

*Defining Resiliency in Dorchester: A Climate Action Research Project to Understand Vietnamese American Residents' Relationship with Climate Change*

A Master's Thesis submitted by

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## Abstract

This thesis is an autoethnographic reflection of an action research project that explores the relationship between climate change and Dorchester’s Vietnamese-American residents. Guided by a more racially just and equitable resilience framework, this thesis also aims to shift current climate policy practices by actively engaging with marginalized communities frequently excluded from changemaking conversations. The action research components of this project used dot surveys, key informant interviews, resident interviews and focus groups, and workshops to learn from residents about their understanding of climate change and their perceived levels of preparation for climate disasters. Because the timing of this project coincided with the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also explored disparities in crises responses between a future climate event and a global health crisis. Finally, the discussion of data and final reflections applied an autoethnographic lens to acknowledge the personal experiences and anecdotes that often influence how a researcher carries out a project and analyze their results.

Findings from the resident engagement methods showed that there is still a lot to be done to have meaningful discourse that accounts for cultural differences and the language divide across Boston’s diverse neighborhoods, that the lack of representation from immigrant communities stem mainly from a lack of intentional engagement and accessible information, and that disadvantaged communities already must cross more barriers to access basic needs compared to their more advantaged counterparts. However, this thesis also shows that there is a lot of space and potential for engaging young people in immigrant communities to bridge the cultural and language divide.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	1
Roles and Motivations .....	2
Dorchester Neighborhood Context .....	4
VietAID and Climate Justice.....	6
Project Phases.....	8
Project Roadmap .....	12
Chapter 2 – Literature Review .....	13
Reframing Resiliency .....	13
Environmental perceptions and concerns among immigrant communities in the United States .....	18
The challenges and unique advantages of first-generation youths in community organizing and their roles in their community .....	23
Chapter 3 –Research Methods .....	30
Literature Reviews.....	30
Action Research.....	30
Autoethnography .....	36
Project Applications and Methods .....	38
Chapter 4 – Phase 1 .....	41
Dot Surveys.....	41
Methods .....	41
Findings .....	45
Discussion.....	49
Key Informant Interviews .....	53
Methods .....	53
Findings .....	54
Discussion.....	55
Chapter 5 – Phase 2 .....	58
Interviews and Focus Groups .....	58
Methods: Semi-Structred Open-Ended Resident Interviews .....	59
Methods: Youth Focus Groups.....	64
Findings .....	64
Discussion.....	68
Chapter 6 – Phase 3 .....	71

Resident Climate 101 Workshops.....	71
Methods .....	71
Findings .....	74
Discussion.....	77
Chapter 7 – Conclusion .....	81
Takeaways .....	81
Recommendations.....	82
Reflection.....	85
References .....	88
Appendices.....	92
Appendix A: Dot Survey Responses – First Day, Morning Session .....	92
Appendix B: Dot Survey Responses – First Day, Afternoon Session.....	94
Appendix C: Dot Survey Responses – Second Day .....	95
Appendix D: Key Informant Interview Guides .....	96
Appendix E: Climate Justice Booklet Stakeholder Interviews Analysis .....	98
Appendix F: Climate Justice Booklet Resident Interviews Analysis.....	102
Appendix G: Flyers for Interview Recruitment .....	115
Appendix H: Youth Focus Group Interactive Presentation – Example Slides.....	116
Appendix I: Climate Workshops – Example Slides.....	117

### List of Figures

Figure 1 Climate Justice Alliance .....	15
Figure 2 Action-reflection cycle - McNiff et al .....	31
Figure 3 PAR Field Guide – Healthy Neighborhoods Study.....	35
Figure 5 Example survey question from morning session .....	45
Figure 4 Example survey question from morning session .....	45
Figure 6 Example survey question from afternoon session.....	47
Figure 7 Example survey question from afternoon session.....	47
Figure 9 Example survey question from second Friday .....	48
Figure 8 Example survey question from second Friday .....	48
Figure 10 Climate Justice Booklet .....	54
Figure 11 Workshop slide with examples of climate impacts .....	73
Figure 12 Example interactive slide: compare and discuss the families in the images below ...	79

### List of Tables

Table 1 Dot Survey Questions – First Day, Morning Session .....	42
Table 2 Dot Survey Questions – First Day, Afternoon Session.....	43
Table 3 Dot Survey Questions – Second Day .....	44
Table 4 Resident Interview Questions – English .....	61

Table 5 Resident Interview Questions - Vietnamese .....	62
Table 6 Process review.....	74
Table 7 Workshop findings .....	75

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis is an autoethnographic reflection on an action research project which seeks to redefine resilience and better understand Dorchester residents' relationship with climate change. In this thesis, I reflect on my partnership with the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development, or VietAID, a Dorchester community development corporation that was founded by Vietnamese immigrants and refugees to provide social services to the growing Vietnamese population in the community. As a part of VietAID's long-term goal to incorporate climate resiliency in its advocacy work, this climate project was meant to be a starting point for understanding and learning about Dorchester residents' relationship with climate change and the policies around it. One of the actionable goals that VietAID had hoped would materialize after these conversations is the development of a climate justice steering committee that is representative of the cultural and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood.

Climate change conversations have traditionally excluded those who are most impacted: people of color, immigrant communities, non-English speaking communities, and low-income communities. Dorchester is home to all the above and suffers from policies that have been enacted without input from the people who will face the impacts and consequences of such policies. This is consistent with the mainstream definition of climate resilience as the ability to “bounce back” after catastrophic climate events and ignores the fact that these impacts are disproportionately absorbed by communities with the least amount of resources to rebuild. It also assumes that the system that enforces climate policies guarantees equitable benefits for all and bouncing back means returning to a state of equilibrium that is the same for everyone across the board. This project seeks to redefine resilience by working directly with marginalized communities to better understand what their priorities are, what resources they need, and how the intersectionality of different concerns can relate back to climate vulnerability.

The initial stages of this project also coincided with the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an emergency shutdown of almost all local businesses and services across the state. Based on the

resilience frameworks that we wanted to incorporate into our work, we believed that a community's ability to respond to the pandemic would also be indicative of its ability to respond to climate change-induced impacts. To make this work more relevant and resonate with the residents we were working with, we included a conversation about the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand residents' preparedness levels, how they were coping, and where they needed the most assistance.

### Roles and Motivations

I was motivated to participate in this project because, as someone who grew up in Dorchester, I wanted to better understand my community's vulnerabilities and relationship with climate change and explore opportunities to shift policymaking conversations so that they are more intentional about addressing socio-economic disparities. Using an autoethnographic lens allows me to acknowledge my personal and anecdotal experiences, incorporate them into my reflection, and pose potential explanations for our findings. Given my multiple positionalities as 1) a graduate student who is conducting an action research project, 2) an embedded researcher working closely with VietAID, and 3) a community researcher engaging directly with Dorchester residents, I have many different layers of experiences and assumptions that manifested themselves throughout the project and within my analysis of our findings.

The VietAID Climate Project was led by VietAID's Executive Director Lisette Le, though I was supervised by Tufts UEP's Senior Lecturer Penn Loh who is an advising consultant to VietAID on this project. Under their guidance and supervision, VietAID's Youth Leadership Coordinator, Thang Diep, and I designed and implemented various types of resident engagement, including dot surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops from summer 2020 into spring 2021. In my primary position as a UEP student who participated in this project as an intern and research assistant, I carried out an action research project to help VietAID explore how it might incorporate climate work into its organizational goals. Applying an action research approach to this project allowed us to revise our methodology and

approach based on ongoing residents' feedback during each step, rather than incorporating them in the end as "lessons learned." Originally, we had hoped that our conversations with residents might help us answer the question "What is the Dorchester Vietnamese American community's relationship to and understanding of climate change?" We wanted to answer this question before planning for a broader survey available in different languages and available to all Dorchester neighborhoods. However, as we began to learn more about the impacts of cultural and language barriers in our engagement processes, we modified our research goals so that we could further explore the following sub-questions:

- What are Vietnamese American residents' understandings of climate change as an issue, or not?
- To what extent do residents see this as a pressing concern that will affect them?
- If they are concerned, to what extent do they feel prepared for the impacts?
- What services have residents identified as lacking or essential to help them feel more prepared?

In my second role as a researcher embedded with VietAID staff, I helped train VietAID youth leaders to become Youth Researchers and facilitated conversations that generated questions the youths wanted to further explore. Early on, we identified the opportunity for high school students in VietAID's Summer Leadership Program to participate in the project as Youth Researchers. First generation and generation 1.5<sup>1</sup> Vietnamese American young people in Dorchester are in a unique position where they straddle between the oft-contrasting Vietnamese cultural expectations within their multi-generational households and the Western cultural norms within their educational and social settings. Exploring these dynamics and allowing Youth Researchers to help shape the project based on their own priorities and concerns helped us to incorporate an additional layer of community knowledge building. In the discussion sections, I reflect on my shared background with the Youth Researchers and what it meant in the context of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "1.5 generation" was coined by Cuban American sociologist Ruben Rumbaut. 1.5 generation represents immigrants who migrated from their native country before adolescence. This group, while growing up and acculturating to the norms of their new country, still holds cultural connections to their native country. This dynamic will be further explored in Chapter 2.

My third perspective is that of a community researcher who worked with VietAID to collect information. I was able to incorporate my own experiences as a Dorchester resident to design the project and carry out conversations with other residents. Having grown up in Dorchester, I have a similar background and some of the same concerns as our Youth Researchers and many of our participants. While I worked with VietAID to design and modify our research methods, I was also influenced by anecdotal experiences as someone who is familiar with the dynamics, culture, and norms within the community.

My personal stake in the project was as a fellow resident whose priority is to improve the community's representation in climate change conversations. There is a prevailing assumption that among Vietnamese Americans, particularly among first generation immigrants, there is a lack of interest in civic engagement and environmental activism. However, by centering a more just definition of resilience, we can intentionally build in research methods that seek to better understand the reasoning behind residents' lack of engagement and transition towards a more wholistic approach when it comes to community organizing around the topic of climate change.

### [Dorchester Neighborhood Context](#)

Dorchester, recognized by the City of Boston as its biggest and most diverse neighborhood, is home to various immigrant populations, including those from Vietnam, Cape Verde, the Caribbean islands, and Ireland. Initially colonized and settled by English Puritans in 1630, the Town of Dorchester became a suburban escape for Boston elites by the 1800s, and was officially annexed by the city in 1870 (City of Boston, 2020a). By the early 1900s, city residents had begun fleeing dense, older sections of the city in favor of the outer suburbs such as Dorchester. With the introduction of electric street cars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, working class individuals and families were eventually able to settle in Dorchester because of the new ability to commute to in-city jobs. The populations in central Boston and Dorchester continued to swell during the Great Migration between 1915 and 1970, when large groups of African

Americans fled the Jim Crow south and began resettling in the north in pursuit of viable economic opportunities. This broke down the Dorchester suburbs as an “enclave built by and for the wealthy” – transforming the opulent landscape of summer colonial homes into that of rows of triple-decker apartments affordable to the working class (Johnson, n.d.). However, in response to the arrival of African American migrants from the American South, Northern cities such as Boston began introducing policies, such as redlining<sup>2</sup> and blockbusting,<sup>3</sup> aimed at enforcing segregation and preventing wealth-building for ethnic and racial minorities.

Beginning in 1975, following the end of the Vietnam War, many Vietnamese refugees began arriving in the United States as a part of federal refugee resettlement programs which facilitated the “clustering of refugees within certain neighborhoods,” allowing large groups of Vietnamese immigrants to settle in Dorchester (“Vietnamese,” n.d.). However, because of historical racist housing policies and disinvestment in response to the influx of non-White residents, what awaited the new Vietnamese arrivals were “high unemployment, residential instability and family separation, low rates of home ownership, mental health issues and lack of social supports” (Watanabe and Lo, 2019). The clustering policy, while addressing the social isolation that earlier dispersed refugees felt, ended up reinforcing the concentration of poverty and social vulnerability in Dorchester. In 1995, to meet their own needs, Vietnamese immigrants and refugees in the Fields Corner neighborhood of Dorchester founded the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development, or VietAID, to provide social services and encourage civic engagement for existing residents and newcomers in the community.

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<sup>2</sup> Redlining was the practice of designating predominantly black neighborhoods as risky and undesirable investments. This made it impossible for Black and other people of color to secure home loans and mortgages, preventing them from building wealth.

<sup>3</sup> Blockbusting was the practice of breaking up integrated neighborhoods through intimidation and false speculation. Real estate agents and developers would encourage white homeowners to sell their home because new Black residents would bring down property value. These agents and developers would in turn upsell these homes at exorbitant prices to potential Black homeowners.

However, these hardships are not unique to Vietnamese immigrants and refugees—Dorchester is also home to Cape Verdean, Latinx, and long-established African American communities. 2017 American Survey Data show that Dorchester makes up almost 20% of all Boston residents. Of those, 45% identify as Black/African American, 18% as Hispanic/Latino, and nearly 10% as Asian. Dorchester residents also represent nearly a quarter of Boston’s impoverished individuals (Boston Planning and Development Agency [BPDA], 2019). For comparison, Dorchester’s northern neighbor of South Boston, which is home to just 5% of Boston’s residents and identifies as 77% White, comprises just 4.6% of Boston’s impoverished (BPDA, 2019).

Taken altogether, factors such as poverty, unemployment, housing instability, and the lack of social support put Dorchester’s immigrant and low-income communities at further risk of social and physical harm in the face of climate change. The City of Boston has put together various plans and initiatives aimed at climate resilience and adaptation, such as the Climate Ready Boston initiative and the 2019 Climate Action Plan. It has also recognized Dorchester as being at-risk when it comes to coastal flooding and extreme heat events. However, while these plans mention the need to mitigate “potential burdens on socially vulnerable communities,” they do not intentionally plan for or identify existing inequities and ways to address them (City of Boston, 2020b). Moreover, the City’s climate efforts are based on climate adaptation and resilience, both of which assume the need for vulnerable communities to absorb harm during climate events and the ability to return to the status quo afterwards. Chapter 2 will further break down and discuss these definitions.

### [VietAID and Climate Justice](#)

VietAID is a community development corporation (CDC) located in the Fields Corner neighborhood of Dorchester. Founded by local Vietnamese immigrants and refugees, its primary purpose is to provide sorely lacking social services and encourage civic engagement for the betterment of the community. The range of programs that VietAID now offers include Âu Cơ Preschool, the only

bilingual and bicultural preschool program in Massachusetts; afterschool and summer youth programs that provide academic support and community engagement opportunities for young people; Senior Day Program, aimed at providing care and companionship for the elderly; community events throughout the year to celebrate Vietnamese heritage and foster belonging in Dorchester; developing mixed-used affordable housing projects; and providing housing counseling and support. Despite its name and founding history, VietAID services are available to all Fields Corner residents who are eligible, regardless of race and immigration background.

Recognizing that its social services and advocacy work intersect with climate justice, the organization saw a need and an opportunity to enter the climate resiliency conversation in Boston. In 2019, VietAID was able to secure a grant with the Barr Foundation to plan and develop engagement processes with residents in Fields Corner and the surrounding Dorchester neighborhoods to better understand their priority issues and relationship with climate resiliency policies. The three-pronged approach to the project included surveying and canvassing, building a steering committee, and engaging with residents on their individual climate preparedness plans.

The timeliness of this project was particularly evident during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Summer 2020, through funding from the City of Boston, VietAID was able to partner with the YWCA to provide free groceries and take-out meals to Boston's food insecure populations, including public school students who rely on free school meals and seniors. The organization was also able to partner with the Chinese Progressive Association and other local groups to hire community members to prepare and distribute meals (Yee, 2021). VietAID points out the need and opportunity for community organizations to provide essential services during crises because they can bridge language and cultural gaps that often preclude immigrant populations from accessing much-needed resources. Impacts seen during the pandemic—unemployment, eviction, food insecurity—will also be experienced during

extreme climate events. These issues became a starting point for our conversations with residents during the engagement process in the climate project.

### Project Phases

This project can be broken down into three chronological parts. The first phase focused on gathering background information and collecting a baseline understanding of residents' relationship with climate change. To do this, I conducted literature reviews about different resiliency frameworks, environmental perceptions and concerns among immigrant communities in the United States, as well as the challenges and unique advantages of first-generation youths in community organizing and their roles in their community. Understanding these topics helped us formulate our project goals and develop research methods that were tailored to this specific community. The second component of gathering information also included dot surveys, which was the first step to figuring out how we should proceed with the project.

The goal of the dot surveys was to establish a baseline understanding of Dorchester residents' relationship with climate change, their priorities, and their level of preparedness for climate change. Using food pick-up times at the VietAID community center, we had hoped to use dot surveys to reach a wide audience since residents who came to the center at those times were not limited to just VietAID constituents or Vietnamese residents. The dot survey method allowed participants to apply stickers to a poster to represent their responses, eliminating the need for physical interactions to ensure that both participants and researchers were able to safely practice social distancing.

Thang and I were able to conduct a total of three dot surveys over two Fridays in the summer of 2020, getting responses from over 100 Dorchester residents. The distribution was approximately even between male and female residents, though we noticed that the age skewed towards those who were over 30 years old. During the dot surveys, and after we analyzed our results, we learned that even though we were native Vietnamese speakers, we still struggled with defining key terms such as "climate

change” and “resources” from English to Vietnamese while also preserving the social context normally associated with those terms. We also found that there was a cultural difference in how Vietnamese participants understood climate change: many understood it as the predictable seasonal change in climate and weather patterns. Ultimately, while the dot surveys gave us a basic sense of how some residents felt about climate change and preparedness, we needed deeper engagements to truly understand why participants responded the way they did, or whether those responses were based on inadequate translations of survey questions from English to Vietnamese.

At the same, we began designing key informant interviews with VietAID’s partners and other Dorchester community leaders so that we could learn from various stakeholders about existing climate work that has already been done in Dorchester and identify ways in which VietAID could enter the conversation. With the help of our Youth Researchers, Thang and I were able to interview five key informants: a city climate program coordinator, a youth organizer, a Dorchester coalition leader, a climate justice advocate and religious leader, and a Vietnamese cultural organizer. Overall, regarding underrepresentation of low-income communities and people of color in climate conversations, our key informants identified the need for intentional engagements that recognize residents’ daily priorities.

The second phase was a direct result of our lessons from the dot surveys. After Thang and I learned that we were not prepared to develop a community-wide survey, based on our limited understanding of the cultural and language gaps when translating key terms and concepts from English to Vietnamese, we began designing a more targeted approach of interviewing up to 50 Dorchester residents who signed up for interviews and focus groups. To help us create questions and goals that reflected the interests and priorities of the community, we recruited five Vietnamese American Youth Researchers between 15-17 years old from VietAID’s summer leadership program. As both researchers and community residents, the students played an integral role during this part because they helped to formulate interview goals, recruit participants, conduct interviews, and analyze transcripts.

Between July and August 2020, we conducted 35 individual interviews and one group interview with 4 young people. 37 participants were Vietnamese, 1 identified as White, and 1 identified as Black.

From our interviews, six themes emerged:

1. Participants all had very different definitions of climate change.
2. There are contrasting senses of self-reliance and independence during emergencies.
3. Different types of support and aid must be considered during periods of emergencies and disasters.
4. Certain social identities are likely to impact how different groups experience impacts relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.
5. Depending on their personal experiences and awareness, different participants had varying interpretations and levels of understanding of the interview questions.
6. If time and language access allowed, many participants would be interested in future engagements around the topic of climate change.

The interviews and focus group highlighted the need to be even more intentional about language and communication: how are we translating key terms and phrases, and how are we relating climate change back to residents' needs and priorities?

Our expectation of the first and second phases was to gather data that would help us design and refine a general survey that could be shared with the entire Dorchester community. These surveys, which would have been translated into different languages, were to be part of a large canvassing effort to hear from several hundred residents across different various neighborhoods, such as Fields Corner, Uphams Corner, Codman Square, etc. However, at each step of our data gathering and resident engagement, we learned that meaningful conversations about climate change, priorities, and preparedness required more than direct translations of key terms and concepts from English to Vietnamese. We recognized the language and cultural gaps, but we were not sure of how to bridge

those gaps and how to connect with residents on those issues. Moreover, despite being embedded in the research and being native speakers of the language, Thang and I were still struggling with conveying the major concepts for the project in a way that accounts for cultural contexts. Thus, we did not feel comfortable creating or sharing a survey that would have been translated into other languages which might have the same cultural and contextual barriers.

We determined that we needed to plan additional engagements to understand whether, and how, providing educational materials on the topic of climate change and vulnerability would help residents make the connection to personal impacts. For the third phase, we created climate workshops designed specifically to provide basic climate education and test ways to relate residents' existing priorities to climate risks. This approach was further narrowed because we only recruited Vietnamese speaking participants who completed the climate interviews, and because we wanted to fully understand Vietnamese cultural gaps before attempting to engage with other communities that have their own unique cultural contexts and barriers. In this part, we focused on gaining a deeper understanding of residents' interview responses by experimenting with different translations and framings of climate change as individual- and community-level concerns.

Between March and April of 2021, we held three virtual climate education workshops which were attended by 8 Dorchester residents. The findings from the workshops were significant because, not only were we able to learn about residents' current priorities, their concerns about future climate change events, and their perspectives on racism and inequality as barriers to climate engagements. Moreover, we were able identify three Vietnamese residents who were interested in having more conversations about climate change, both with VietAID and with other community members. We are hopeful that these residents could be successful community leaders in this work and be a part of the resident steering committee.

While my participation ended with the conclusion of phase 3, VietAID's climate project work continues. This thesis does not attempt to cover the entirety of VietAID's climate initiative, only my reflection on my involvement and the engagement processes that started the organization's next steps in climate justice work.

### Project Roadmap

This project begins with literature reviews on justice- and equity-oriented resilience frameworks, the perception of environmentalism and climate change priorities among immigrant communities in the US, and the unique role of young people as changemakers and advocates in their community. These can be found in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I provide my research methods by first reviewing existing literature about participatory action research as an approach to the project and how it influenced our decision-making. I then explain the various steps that were taken throughout the project and how the application of participatory action research methods allowed us to review and modify our approach as we went along. In Chapters 4 to 6, break down the three phases of the project and them in detail in their respective chapter. Chapter 4 covers Phase 1 of the project, including dot surveys and key informant interviews. In Chapter 5, I discuss the interviews and focus groups. In Chapter 6, I discuss Phase 3, the resident climate workshops. In each chapter, I reflect on my various positionalities as a researcher and how the dynamics of those different perspectives influence my interpretation of our findings. Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide a broader reflection of my overall learnings, experiences, and opportunities for VietAID moving forward given our results.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter provides a literature review of the resiliency framing that was applied to this project, as well as two concepts that emerged during the implementation of the project, namely environmentalism among immigrant groups and youth engagement. The review of resiliency framing provides the reason and approach to this project, while the latter two concepts are included here to provide context and highlight the need to consider cultural sensitivities when engaging in climate conversations with immigrant communities.

### Reframing Resiliency

The concept of resilience has long been embraced within the fields of engineering and ecology. Within the engineering field, and applied to mainstream climate change mitigation strategies, resilience is assumed to be a system's ability to "bounce back" after shock events and return to a state of equilibrium (Meerow and Stults, 2016, p. ). In the urban context of climate change, resilience has heavily leaned on C.S. Holling's theory on ecological resilience, which refers to a system's ability to absorb shock and "bounce forward" after an unprecedented event (Meerow and Stults, 2016). DeBacker et al argue that shifting resilient goals and solutions from bouncing back to bouncing forward would not only eradicate inequities, but it could also simultaneously address the root causes of climate change and advance social and economic transformation (Debacker et al, 2015). Instead of aiming to bounce back after crises, communities that are prepared to bounce forward would be able to correct the inequities and gaps in the social systems that allowed the harm to occur.

However, when applied to the human component of climate readiness and remediation, neither framing of resilience truly takes into consideration slower moving stressors, such as gentrification and food insecurity, factors that exacerbate a population's inability to either bounce forward or bounce back (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019). Indeed, the common critiques of applying resilience in urban settings

is its broad definition and susceptibility to cooption by capitalist programs which place more “emphasis on adaptation rather than structural change” (Bonds, 2018, p. 1286). The eco-systems framing in climate change conversations and engineering framing in climate mitigation strategies often intersect in their application of a resilience framework in that both assume a need for the system to endure harm, regardless of duration or frequency. Pursuing an outcome that is agnostic towards underlying socio-economic factors places vulnerable people back into positions where their safety and wellbeing were already precarious and runs the risk of reinforcing inequitable social hierarchies that will only further disenfranchise vulnerable communities (O’Brien et al, 2009). Rather than relying on a framework that results in furthering power imbalances, environmental justice advocates have begun arguing for a reframing of resiliency or doing away with the term altogether (DeBacker et al, 2015; Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019).

Disaster recovery efforts have historically benefited corporate entities such as consultants, private contractors, and financial executives, while the onus is on community members to be creative and entrepreneurial in order to access the financial resources that they need to rebuild. Moreover, resilience strategies implemented by the aforementioned beneficiaries after natural disaster events privilege solution designs imposed by so-called experts and ignore residents’ practices of care rooted in lived experiences (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019). In contrast, a systems approach that acknowledges social bonds and perspectives can foster multidisciplinary collaboration among individuals, community, institutions, and businesses to identify, based on resident experiences, the chronic stressors that need to be addressed and resolved (Resilient Cities Network, 2019).

Whereas resiliency projects proposed by experts tend to address only external threats such as sea level rise or severe storms, strengthening resilient systems would enhance certain critical functions of a city, such as delivering basic needs, safeguarding human life, and defending justice and equity. A resilient system would guarantee that vulnerable groups have daily access to, and can afford, essentials

such food, shelter, and safety services during times of crisis because the system would have already been prepared for multiple hazards (Arup International Development, 2015).

One human-centric systems approach is the Just Transition framework, which is a “vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy” (Climate Justice Alliance, n.d., p. 1). Just Transition credits the civil rights movement with the environmental justice movement, which is grassroots driven and led by communities of color and low income communities that face disproportionate harm from industrial pollutants. As an alternative to capitalistic approaches that have been viewed as the most viable, Just Transition “centers on the development of human potential” (Climate Justice Alliance, n.d.), empowering peoples’ self-determination and supporting a regenerative economy in which the ultimate output is ecological and social welfare. Rather than prioritizing and investing in capitalist climate resiliency mechanisms such as carbon capture technology that generates income for only a few, a justice oriented transition builds up “local food systems, local clean energy, and small-scale production that are sustainable economically and ecologically,” supporting and nurturing leadership for those within the community and allowing residents to at least partially govern themselves, as well craft their own solutions to address the issues they have identified as priorities (Climate Justice Alliance, n.d. p. 5).

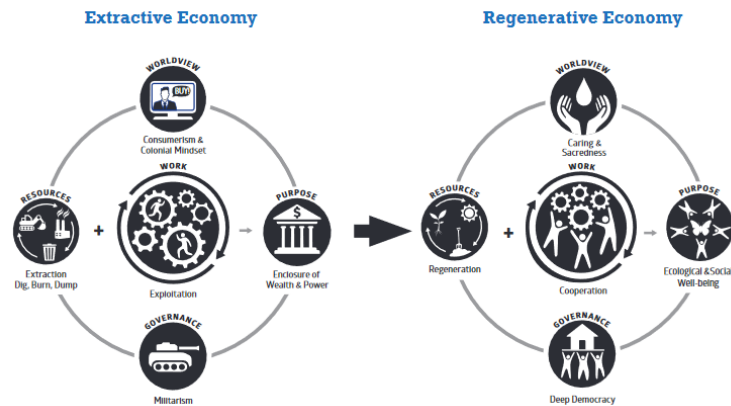


Figure 1 Climate Justice Alliance

This would also require the general public to have a better nuanced understanding of the economy so that it can better understand the crisis and approaches that can be taken to repair harm. Doing so can also help people to understand that there is a sense of “shared fate” during times of crisis (DeBacker, et al, 2015, p. 10). Often, devastating climate events such as typhoons and famines are associated with third-world or developing countries, giving the perception that this is a problem that only affects impoverished people. However, empathy and a nuanced understanding of disparate-but-shared experiences can help to prevent communities from accepting climate impacts as inevitable and far-removed. Here, the role of the resilience framework “expand[s] the definition of ‘We’ as we evolve our understanding of interconnectedness” by stressing the importance of strong community networks and the collective experience (DeBacker, et al, 2015, p. 42).

Nevertheless, this still means that a resilience framework using Just Transition principles is grounded in economics, even if it centers regenerative practices and holds ecological resilience as one of its goals. Abolitionist climate justice, on the other hand, goes further by rejecting the resilience framing altogether and instead framing the intersectionality of Black radical thought, feminism, and human scholarship. Per Ranganathan and Bratman, a resilience framework cannot go as far as climate justice in recognizing that climate is only one among many “intersectional drivers that impede the ability of people to lead healthful and dignified lives” (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019, p. 18). As other authors have suggested, resilience can be just as long as it recognizes and plans for inequity, but it does not offer solutions for resolving such inequities or reparations for groups that have experienced generational traumas (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019).

As Ranganathan and Bratman put it, “resilience language fails to account for what creates the need to be resilient in the first place” (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019, p. 3). Abolitionist climate justice, meanwhile, separates expert vision from disaster responses to allow for the bolstering of real lived experiences and resident knowledge. Additionally, this framework is more complete than climate

resiliency because it digs deeper into harm; it borrows abolitionism from Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of the word as "unfinished liberation" in reference to "not-as-yet won freedoms" for Black people after emancipation and the continuation of slavery through the capitalization Black men in the prison system (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019, p. 2). It is not enough to recognize and address inequities directly before and after crises; the system that created and enforces such injustices must be reformed and those who suffer disproportionate harms deserve reparations.

Furthermore, the term climate justice is free from the semantics that limit climate resilience from truly capturing the different intersections that are integral in conversations about the environment, such as "labour rights, land rights, housing, toxics, health, and other social justice concerns" (Ranganathan and Bratman, 2019, p. 7). Together with the abolitionist framework, climate justice seeks to liberate people from oppressive systems, such as institutional racism or environmental racism, and allows them to live dignified lives equipped with the resources they need to protect them a range of harms—not just climate change.

This project used different principles of resilience found in existing definitions that were explored in this literature review. We used the Holling's eco-systems theory as a foundation and built on it using Just Transition principles. Finally, motivated by the climate abolitionist justice suggestion that 'resilience' is not the be-all and end-all outcome to strive for, we instead focused on understanding residents' needs and priorities first. Thus, we arrived at a resilience framework that focuses on assessing existing vulnerabilities, exploring how those vulnerabilities might be exacerbated with climate change, and identifying opportunities for systematic changes that would right historic and systemic inequities. We acknowledge that our definition of resilience is flexible, and this was intentionally so because we recognize that what resilience looks like is unique to each community.

## Environmental perceptions and concerns among immigrant communities in the United States

Within the context of climate change research and policy making, grassroots knowledge has been categorized as too local and not generalizable, which creates a double-edged sword scenario because while each community is unique, there are also universal factors, such as race, ethnicity, and migration status, across different communities that would benefit from the application of such knowledge (Walker, 2020). Despite existing research focused specifically on populations of color, the knowledge and data gathered oftentimes do not make it out of the community. Additionally, while environmental justice activism, which is rooted in struggles of racial inequality and environmental racism, has focused on experiences and impacts in African American, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, there has been less attention given to “newer and less politically-established groups of colour (including more recent immigrants)” (Walker, 2020, p. 3). Instead, research and studies on the intersection of climate and migration tend to focus on climate-induced migrations, rather than the knowledge and practices that migrants already had before they left their homes (Walker, 2020).

Moreover, a lack of focus on the migrant identities when talking about climate and climate related disasters has led to the exclusion of undocumented and Mexican Indigenous migrants from disaster aid due to racism and “cultural norms regarding U.S. citizenship” (Mendez et al, 2020, p. 51). As in the case of the California fires, one senior official acknowledged that they were unaware that there were even that many Indigenous migrant farmworkers, despite a steady number of Indigenous peoples who have been migrating from Mexico to California since the 1960s. This is a strong indication that in assessing disaster risks and vulnerabilities, there has been very little attention given to immigration status as a factor. After the Thomas Fire in California in 2018, while “resources were directed toward wealthy individuals,” Latinx and Indigenous immigrants had to rely on local non-profit organizations to provide aid and safety information in accessible languages (Mendez et al, 2020, p. 50).

Meanwhile, existing research and focus in the area of environmental risks and concerns have been limited by the dichotomy of “white versus black or white versus nonwhite outcome differences,” ignoring diversity among immigrant groups and social indicators that are context specific to each community, such as income, education level, gender, etc (Macias, 2015, p. 112). Even within the black versus white dichotomy regarding environmental risks and concerns, despite a record of “high-profile activism and legislative triumphs” from the Civil Rights Movement, social scientists in the 1970s still questioned whether African American people were concerned about environmental issues and tried to study the interest gaps between them and their white counterparts (Macias, 2015, p. 113; Gale, 1972).

By the 1980s, researchers instead began to question whether older studies were conflating environmental memberships, donations, and “visits to natural area” with environmental concerns, which tied affluence to environmental concerns and which underestimated or undervalued the concerns among BIPOC communities (Macias, 2015, p. 113). In a 30 year study in which they controlled for socio-economic identifiers such as race, level of education, political party affiliation, age, etc., Jones et al found that African American people demonstrated “at least as much, and sometimes more, concern for the environment” than white people did (Macias, 2015, p. 113; Jones and Carter, 1994). A separate study which pooled 21 years of survey data from the state of California, found that when presented with environmental justice issues, Latinx people showed a greater level of concern for their community compared to “more abstract environmental principles” (Macias, 2015, p. 114; Whittaker et al, 2005). Likewise, a different study by Hunter (2000) found that, using General Social Survey (GSS) data from the early 2000s, environmental attitudes did not differ significantly between immigrant and non-immigrant groups. Similar findings across different studies contradict the long-held notion that communities of color and immigrant communities are not concerned or are less concerned about environmental risks associated with climate change. In fact, there is research evidence that immigrants and ethnic minorities with strong ties to their family’s native background, despite seeing themselves as “deficient in their

commitment to sustainability” through actions such as donations and environmental memberships, actually perform many “pro-environmental practices” in terms of water conservation, waste reduction, and active transportation (Walker, 2020, p. 3).

In a separate study using cumulative GSS data between 1972 and 2002, researchers found that immigrants displayed higher perceptions of environmental concerns compared to US born individuals (Adeola, 2007). Based on the data collected in this study, there is some indication that “environmental values among people of color persist over generations,” at least for those with Latinx or Mexican origins (Macis, 2015, p. 125). Additionally, among those who were born in the US but are of minoritized races or ethnicities, there are “persistently high levels of perceived environmental risks” (Macis, 2015, p. 125). While there is evidence that among immigrant, racially, and ethnically minoritized communities there is growing environmental concerns about risks associated with climate change, it is important to note that these concerns are heightened for these same groups if they live or work near to environmental hazards such as “transportation centers and roadways, industrial plants, and hazardous waste facilities” (Macias, 2015, p. 126).

In terms of climate change specifically, a 2020 survey conducted by the Sustainable Solutions Lab at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, found that compared to Black and White residents in Boston, Asian American and Latinx residents reported feeling that climate change “has probably not been happening” (Estrada-Martinez et al, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, while all communities share the view that climate change is occurring, White residents feel that climate change impacts will be more severe for certain groups, and Asian American and Latinx residents feel that impacts will be shared equally among all. However, because the survey data is not disaggregated by nationality, income level, or educational attainment, it is not possible to analyze the role of socioeconomic factors when it comes to climate change perceptions. Moreover, because the survey collected responses from Boston residents across many neighborhoods and was only available in English, it is unclear whether there is adequate

representation from neighborhoods such as Dorchester, where there is a much higher concentration of immigrants, low-income residents, residents of color, and non-English speaking residents. Because climate disaster survivors will likely experience trauma, which could manifest itself in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD, it is crucial to contextualize vulnerabilities by accounting for existing intersectional social inequities in the face of disasters to better evaluate how long-term exposure to injustices can result in disproportionately amplified harm in the face of short-term crises (Mendez et al, 2020; Kaplan and Huynh, 2008).

Immigrants who are of undocumented status already face several intersecting social inequalities along the lines of race, gender, indigeneity, immigration status, health care access, and income (Mendez et al, 2020). During times of crises when their resources are further limited or restricted, these groups face even more intense vulnerabilities. Therefore, in addition to looking at immediate short-term harm, it is important to look beyond the “homogenization” of the immigrant experience in order to fully assess the different intersectional identities of individuals “that together generate disparate disaster outcomes” (Mendez et al, 2020, p. 52). For example, even within just Vietnamese American communities there are disparate levels of post-war trauma, acculturation, and success. Prior to the Vietnam War, few Vietnamese people lived in the US. It was after 1975 that large numbers of Vietnamese immigrants entered the US, many of whom were refugees seeking safety after the Fall of Saigon. Due to the relatively recent waves of migration, presently, many Vietnamese households in the US are comprised of first-generation adults who left Vietnam as refugees, younger children who were also born in Vietnam and arrived with the parents in the US, often referred to as generation 1.5 immigrants, as well as a newer generation of young people who were born in the US after their family’s arrival in the country, or second-generation Vietnamese Americans. These create complex households in

which all members share a racial and ethnic background, but upbringing and absorption of the culture that they grew up with differ (Kaplan and Huynh, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

It is also important to note that fully appreciating the Vietnamese American experience requires an understanding of the traumatic disruption in the lives of the older generation who had to flee from their home following a civil war. Migrants who were able to flee during the final days of the South Vietnamese regime were able to settle in the US through a sponsorship program. They were also able to receive social assistance which helped them to adapt to their new lives more easily and less traumatically compared to refugees who were not able to flee until later and who had to take more treacherous routes to reach the United States, during which they encountered pirates, sexual abuse, and starvation among other dangers (Kaplan and Huynh, 2008). However, conversations with these groups regarding disaster experiences and coping mechanisms might not be immediately straightforward depending on cultural norms and practices, which lean heavily towards social reservations and passivity. The Vietnamese culture is strongly influenced by Confucianist, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophies that help guide “family/social dynamics, communication, and behavioral patterns in every day life” (Kaplan and Huynh, 2008, p. 328). Recognizing these tenets and their deep cultural influence on the Vietnamese culture is helpful to understanding certain practices within the community.

Notably, Liem and Kehmeier (1980) theorize that it is Taoism that influences the outlook of a Vietnamese refugee on worldly difficulties. In contrast to Buddhism, which seeks eternal contentedness after the physical life, and Confucianism, which promotes actions aimed at advancing self-improvement, the Taoist approach is one of “do nothing and everything will be accomplished spontaneously,” which is expressed through “inaction, conformity, and passivity” (Kaplan and Huynh, 2008, p. 328). Such an outlook might lead a Vietnamese person to “adopt a fatalistic attitude toward the outside world,” an approach that has allowed the group to endure disasters such as natural catastrophes, wars, and

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<sup>4</sup> Ethnocultural Perspectives on Disaster and Trauma: Working with Vietnamese Americans in Disasters

migrations because they are able to view such events as inevitable and beyond their control (Liem and Kehmeier, 1980, p. 214). Kaplan and Huynh (2008) warn that as a result of this outlook and cultural norms toward inaction and conformity, certain Vietnamese individuals, particularly those in the older age groups, might present responses that are consistent with their cultural values but that may betray how they actually feel.

This literature review shows that there is much to learn about immigrant communities' perceptions about environmentalism, climate change, and climate risks. However, to fully understand those perceptions will require engagement processes that are culturally sensitive and language accessible. Even within immigrant communities, there are different levels of trauma and mechanisms of coping with those traumas, and being able to understand residents' experiences in those areas provided us some context around themes that emerge from our findings.

### [The challenges and unique advantages of first-generation youths in community organizing and their roles in their community](#)

Generation Z, those born after 1996, represents the most diverse generation, both in terms of race and ethnicity, in the United States compared to its predecessors (Parker and Igielnik, 2020). One of the most defining features of Gen Z is “climate anxiety,” as evidenced by the number of coordinated climate strikes led by young people—defined as those aged between 15 and 24 years old according to the United Nations (Walker, 2020; Sengupta, 2019; United Nations, n.d.). This is in part due to environmental education present in many countries' school curricula as a result of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Article 6 in Education, Training and Public Awareness, aimed at promoting climate awareness among young people and empowering them to become active citizens who can partake in future decision-making to address the issue (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015). However, there are deficiencies in the climate education framework currently presented to young people around the world, such as a lack of urgency, inconsideration for multicultural classrooms, and

the absence of participatory opportunities for young people in policy making (Walker, 2020; Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015).

Young people are dissatisfied because even though they are learning about sustainability and the climate crisis in school, they do not see that playing out in political actions. There is also a systematic focus on long-term sustainability and sustainable development, which blunts the urgency of the climate crisis for youths who are concerned about the immediate future (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015). Separate studies in Malaysia and the United Kingdom found that middle to high school students who receive environmental education have an adequate understanding of issues pertaining to the environment, but they were unable to relate sustainability back to their own behaviors and lifestyles. There will likely be a continued disconnect between young people's understanding of environmental issues and their own roles if the curriculum does not include materials and topics that "empowers individuals and communities to make informed decisions and take responsible action," including encouraging young people's vested interests in environmental issues (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015, p. 177; Anderson, 2010).

The Brundtland definition of sustainable development includes the element of "intergenerational equity for the unborn generations who cannot voice their concerns and desires," which means that today's young people serve as the voice of the next generation of citizens (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015, p. 175). Yet, while there are climate and sustainability policies that have been created for them, young people themselves have not been engaged in the conversations preceding the implementation of such policies. Intergenerational equity will require the involvement and participation of young people in climate work since they, and the yet-to-be-born generation, will "bear the burden of climate change over the course of their lifetimes" (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015, p. 172). One author notes that there has been a distinction between intra- and intergeneration justice, where intragenerational justice protects the rights of future generations and intergenerational

justice “seeks equality between current generations” (Forsyth, 2013, p.230). However, this dichotomy is false because inter-generational justice also seeks equal protection for “poorer societies’ future generations” by developing their capacities to withstand future risks through actions taken today (Forsyth, 2013, p.231). Therefore, while it is crucial to plan for long-term solutions, it is not any less imperative to develop strategies for societies to achieve distributive justice in the immediate future.

Another challenge to young people’s environmental education and climate activism is the contemporary environmental curriculum’s failing to fully recognize the diversity of students in school classrooms (Walker, 2020). When it comes to learning for young people, there is a disproportionate emphasis on a top-down approach to educating, rather than meaningful efforts on “learning from young people’s own environmental concerns” (Walker, 2020, p. 2). Additionally, because environmental education agendas are largely shaped by policy priorities set for the Global North, such as a focus on the scientific and technical aspects of climate change, they can subtly validate the knowledge and concerns of some students while overlooking them for other students (Walker, 2020; Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015). Within culturally and ethnically diverse countries such as the US, there is a large “Generation 1.5” among immigrant communities. This generation is comprised of those who were born in one country but immigrated at a young enough age that they were raised and acculturated in a different country (Walker, 2020). Young people in this generation represent an untapped and understudied collection of knowledge and perspective of environmental issues and sustainability practices.

Yet despite the existing “wealth of social scientific literature on family and other personal relationships,” there is still a very limited number of studies on the familial and personal relationships within the context of environmental issues and sustainability practices, particularly studies that explore the learning of or conversations about climate change concerns in multigenerational families that are also of immigrant backgrounds (Walker, 2020, p. 4). Research that has looked into immigrant families

has shown that adult figures, namely parents, often hold habitual sustainable household practices, not so much because of conscious pro-environmental reasons, but more so due to their experience with resource scarcity in their home countries. However, second generation immigrant young people, particularly those in Generation Z who grew up with a “global ‘Education for Sustainable Development’ agenda” centering natural resources conservation and environmental protection, might not find the daily sustainability practices of their parents as relevant to their own lives (Walker, 2020, p. 4). A survey carried out by Boyes and Stanisstreet relating students’ attitudes and understanding of their own sustainable actions within the context of global warming and carbon emissions found that although the majority of students in the UK study were able to identify strategies to reduce global warming such “tree planting, recycling, public transport use, and energy conservation,” they were not able to make the connection to their own decision-making power related to “buying fewer new items” or “decreasing meat consumption” (Boyes and Stanisstreet, 2012, p. 1602). To address this cognitive gap, it has been suggested that climate education must be able to relate “global and abstract issues” back to students’ circumstances and how their own abilities to make an impact (Lenzen & Murray, 2020, p. 33).

Part of that consideration includes a closer look at the socio-spatial context in which youth activism can be fostered and supported. A US study found that early civic engagement has shown to be effective in empowering continued and long-term engagements for young people later in life around social and environmental issues that they are passionate about (Youniss & Hart, 2006). Due to the “intergenerational nature of climate change and the vulnerability of children to its impacts,” young people need to be included in climate planning conversations so that they are able to take ownership of their own future and so that they can develop the foundations to become knowledgeable empowered leaders with the capacity to develop their own climate solutions (Walker 2020).

Moreover, the current generation of young people is cognizant of the diversity in their cohort and the systematic injustices that are inflicted upon them. Evidence of this can be seen in the youth-

organized and youth-led climate marches across the globe in 2019. Galvanized by their experience in the climate strikes, some youths of color continued on by participating in the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 to decry the unjust treatment of black and brown people at the hands of law enforcers (Walker, 2020; Sengupta, 2019; Murray & Mohdin, 2020). They feel that the climate crisis is also “an ethical and political issue, not just an environmental one” (Murray & Mohdin, 2020). The passionate participation of young people in environmental and social issues demonstrates their willingness and capacity to advocate for meaningful changes, which is in direct contrast with “the view of youth as problematic, passive recipients of services” (Narksompong & Limjirakan, 2015, p. 174). Additionally, the justice orientated activism among different issues that are important to young people indicates a level of diversity in ways that youths express and act upon climate and environmental concerns in different socio-spatial contexts.

In the same vein, because of the diverse social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds present within Gen Z, it is important to recognize that there is a distinction in the independent agency of young people versus their “agency as interdependent and negotiated in and between socio-spatial contexts” (Walker, 2020, p. 4). For example, among families with parents who migrated to the United States from other countries, there could be different reactions in response to children’s participation in climate strikes and BLM marches which sometimes required taking absence from school. One potential reaction is that parents who place high values on education may be reluctant to support their children's climate strikes which might require them to skip school. Additionally, based on differential treatment of protestors of color, parents and their youths might be less inclined to participate in climate strikes due to fears of racism and violence. On the other hand, owing to their own experiences with the climate crisis, parents and adult figures may be more sympathetic to their children’s activism and participation in climate strikes (Walker, 2020). This third reaction opens the possibilities for “trickle up socialization,” in which young people can act as the motivators and catalysts for civic engagement within their own family,

particularly when they already have opportunities to be involved in a campaign group outside of the home (Walker, 2020, p. 5; Terriquez & Kwon 2015).

Another consideration is that young people of color, particularly those who are second or 1.5 generation immigrants, have unique circumstances that may pose challenges to community organizing or defining the role and power of youths in their community. For example, in Vietnamese households, young people often play the important role of “spokesperson” or “go between” for the family and institutions (Kaplan & Huynh, 2008, p. 336). Due to their ability to attend American schools and interact with other American-born children, Vietnamese American youths are able to better and more quickly adapt to their new environment. However, due to their roles and the traditional expectations placed on them, Vietnamese American young people often find themselves straddling between two different cultures that may have opposing views and values. The relationship established by gender roles and seniority is further complicated by the cultural expectation where younger individuals are expected to show deference and respect to those who are older. Girls, specifically, “were raised to acknowledge ‘Three Obediences’: respect for father, husband, and eldest son” (Kaplan & Huynh, 2008, p. 330). However, acculturation due to the exposure to multicultural US communities has led to the blurring of gender roles in certain households where women are gaining more autonomy (Kaplan & Huynh, 2008).

Therefore, while the perspectives and participation of young people are important, it is equally critical that more studies be conducted to better understand the different intersecting identities that define today’s Generation Z. Due to the limited number of engagements between academics and communities with diverse immigrant experiences in the United States, there are both space and opportunities to engage with recent immigrant groups to better understand their knowledge and practices as valuable contributions to the conversation around climate change (Walker, 2020).

This project intentionally created researcher roles for VietAID’s Youth Leaders, who provided perspectives that were specific to Dorchester’s young Vietnamese residents who also identify as first,

second, or 1.5 generation Americans. They were able to represent their peers in building knowledge by helping to create learning goals, develop questions, and interpret interview findings through the lens of bicultural youth who are still learning about their role in their community. Their positive experience and significant contribution to the project are evidence that not only can young people be invaluable community organizers, with guidance and support, they can also be changemakers, lead climate conversations, and influence the direction of policymaking.

## Chapter 3 –Research Methods

This chapter explains the action-research approach of the VietAID Climate Project and the autoethnographic method I applied in this thesis. The literature reviews in this chapter look at how, in addition to including justice as an end goal for the project, those principles were furthered through an intentional research process that acknowledged and challenged traditional academic inequities. The action research-oriented framework for the VietAID climate project allowed us to incorporate feedback in real time rather than soliciting it at the end and shelving it for future references. In March 2020, Tufts UEP partnered with VietAID to help develop tools for engaging Dorchester residents around the topic of climate change and preparedness. Even though UEP Senior Lecturer Penn Loh and I were originally part of the work as project evaluators, we became increasingly embedded in the process and grew beyond those roles. My positions as a Dorchester resident, a researcher from Tufts University, and community researcher who is also a member of the Vietnamese American community became an opportunity for me to apply my personal perspectives and experiences into the project as a community researcher. Using autoethnography to frame this thesis acknowledges my personal assumptions and experiences and allows me to lean on that knowledge to analyze the data.

### Literature Reviews

#### Action Research

Action research is a “form of enquiry” that can be easily used by practitioners and researchers who want to be able to evaluate and reflect on their own work (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 7). Because it is a learning tool which involves progress evaluation, researchers are able to ask themselves along the way whether their work is progressing as wished or how it can be improved upon before moving forward. Action research allows a researcher or practitioner to constantly evaluate their process and revise or improve the different steps in their work. It builds into a project the expectation and flexibility to be able identify a concern, try a different approach, and reflect on the modifications and

how researchers might proceed. In the action-reflection cycle, the process is ongoing “because as soon as we reach a provisional point where we feel things are satisfactory, that point itself raises new questions and it is time to begin again” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 9). Framed as a form of learning and doing, action research is not reserved exclusively for any specific type of researchers or those with specific credentials. As a community-friendly tool, it can be utilized by academic institutions and community organizations in partnership.

(This is a modified version of the plan in McNiff et al. 2003.)

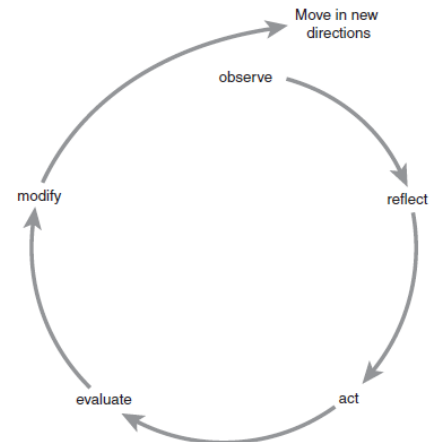


FIGURE 1.1 An action-reflection cycle

Figure 2 Action-reflection cycle - McNiff et al

One of the goals of action research is to generate a special kind of knowledge through a shift in research purposes “from imposing change from without” to a “commitment to understanding and improving” human practices and affecting those changes from within (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 11). Rather than collect data and information as a passive observer, the researcher places themselves at the center of this cycle by asking questions from a personal perspective: “how am I understanding this process?” or “how can I improve this work?” In doing so, they are linking ideas with action; using personal experiences to untangle and navigate through social issues that they want to address. Carrying out an iterative and reflective research project in partnership with community participants will also allow this special kind of knowledge to be created, rather than discovered and extracted. Answers and information are formulated and modified through trial and error; research participants are not being experimented on to produce a generalizable solution for other communities.

Moreover, in contrast to theorists and “professional elites [who] tend to use their own language to talk to one another,” self-study as a discipline, and action research by extension, have bolstered the efforts of practitioners contributing to spaces where “educational enquiry” is welcome, including the

community where the research takes place (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 19). While the researcher can hope that participants might share the same views as they do, it is not a requirement of participation. These differences can instead be used as a starting point for discussions and further inquiry to better understanding.

To truly generate community knowledge, however, will require a collective reflection of 'I'-oriented questions. In this way, a participatory component takes action research further by incorporating the knowledge and experiences of research participants into the process, thereby transforming the role of observed participants into active ones. In "Power and Knowledge," Gaventa and Cornwall further ask "what happens when participatory methods are employed by powerful institutions? Whose voices are raised and whose are heard?" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, 182). Indeed, how does a researcher navigate through their different identities if they represent a large academic institution as well as the community they are studying? The authors attempt to reconcile this internal conflict by breaking down the association of power with knowledge.

Historically, power has been associated with and defined by knowledge, creating a structure where the oppressed can be silenced by having restricted access to information. This kind of relationship also assumes that power and knowledge are finite: for certain groups to obtain power means that another group must give it up. Action research upends this monopoly by recognizing that power can be *created* through "democratic participation in knowledge production" so there is no need to jostle for it (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, 176). Removing the monopoly on knowledge production would also allow participants from marginalized groups to contribute to this discourse. If knowledge is power, then supporting participants to develop and construct their own knowledge would allow them to wield their own power rather than allow a dominant class to harvest that knowledge and take power from the community.

Participatory action research, or PAR, recognizes that those “most impacted by a problem are in the best position to understand and solve that problem” (Seeder et al, 2020, p. 2). Centering the knowledge and lived experiences of those who are mostly intimately familiar with an issue, PAR breaks from traditional extractive research in that the data, analyses, and results are produced by and available to community members. The community is not mined for information which is then used by a researcher or an institution to publish a paper, typically locked behind a paywall or is difficult to access, to further their own career. Instead, by highlighting the expertise of participant researchers to design research tools and collect data, PAR helps to ensure that participants themselves can become skilled and effective researchers. Building this research knowledge in a community transforms learning into a renewable resource of power that people can tap into when they need it, rather than having to rely on an external agency for leadership or support.

### *Action research and justice*

Per Gaventa and Cornwall, knowledge is just one dimension of power, with action and consciousness being the second and third. There is a rich body of literature that “struggles to reconfigure power relations and enhance agency, [and] tend[s] to emphasize one or the other of the above approaches” (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, 179). However, in the quest to address power structures, emphasizing any one of the above dimensions fails to understand that they are all related and places limits on the work that can be done and the progress that can be achieved. Action research does not offer a definitive solution on how to rebalance these different dimensions, but it can address the conflict raised above. That is, a researcher or practitioner with multiple identities and positionalities does not need to reconcile their different ideas and value systems. Rather, the researcher can use their different cultural identities to better understand the population that they are working with in a participatory action research project.

In terms of justice and equity, when a marginalized group is given the space and support to generate knowledge and contribute to the discipline, they can legitimize their own different traditions and ways of thinking. The first dimension of power assumes that with knowledge comes power and that arguments only need to be supported by highly credible and expert knowledge. However, this precludes those who do not possess that expert knowledge, either laypeople or "experts" from other professional fields. Those who are unable to debate are therefore unable to influence the policy decisions that will affect them.

Action, the second dimension of power, allows a selected privileged group to retain power by creating and enforcing barriers to knowledge. In this way, knowledge can be withheld to control who is informed and who may act upon their grievances once they are informed of the inequitable distribution of power. Action research, therefore, balances out these inequities by not only generating awareness to spur action, but it also does not require participants to "mimic the language and knowledge of the powerful, in order to begin to be heard" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, 174). Again, it acknowledges that different people have different experiences that affect their stances on different issues and how they communicate those beliefs, rejecting the idea that certain sources or knowledge are more valid than others.

#### *Application to the VietAID project*

Action researchers stress that regardless of the methods of data gathering, it is more important that the process of developing and implementing the methods include consultation and collaboration with participant researchers in the design and revision processes. In doing so, with the additional identity of being a community member, the researcher can critically question existing assumptions and how those assumptions can be challenged during and within the enquiry. This includes the researcher asking themselves why they think a certain way and how they have been influenced or affected to think the way they do.

Action research also recognizes that people have agency and can think for themselves. Though conditions should be provided for people to make their own decisions, there should not be a particularized concern about “behavioral outcomes” but rather, the process should be about enabling people to make well informed decisions (Whitehead et al, 2011, p. 31). The application of this action research method to the VietAID climate project allows for the learning process to happen without having the added pressure of worrying about any particular outcome. Furthermore, the participatory component closes gaps between the ‘they’ and the ‘we.’ It breaks down the notion that the researchers have more power because they represent structures, organizations, and ‘experts,’ and remedies the power inequities by redistributing it to “the oppressed, grassroots, marginalized” (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, 173).

In this way, action research stands out from traditional research in that the researcher or practitioner is situated within the investigation and there is no clear boundary between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside.’ Because the researcher can become so embedded that they end up blurring the line between observer and



Figure 3 PAR Field Guide – Healthy Neighborhoods Study

participant, they can also dissolve the boundaries between researcher and participants. This creates room for anyone to become a participant researcher, particularly students and youths. Activating the consciousness of power distribution by allowing young people to generate and contribute knowledge is just one way in which they can be civically engaged and empowered to participate in decision-making conversations.

## Autoethnography

While action research is a practice for action and reflection for a research cycle, autoethnography is an approach that can be applied to the practitioner's own journey or learning and discovery. As a practice, autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that is rooted in personal and cultural experiences. Using a semi-autobiographical lens to reflect on the research allows researchers and practitioners to not only "address and disrupt power in research," but it also allows the oppressed to assert their stories into the discourse traditionally shaped by the experiences of privileged "White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied" researchers (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 278). While action research documents how a project transforms, autoethnography allows the researcher to observe the transformation within themselves.

One critique of action research is that because it blurs the boundary between researcher and participant, it becomes unclear whose voice is telling the story, "whose voice is heard, and who speaks on behalf of whom" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, p. 11). Autoethnography, which is both a process and a product, addresses this uncertainty by allowing the researcher and writer to frame their work as a learning experience and epiphany, filling the gaps in their personal "storyline" along the way (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 277). Through the production and sharing of their work, the autoethnographer demonstrates how their perspectives did, or did not, change over the course of their research and help others experience similar epiphanies by making accessible to outsiders the culture that is familiar mostly only to insiders.

However, in sharing their experiences, the writer must think about how to position the validity of their story so that others would have a reason to read it. If it is framed as just 'here is my story,' then why should others "privilege" it over "anyone else's that [they] see 25 times a day on TV?" (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 276). One way to address this is to make their experience relatable to others by analyzing the learning and research experiences, as well as comparing and contrasting them against existing research,

among other methods (Ronai, 1995; Ellis et al, 2011). This also allows the autoethnographic work to reach a wider audience than traditional research, which tend to be less engaging and more difficult to access. These approaches are consistent with autoethnographers' perspective of writing and research as serving socially just purposes (Ellis et al, 2011). It seems the goal of autoethnographic works is not to provide accuracy or settle debate about how work in the social sciences should be presented. Rather, "the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better" (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 284). If knowledge generates power, it follows that the more access people have to works that reflect their experiences and values, then the more people can build on and contribute to policy conversations that will affect them. It also bolsters and validates peoples' experiences by normalizing different cultures and desensitizing the public to formerly underrepresented opinions.

This paper does not challenge the merits of one research approach, nor does it value one over the other. Instead, there are benefits in using both action research and autoethnography as complementary lenses when reflecting on this research project. Action research is a tool and an approach in carrying out the research, while an autoethnographic reflection requires a deep introspection into the learning experience of the researcher. This thesis applies autoethnography in both the discussion of findings and the final reflection. Rather than striving for objectivity, the data interpretation and final reflection lean on personal experiences, personal anecdotes, and the inner conflicts that arise from holding multiple roles throughout this project: a graduate student researcher, embedded researcher, and community researcher. This approach also highlights how embracing subjectivity and personal experiences is beneficial for researchers who conduct action research as a form of community organizing since it helps to bridge the gap between the 'insider' (the researcher) and 'outsider' (community members and other observers).

## Project Applications and Methods

VietAID partnered with Tufts to design and develop a project that would help the organization better understand the Fields Corner Vietnamese American community's relationship to and understanding of climate change. The project was led by VietAID's Executive Director Lisette Le, with UEP Lecturer and myself brought on as project evaluators, even though those roles began to evolve as we became further embedded in the work. Design and implementation were led by myself and VietAID's Youth Leadership Coordinator, Thang Diep. One of the goals that VietAID had laid out prior to the start of this project was to ultimately build out a steering committee of residents to lead climate conversations in Dorchester and who might be able to liaise with other local leaders and community organizations on climate actions. Based on what we learned during the process, our project continued to adapt and evolve. Upon reflection, the project can be broken down into three phases.

The first phase involved dot surveys and key informant interviews. First, Thang and I carried out dot surveys on two separate Fridays in the summer of 2020. The goal of these initial surveys was get a cursory understanding of Dorchester residents' views on climate change impacts and their levels of preparedness for climate events. Because the project was conceived during the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognized that based on our literature reviews, there were some parallel impacts between climate change events and the experiences that were witnessed in marginalized communities. The third goal of the surveys was to learn more about resources that residents identified as needing the most during the pandemic. At the same time, we were planning to conduct key informant interviews with the goals of learning from other community leaders and stakeholders about climate work currently happening in Dorchester, and identify opportunities for further community engagements.

Based on what we learned from the surveys, we began designing more in-depth resident interviews and workshops during phase 2 to fill in knowledge gaps. Thang and I worked closely together

with VietAID's Youth Researchers to develop interview questions that would dig deeper into resident responses from the dot surveys:

- 1) What climate change issues are impacting the Dorchester community?
- 2) How much do Dorchester residents know about climate change?
- 3) How much do Dorchester residents care about climate change?
- 4) How do Dorchester residents want to engage with climate change?
- 5) What takeaways from COVID-19 can be applied to climate change preparedness?

The results from these interviews were insightful. However, the research team continued to struggle with language and translating key terms and concepts into Vietnamese in a way that would capture the context of the project.

Recognizing that we needed to further break down the concept of climate change so that climate related issues would resonate with residents, Thang and I designed, developed, and facilitated the climate workshops which we incorporated into phase 3 of the project. The workshops, which provided climate change education and explored resident priorities, were a space for residents engage with one another and discuss different intersectional issues relating to climate change.

To truly pursue equity and justice, we must hear from the residents and provide the opportunity for them to engage in ways that are comfortable and safe for them. It was also critical that we respected participants' time and valuable insights. To avoid perpetuating the extractive relationship that has historically existed between academic institutions and low-income communities of color, we offered monetary compensation for commitments that went beyond 30 minutes, i.e., resident focus groups, interviews, and resident workshops. In explaining the voluntary participation to residents, we assured them that their responses would not affect their relationship with VietAID or their eligibility to receive the free weekly meals and groceries services that the organization was providing in partnership with the

City of Boston and other local community organizations. We also explained that we would not collect any identifying or traceable information such as name, age, sex, or race.

## Chapter 4 – Phase 1

Phase 1 consisted of two parts: dot surveys and key informant interviews. The dot surveys collected responses over 50 participants, most of whom were Vietnamese immigrant residents, and was our first exposure to the ongoing language and cultural challenges relevant to this project. The challenges from the survey helped us to plan the next phase of the project and figure out how we should approach conversations with residents. From the second part of Phase 1 involving key informant interviews, we were able to learn about community leaders' first-hand experiences with providing essential services during COVID-19. Some of the findings also confirmed our takeaways from the literature reviews and supported our baseline assumptions entering into this project.

### Dot Surveys

#### Methods

In June 2020, we conducted two Dot Surveys at the VietAID Community Center to develop a basic understanding of Dorchester residents' position on the topic of climate change, their level of climate preparedness, and their vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with public health limitations, both surveys were conducted on separate days, outside of the community center during food distribution hours while residents were queuing to pick up their food. Because the engagement window for each prospective participant was limited to the amount of time they were in line, we limited our survey to five yes/no or rank-questions.

For both survey sessions, all questions, which were available in both English and Vietnamese, were written on poster sized easel pads and taped on the wall. We were present to observe residents' interactions with the survey and to provide support for those who were not able to understand the questions. On the first day, we made the survey available to participants by 7am when they were able to access the building for meal pickups. All residents over the age of 17 were encouraged to participate in the survey and were given a set of five dot stickers to place onto the poster to select which statement

most resonated with them. I attempted to record general observations about the demographics of our participants. However, this proved to be difficult because the queue was moving relatively quickly, and I often had to spend extra time with individual participants since the questions were difficult to understand. After two hours, it became clear that the questions were not visually presented in a way that was simple or straightforward enough. Because participants were not able to properly answer the questions, we were also unable to have in depth conversations with them to better understand the reasoning behind their responses. The posters were thereafter taken down while we brainstormed a new, more simplified set of questions to be presented later that morning. The questions for the first survey can be found below.

Table 1 Dot Survey Questions – First Day, Morning Session

<p>Việc bạn có được thực phẩm thay đổi như thế nào từ khi có đại dịch? How has your access to food changed since this pandemic?</p>					
<p>Khó hơn Less access</p>		<p>Cũng vậy Same access as before</p>		<p>Dễ hơn More access</p>	
<p>Bạn đánh giá những biến đổi khí hậu như bão, lũ lụt, đại dịch, sóng điện hay hạn hán sẽ ảnh hưởng bạn như thế nào? How much do you think climate change events such as hurricanes, public health epidemics, extreme heat waves, or droughts would affect you?</p>					
<p><b>Trước đại dịch:</b> <b>Before the pandemic:</b></p>			<p><b>Trong đại dịch:</b> <b>During this pandemic:</b></p>		
<p>Không chút nào Not at all</p>	<p>Một ít A little</p>	<p>Rất nhiều A lot</p>	<p>Không chút nào Not at all</p>	<p>Một ít A little</p>	<p>Rất nhiều A lot</p>
<p>Bạn nghĩ khu phố này được chuẩn bị tốt đến mức nào để đối phó với các thảm họa như bão tố, đại dịch, sóng cực nóng hay hạn hán? How well did you think this neighborhood was prepared to handle disasters such as hurricanes, public health epidemics, extreme heat waves, or droughts?</p>					
<p><b>Trước đại dịch:</b> <b>Before the pandemic:</b></p>			<p><b>Trong đại dịch:</b> <b>During this pandemic:</b></p>		
<p>Không chút nào Not at all</p>	<p>Một ít A little</p>	<p>Rất nhiều A lot</p>	<p>Không chút nào Not at all</p>	<p>Một ít A little</p>	<p>Rất nhiều A lot</p>
<p>Bạn có cảm thấy được VietAID hỗ trợ không? How supported by VietAID do you feel?</p>					
<p><b>Trước đại dịch:</b> <b>Before the pandemic:</b></p>			<p><b>Trong đại dịch:</b> <b>During this pandemic:</b></p>		
<p>Không chút nào Not at all</p>	<p>Một ít A little</p>	<p>Rất nhiều A lot</p>	<p>Không chút nào Not at all</p>	<p>Một ít A little</p>	<p>Rất nhiều A lot</p>
<p>Bạn có cảm thấy được chính phủ hỗ trợ không? How supported by the government do you feel?</p>					

Trước đại dịch: Before the pandemic:			Trong đại dịch: During this pandemic:		
Không chút nào Not at all	Một ít A little	Rất nhiều A lot	Không chút nào Not at all	Một ít A little	Rất nhiều A lot

We noticed that the simplified questions were much better received compared to the morning session and noted that change for the second survey for the following weekend. Our considerations for improvements included a further simplified set of questions, a further simplified response options, and giving different age groups different colored stickers. The latter consideration was meant to eliminate individual counting done by the observer and freeing them up to better engage with participants. We decided to distribute the colors by age group: yellow for those who appeared under 30 years old, green for those who appeared between 30 and 50 years old, and pink for those who appeared over 50 years old. While this method is not meant to be an accurate representation of participants demographics, it would give us our own judgement of participant age and ability to discern which age groups might be most readily available to engage in climate conversations, even casually. The revised questions can be found in below.

Table 2 Dot Survey Questions – First Day, Afternoon Session

Bạn nhận thấy chính phủ hỗ trợ bạn ít hay nhiều trong đại dịch? Do you feel more or less supported by the government during this pandemic?		
Ít hơn trước (Less)	Cũng vậy (The same)	Nhiều hơn trước (More)
Bạn nhận thấy VietAID hỗ trợ bạn ít hay nhiều hơn trong đại dịch? Do you feel more or less supported by VietAID during this pandemic?		
Ít hơn trước (Less)	Cũng vậy (The same)	Nhiều hơn trước (More)
Bạn đánh giá những biến đổi khí hậu như bão, lũ lụt, đại dịch, sóng điện hay hạn hán sẽ ảnh hưởng bạn như thế nào? How much do you think climate-related events such as hurricanes, heat waves, or droughts would affect you?		
Ảnh hưởng một chút (A little)	Không ảnh hưởng (Not at all)	Ảnh hưởng nhiều (A lot)
Bạn có nghĩ việc biến đổi khí hậu như bão tố, sóng nhiệt hoặc hạn hán sẽ ảnh hưởng ít nhiều đến bạn? How prepared are you to handle disasters such as hurricanes, public health epidemics, extreme heat waves, or		

droughts?		
Không sẵn sàng (A little)	Sẵn sàng một chút (Not at all)	Rất sẵn sàng (A lot)

The following week, we officially began our survey at 7:30am, noting from the previous week that the opening time was too early and residents did not arrive until later. We learned from the previous week that the number of residents is dramatically diminished by after noon, which meant we had to maximize our opportunity for engagement between 7:30am and 12:00pm. we also recognized that while our Vietnamese language capabilities were on par, we have very different sets of basic vocabulary. Therefore, we found it necessary to agree on how we would be translating certain terms to Vietnamese participants who might need clarification on the survey questions. These terms included “climate change,” “access,” “preparedness,” and “worried.”

After making significant improvements to the way the survey questions were worded and visually displayed, we were able to make another attempt at engaging with residents much more by asking them to explain or elaborate on their responses. Other than these changes, the procedure was similar to the previous week. The survey questions for the second week are below.

*Table 3 Dot Survey Questions – Second Day*

Việc bạn có được thực phẩm thay đổi như thế nào từ khi có đại dịch? How has your access to food changed since this pandemic?		
Khó hơn (Less access)	Cũng vậy (Same as before)	Dễ hơn (More access)
Bạn có tin vào sự thay đổi môi trường khí hậu không? Do you believe in climate change?		
Có (Yes)	Không Có (No)	Không Biết (Unsure)
Bạn có lo lắng về việc thay đổi môi trường khí hậu không? How worried are you about climate change?		
Không Lo (Not Worried)	Lo ít (A Little Worried)	Lo Nhiều (Very Worried)

Bạn đánh giá những thay đổi môi trường khí hậu sẽ ảnh hưởng bạn như thế nào? How much do you think climate change would affect you?		
Không ảnh hưởng (Not at all)	Ảnh hưởng một chút (A little)	Ảnh hưởng nhiều (A lot)
Bạn cảm nhận bạn có sẵn sàng để ứng phó khi có tai biến như đại dịch, bão, lũ lụt, sóng điện hay hạn hán? How prepared are you to handle disasters such as pandemics, hurricanes, floods, heat waves, or droughts?		
Không sẵn sàng (A little)	Sẵn sàng một chút (Not at all)	Rất sẵn sàng (A lot)

### Findings

Complete data from the two days of dot surveys can be found in Appendices A-C. As mentioned in the *Methods* subsection, on the first day it was not possible for us to track or count the number of participants. However, we were able to note that the majority of residents who participated were women in the 30 to 50 year old range. There were also a few residents who did not speak either English or Vietnamese and thus were unable to complete the survey because we were not able to translate for them.

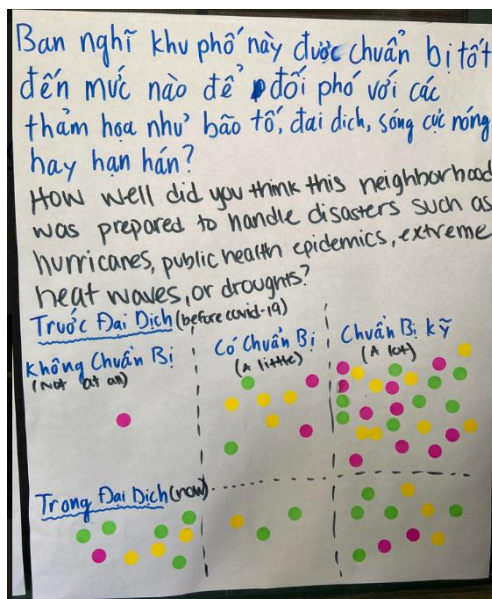


Figure 4 Example survey question from morning session

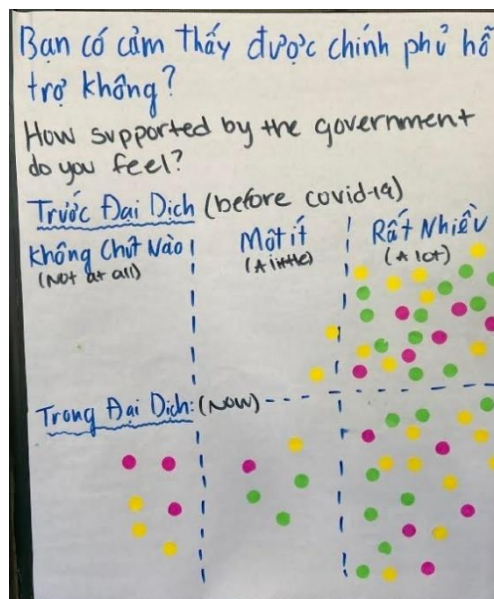


Figure 5 Example survey question from morning session

Of the ones who did attempt to complete the survey, we found that participants seemed to have a difficult time understanding that we were trying to ask for their opinions about their experiences

both before and during the pandemic. Most were under the impression that we were quizzing them about general facts based on actual reporting. Several residents opted out of the survey because they felt they did not have the correct answers and were afraid they would taint the results. One participant opted out because she did not rely on government services before the pandemic and therefore would be unable to answer that question. Overall, residents felt that if they were unsure about even one question, then they would forego the survey completely. Participants also did not complete the survey all at once. After answering one question, many would return to the food distribution line to ponder about the following questions. Because of this, it was very difficult to track who had already answered and with whom we should engage to further understand why participants responded the way they did.

We also witnessed the influence of peer pressure and group mentality. Whenever there were multiple people answering the survey at once, many of these participants would have conversations with one another and change their answers based on those conversations. Because there were only two researchers on site to help answer questions and provide instructions, we also saw many participants giving incorrect instructions to their friends and encouraging them to answer the same way they did. Additionally, when some changed their mind and removed stickers from certain questions, they would lose track and end up answering twice on a different question. Or, when some participants were “correcting” their own stickers and peeling them off the poster, they were incorrectly peeling stickers from other categories and reassigning those stickers, effectively changing other people’s responses as well. For example, Participant A responded “A lot” under the “Before COVID-19” category in Question 1. However, when they wanted to change their response, they would accidentally reassign Participant B’s sticker from “A lot” under the “Now” category in Question 1. On one occasion, there was an older couple comprising of a middle-aged Vietnamese male and female. When both residents approached the survey, the gentleman waved his wife away and told her to pick up the food while he answered for them both.

Although we handed participants exactly 9 stickers for the 9 survey questions, many felt that because certain questions did not pertain to them, they assigned multiple stickers to the remaining questions because they felt that having more stickers in a category would represent how strongly they agreed with a sentiment. For example, Participant A felt that the level of government support they received did not change from before the pandemic, so they assigned two stickers to “A Lot” for the question about VietAID support.

The visual presentation of the survey also confused participants who were not able to distinguish the differently titled columns and assumed the separate columns and rows were simply extra space for stickers. A revised survey was posted later in the first day and was better received. Questions and answers were more streamlined, and participants were also able to complete the survey much more quickly.

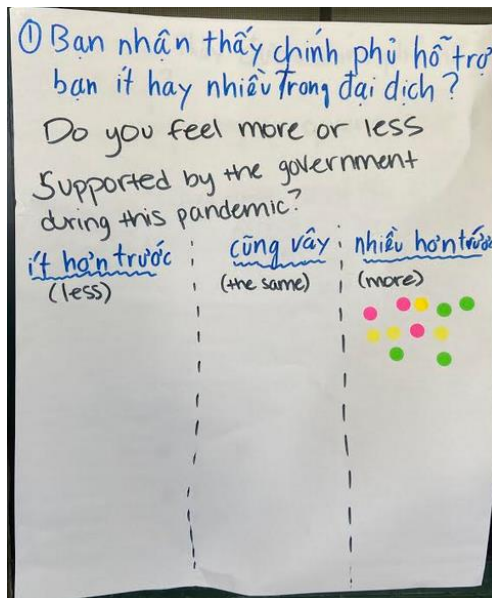


Figure 6 Example survey question from afternoon session

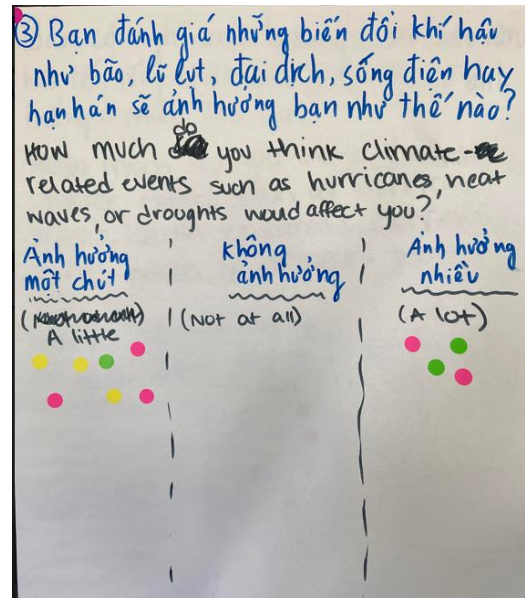


Figure 7 Example survey question from afternoon session

There were far fewer people waiting for meal pickups by the time we brought out the revised survey. However, of the little number of participants we had in the second session, we were confident that this question format was much more effective. We noticed that participants were still not fully

answering all the questions that were posted, but at least residents were not opting out of the survey completely based on their uncertainty about one or two questions.

By the second weekend, our process was more refined, and we were able to better track the number of participants. By the end of the survey, there were approximately 29 men and 24 women. Because we had switched to handing out sticker colors based on age group, we also had a much better visual representation of responses. Yellow represented those under 30 years old, green those 30 to 50 years old, and pink were those deemed over 50 years old. Just like the previous week, there were very few participants who were under 30 years old or youths.

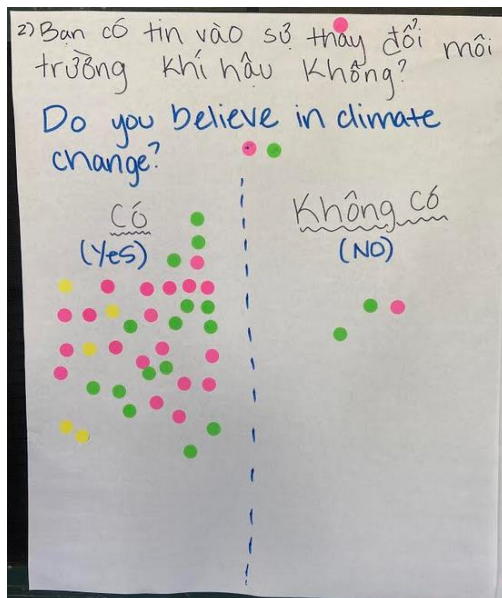


Figure 8 Example survey question from second Friday

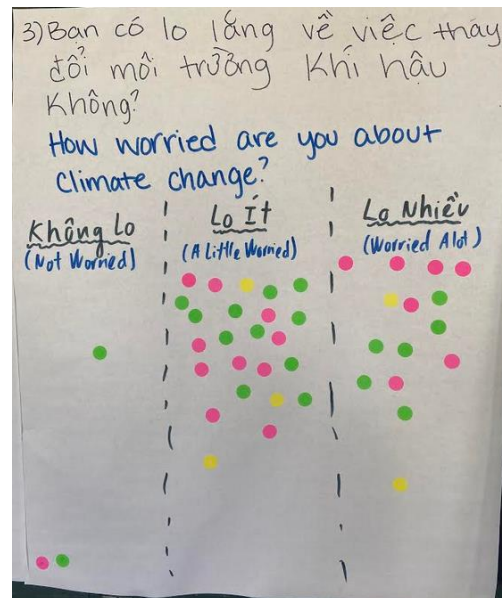


Figure 9 Example survey question from second Friday

Despite our efforts to how we translated the term “climate change” when speaking to Vietnamese participants, we found that most understood the term as the change in regional climate and seasons, rather than as a global phenomenon. Older participants explained that when they responded “A Lot” to whether they were worried about the impacts of climate change, they were referring to the constant and rapid changes in local temperatures, which would make them more vulnerable to colds and the flu. We also continued to encounter the scenario in which people skipped the climate change

questions because they were not familiar with the topic and were therefore not confident enough to answer questions about it, even if we are asking about personal experiences and perceptions.

Moreover, regarding the questions “Do you believe in climate change” and “How worried are you about climate change,” many were unable to distinguish the difference between two. One participant pointed out that if they believe in climate change, then of course they would be worried about it. There were participants who said they did not believe in climate change, even though they later responded that they were worried about it. We considered the possibility that participants did not understand the questions the way they were presented. One additional obstacle that participants faced was the language barrier for those who were not able to read either English or Vietnamese. One Spanish-speaking participant was only able to answer the first two questions because they were more simply stated the rest. Another Spanish-speaking resident in line was not able to answer at all because they were not confident about being able to answer.

By the end of the second day of survey, we also noted that when the queue became busier, there were fewer participants. Many said that they did not want to lose their place in line, so Thang and I took turns saving their place while the other person stayed by the surveys to answer questions and facilitated conversations. However, because there were two researchers on site that day, we were not able to assist everyone. Moreover, even though we explained to residents that the questions from the second weekend’s dot survey were different from the first weekend’s, many did not want to go through the trouble of losing their place in line to participate a second time. There was also a handful of residents who discouraged their friends from completing the second survey because they felt their responses would not change.

## Discussion

The Dot Surveys were meant to help us better understand residents’ concerns about climate change and gauge their levels of preparedness for climate disasters. The information that we gathered

was meant to help us create a survey that we could share with the Dorchester community at large. We had also planned to collaborate with other organizations in Dorchester to translate future surveys so participants would not be limited to only those who spoke English or Vietnamese. However, based on what we learned through the initial surveys, we quickly realized we were not ready to begin planning for a community-wide survey, particularly when we had not mastered the ability to translate key English terms and phrase into Vietnamese. These terms included: “climate change,” “resources,” “access,” and “climate-related disasters.”

As a researcher who is part of the Vietnamese American community in Dorchester and who grew up speaking Vietnamese at home, I was aware I would be able to comfortably converse with other Vietnamese-speaking residents. However, even though my native language is Vietnamese, my dominant language is English. Thus, when having conversations in my native tongue, I knew unfamiliar topics such as science, history, and current events would require more practice and preparation. In the case of the first Dot Survey, Thang and I recognized that our Vietnamese vocabulary and question formats might be too elementary or informal, so we heavily relied on an older VietAID staff member who provided much of the translation services for the organization. The first iteration of our Dot Survey primarily used his translation.

Here, for the first time, we began to experience a recurring problem when it came to language and context. Our translator used the literal translation for all our key terms and phrases, and because Thang and I did not know better, we were not able to identify the translation gap. For example, our first question “How has your access to food changed since this pandemic,” was translated to roughly “In terms of having food, how has that changed for you since the pandemic?” Anecdotally, I know that prior to the pandemic, there was a large Vietnamese population in Dorchester who worked in the service or construction industry, both of which suffered greatly when the State mandated shutdowns. One would assume that due to a reduction or loss of income, households would have more difficulties buying

groceries. However, according to our survey results, an overwhelming majority responded that during the pandemic there was more/easier access to food. One possible explanation for this could be that for many residents, the ability to pick up a week's worth of food from a community center within walking distance of their home provided greater convenience than having to go to a grocery store and do the shopping themselves. Another explanation, which is consistent with the Vietnamese senior population's concerns about health risks, could be that the VietAID food distribution limited their physical contact with others, a valid concern towards the beginning of the pandemic when grocery stores were often crowded due to stockpiling. This would allow them to more frequently pick up free meals instead of having to avoid overcrowded grocery stores until they had no more food.

Interestingly, regarding the questions "How much do you think climate change events such as hurricanes, public health epidemics, extreme heat waves, or droughts would affect you?" and "How well did you think this neighborhood was prepared to handle disasters such as hurricanes, public health epidemics, extreme heat waves, or droughts," many participants asked us what the difference was between the two. The line of thinking seemed to be "if the neighborhood is prepared, then I would not be affected." Because of the inaccuracies with the number of dot stickers, we cannot compare the number of responses between the two questions. However, when we asked participants to elaborate on that line of thinking, many said that during COVID-19, because there was access to electricity and Wi-Fi, they felt comfortable staying at home to ride out the pandemic. This was made further possible by the weekly meal distribution service through VietAID. Many reasoned that in the event of another unforeseen pandemic or disaster, having access to the same things will be enough in terms of preparations.

On the other hand, for several participants, the concept of climate change seemed more elusive. One resident who mentioned Wi-Fi as a component of preparedness said that if a climate change event, such as a hurricane or flood, were to bring down their electricity, they would be very bored and would

not want to stay home. This was only one of many participants for whom safety did not seem to be a concern associated with natural disasters. Moreover, due to our literal translation of “climate change” into “change of the climate,” many participants understood the term to mean the regular change in seasons and regional climates. As a result, when asked whether they were concerned about or prepared for climate change, many said that they were mostly worried about getting sick when the weather becomes unpredictable. Older participants in particular said they were prepared for this because they are familiar with eastern medicines and remedies that they regularly rely on during cold and flu seasons. The mask mandates also supported their perception of preparedness. They are used to that practice in Vietnam, where citizens regularly wear masks and face coverings as a means of protection against bacteria and pollution. Having that practice enforced in the US to prevent the spread of a highly infectious virus has shown residents that this is an effective way to prepare against health-related anxieties.

Another language concern which made it difficult for Thang and me to communicate with residents was our limited vocabulary. In the case of the Dot Surveys, when residents asked follow-up or clarifying questions, I would often have to consult a translation app on my phone or double-check with Thang so that the definitions we provided were consistent. We tried to address this before our second survey by preparing agreed-upon definitions, but we were not able to predict all the words that would need translating or anticipate the different types of questions residents might ask. Moreover, because participants were waiting in a moving line, we did not have the time to mull over those questions and give longwinded answers that would give appropriate contexts to the survey questions. The urgency on top of the inability to provide appropriate spontaneous explanations created a level of panic, which might have prevented us from being able to collect the best survey results.

Finally, in hindsight, I feel that even though we had told people that their responses wouldn't affect their relationship with VietAID or their eligibility to receive the free meals, perhaps having a

survey right outside the community center where people were waiting for their food might still unsettle those who are most vulnerable or who have had prior experience with the loss of public benefits, given that this is a vulnerable and likely food-insecure population.

After we shared our findings and analysis with Penn and Lisette, it was agreed that we needed an extra level of engagement. While the results from our dot surveys were significant and informative, we still needed to understand why some residents responded the way they did. Even though we tried to engage with residents while they were completing the dot survey, we were still unable to fully understand how residents resonated with the topic and how they were making the connections between their own preparedness and unpredictable future events that might be beyond their ability to cope. The purpose of this next step in our engagement process was to have more direct conversations with residents where they can expand on their responses.

## Key Informant Interviews

### Methods

Key informants were identified and recommended through VietAID's network of community partners and coalition organizations. Because it was likely that key informants were community members or leaders who were involved in climate or emergency preparedness as part of their work, they were not compensated for their time. Our goal in speaking to key informants was to learn from them and gather their perspectives about the work currently being conducted in Dorchester around these topics and how residents have already been engaged.

To prepare for interviews with key informants, Youth Researchers conducted background research on interviewees that they would be speaking with so that they could come up with their own questions to ask, in addition to an interview template with general questions. An example of the interview guides can be found in Appendix D. Similar to the resident interviews and focus groups, key

informant interviews were also conducted virtually when required and were expected to take up to one hour.

Additionally, because we expected far fewer key informant interviews than resident interviews, these were conducted by myself and Thang. Each interview was observed by one Youth Researcher who was able to ask their own questions. These also took place well before the resident interviews, so this was also meant to be an opportunity for Youth Researchers to observe and learn about interview etiquette and techniques.

## Findings

A total of five key informants were interviewed who were also stakeholders in the Dorchester community. Our key informants ranged from local leaders to community organizers to city staff. Although interview questions were mostly tailored and specific to respective informants, there were some similarities in the responses which we were able to extract. Youth Researchers were able to identify three recurring themes from the interviews:

1. Communities of color and low-income communities are not well-represented in decision-making processes around climate change issues
2. Many low-income communities and communities of color lack the resources to deal with the impacts of climate change
3. Climate change work often happens in isolation and we need to make climate change resonate with other issues that residents already care about

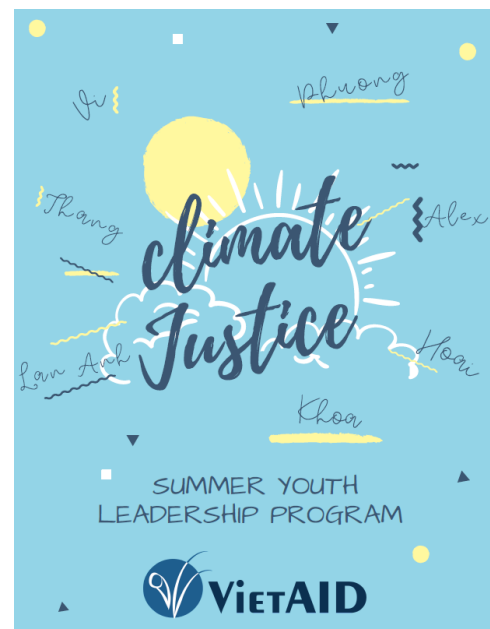


Figure 10 Climate Justice Booklet

These are further discussed in the Climate Justice Booklet that the Youth Researchers helped to produce by the end of their summer project. The themes supported our baseline assumptions that Dorchester residents have not been intentionally engaged in climate conversations and there are barriers that must be overcome before residents can actively participate in such conversations, such as language access and the ability to find childcare services. Excerpts of the interview analyses from the booklet can be found in Appendices E and F.

Our interviewees also identified partnership opportunities with VietAID and ways for young people to be more involved in their community. One opportunity presented itself in the form of a semester long project for Tufts UEP students to explore resilience hubs, potentially centering VietAID as a center for community members to seek shelter, access resources, and receive accurate information during emergency events. Because our key informants had their own networks, we were also able to use that connection to share our interview flyers since we had hoped to recruit participants beyond VietAID's Vietnamese constituents.

We had reached out to potential key informants who were local business owners or who were long-time residents of Dorchester. However, those outreach attempts were unsuccessful, and we were not able to interview individuals who were not associated with a community organization.

## Discussion

With the key informant interviews, we primarily focused on learning from their experiences interacting with Dorchester residents, particularly those in low-income communities or communities of color. With our goal of building out a steering committee in mind, we also sought guidance from community organizers who are familiar with the dynamics across various resident groups in Dorchester. The interviews were very informative in many ways: they supported the assumptions we formed based on our literature review and they confirmed my personal experiences as a Vietnamese resident living in Dorchester.

Even though Dorchester is so culturally rich and diverse, there have been very little efforts from our local government when it comes to public engagements and providing language accessible information. For example, one stakeholder spent much of their time during the pandemic working with local business owners applying for COVID-19 assistance, such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) application which is only available in English. Moreover, because public announcements about these grants and loans are not made available to Vietnamese, Spanish, and Creole speakers, many small local business owners do not know much about them, whether they are eligible, and how they might sign up. Residents who are tapped into their local networks might find out about volunteers, such as our key informant, who can provide assistance, but this is an additional barrier to COVID-19 support which non-immigrant and English-speaking residents do not have to experience.

On the topic of communications, it was interesting that our key informants spoke about the limitations of emails. As employees moved to teleworking, emails and virtual meetings became the predominant methods of communications among the white-collar working class. However, those who do not speak English or have reliable hardware on which to use these platforms must continue relying on in-person physical announcements such as flyers. One key informant said that once community meetings became virtual and announcements were shared via emails, the only people who attended those meetings were “experts” or “professionals” rather than your local service worker. One stakeholder who worked for the City of Boston explained that prior to the pandemic, the City already had trouble filling its community meetings with local residents who are not professionals.

However, it was noted by one community organizer that as hard as we should try to be inclusive and encouraging in giving people a safe space to have their voices heard, we must also respect that even if we have attempted to remove the barriers, we still need to recognize that not wanting to participate is a choice. We must respect people’s agency and not expect them to be the spokesperson for others who might be experiencing the same difficulties. It may be important to know why people are opting out of

conversations, but it acceptable for people to not participate “just because.” This was important for us to note as we began planning our resident interviews and was a critical reminder for our Youth Researchers as they were recruiting participants. We wanted them to encourage residents and advertise the gift card incentives, but we did not want them to coerce a vulnerable population into participating out of fear that they would lose access to VietAID services.

## Chapter 5 – Phase 2

Based on what we learned in Phase 1, we knew that Phase 2 needed to incorporate engagement methods that would allow us to have a deeper understanding of residents' understanding of and relationship with climate change and climate preparedness. Through resident interviews and focus groups, we found that despite trying out different definitions of climate change, many participants still interpreted the concept as a natural weather- and seasonal-changing event. Regarding resilience, we found that there were also different ways that residents perceived preparedness and self-reliance. In the discussion section, I was able to use an autoethnographic lens to explore the reasons for certain stances that participants had on these topics.

### Interviews and Focus Groups

To maintain ownership of the project within the community, we saw an opportunity for VietAID Youth Leaders to be an integral part of the research project. The five Youth Researchers who greatly contributed to the summer portion of the project were a part of the Summer 2020 cohort through VietAID's Summer Youth Leadership Program. The researchers, ranging from high school freshman to a rising junior, were selected to participate in the project based on their interests in climate change and environmental science. As part of their summer curriculum, they attended workshops covering a variety of topics ranging from the science of climate change to environmental racism to climate impacts within their own community, all of which helped them to put this project into context. All five researchers were Vietnamese American residents from Dorchester and were bilingual. While each had different levels of comfort in written and spoken Vietnamese, all five were able to fully comprehend when they were spoken to in Vietnamese.

Before we began resident interactions, Principal Researcher Penn Loh visited the VietAID Community Center to co-facilitate with me a research ethics training for all Youth Leaders in the summer program so that we could officially onboard them as researchers under the project's IRB protocol. As a

part of the training, the Youth Researchers learned how to avoid exploitative and coercive behavior when it came to recruiting and interviewing participants. They were also given the opportunity to discuss and practice different scenarios centered on the IRB principles of Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice. Because the Youth Researchers did not have prior experience with developing research questions or conducting interviews, we provided further trainings and support to help them practice different techniques for open-ended semi-structured interviews, develop research questions, and maintain ethical research protocols.

Together, we came up with the following overarching research questions to be explored through the resident and key informant interviews:

1. How do Dorchester residents understand climate change?
2. What climate change impacts do Dorchester residents think affect them?
3. How prepared are Dorchester residents for climate change impacts?
4. How do Dorchester residents want to engage with climate change?
5. What takeaways from COVID-19 can be applied to climate change preparedness?

We were cognizant of the social hierarchies that exist in Vietnamese culture. We wanted to control for the potential uncomfortable dynamics that may present themselves if we were to put young people in the same focus group as the elderly. The unspoken age deference could have resulted in younger people not being able to speak up and share ideas with their elders, particularly if the thoughts and opinions of the two groups were in direct contrast. Therefore, we made the decision to limit the focus groups to just young people under the age of 21, and those who are older would participate through individual interviews.

#### Methods: Semi-Structured Open-Ended Resident Interviews

Our goal was to conduct between 20-50 interviews with a diverse range of Dorchester residents. Because the interviews were planned for one hour, we offered all participants a \$25 Visa gift card to

compensate them for their time. This information was very clearly visible on all outreach materials. Recruitment was done via word of mouth and public flyers shared through local businesses, such as restaurants and local grocers. The flyers, which were available in both English and Vietnamese, can be found in Appendix G. Digital advertisements were also posted on the official VietAID Instagram and Facebook accounts. Youth Researchers also recruited participants by calling residents who receive weekly home-delivered meals. This category would account for Dorchester residents who do not regularly leave home to buy groceries or pick up meals from community centers.

To sign up for an interview, interested participants could either follow/enter a link or scan a QR code which would take them to a Google Form. Residents who visited the VietAID Community Center regularly through the food distribution program were able to easily receive physical fliers distributed by staff. The proximity and regular access to staff also provided older residents the opportunity to ask in-person how to sign up for the interviews or have a staff member sign up on their behalf. Older residents who learned about the project through a grocery store flyer might not have access to the internet, or if they do, they might not be able to fill out a Google Form on their own. In this way, food recipients had one less barrier to overcome to participate compared to the general population.

Because most participants were either VietAID constituents or Dorchester residents who visited the center for weekly meal distributions, it was more convenient to schedule interviews at VietAID. Participants who were uncomfortable with in-person interactions were offered the option to complete the interviews over the phone. Questions, which were available in both English and Vietnamese, can be found in below. Interviews were largely carried out by Youth Researchers in pairs, with one person taking digital notes while the other person interacting with the participant. Pairing up also relieved some pressure for Youth Researchers with more limited Vietnamese-speaking capacity. When possible, I attended the interviews to offer support or help with facilitating. I also conducted some interviews myself when there were scheduling conflicts.

Table 4 Resident Interview Questions – English

**Research Questions:**

- What climate change issues are impacting the Dorchester community?
- How much do Dorchester residents know about climate change?
- How much do Dorchester residents care about climate change?
- How do Dorchester residents want to engage with climate change?
- What takeaways from COVID-19 can be applied to climate change preparedness?

**Understandings of Climate Change**

- What does climate change mean to you?
  - *If they have a sense of what climate change is:*
    - Where do you hear/read about/watch conversations about climate change?
  - *If they don't understand the concept, give them the explanation:*
    - Climate change is a long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional, and global climates.
- What are some potential climate change events you can think of?

**Impacts of Climate Change**

- Do you think you will be personally impacted by future events related to climate change?
  - If yes, then how?
    - Do you think your income, race, immigration status, and/or language access will affect how you experience these events?
    - Are you worried about climate change and its impacts?
  - If no, then why not?
    - Who do you think these future events will impact then?
- Do you think your community will be impacted by future events related to climate change?
  - If yes, then how?
  - If no, then why not?

**Climate Change Preparedness**

- Are you prepared for climate change?
  - If yes, how have you prepared for it?
    - What else do you think you need to prepare for climate change?
  - If no, would you like to be better prepared for it?
    - If yes, what would you need to be better prepared?
    - If not, why not?
- Do you think certain factors will impact your ability to prepare for climate change?
  - *If participants ask what kind of factors, you can give examples such as income, race, immigration status, and language barriers*

**Connections to COVID-19:**

- *Give a brief introduction to COVID-19*
  - As we think about preparedness, we want to hear about your experiences with COVID-19 and how prepared you were to handle the impacts.
- Did COVID-19 impact you?
  - If yes, how?
    - *Possible answers: food access, childcare, income, housing, employment*
    - Do you think your income, race, immigration status, and/or language access affected how you experience the pandemic?
      - If yes, how?
  - If no, why not?
- What resources and services do you think were necessary during the pandemic?
  - Did you use any of these resources?
  - Were you able to access what you needed?
    - If yes, what made it possible?

- If no, why not?
    - What other resources and services would you have liked to see provided?
  - Do you think these resources and services will also help you to prepare for the impacts of climate change?
    - If yes, how so?
    - If no, why not? What would be helpful?

**Community Engagement:**

- Do you feel that your concerns are being heard/addressed by your local government?
  - Do you feel well represented in your local government?
- Are you interested in further engagement on this topic in Dorchester?
  - If yes, how would you like to be involved?
    - *Example: marches, petitions, calling your local representatives, having informed conversations with people in your community,*
    - Are you aware of any opportunities to get involved?
    - Are you aware of any local groups and organizations doing work on climate change?
    - Can we have your preferred contact information (email/phone number)?
  - If no, why not?
    - Are there any barriers that are preventing you from further engagements?
      - *Example: lack of childcare, language barrier, conflicting work hours*
- How did you hear about the interview?

Table 5 Resident Interview Questions - Vietnamese

**Những câu hỏi nghiên cứu:**

- Những vấn đề thay đổi môi trường khí hậu đang ảnh hưởng đến cộng đồng Dorchester?
- Cư dân Dorchester biết được bao nhiêu về thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
- Cư dân Dorchester quan tâm đến thay đổi môi trường khí hậu tới mức nào?
- Làm sao để cư dân Dorchester muốn tham gia vào thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
- Những trải nghiệm nào từ bệnh dịch COVID-19 có thể đem áp dụng để chuẩn bị cho thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?

**Những hiểu biết về thay đổi môi trường khí hậu:**

- Thay đổi môi trường khí hậu có ý nghĩa gì với bạn?
  - *Nếu họ hiểu thay đổi môi trường khí hậu là gì:*
    - Nơi mà bạn nghe/đọc/xem các cuộc hội thoại về thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
  - *Nếu họ không hiểu khái niệm này, hãy giải thích cho họ:*
    - Thay đổi môi trường khí hậu là một thay đổi dài hạn trong các giai đoạn thời tiết trung bình nhằm xác định khí hậu trái đất tại địa phương, khu vực và toàn cầu.
- Một số sự kiện tiềm năng thay đổi môi trường khí hậu bạn có thể nghĩ đến là gì?

**Những tác động của thay đổi môi trường khí hậu:**

- Bạn có nghĩ rằng mình sẽ bị ảnh hưởng bởi các sự kiện trong tương lai liên quan đến thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
  - Nếu có, thì bằng cách nào?
    - Bạn có nghĩ rằng lợi tức, chủng tộc, tình nhập cư và/hoặc bằng ngôn ngữ sẽ ảnh hưởng đến cách bạn trải nghiệm những sự kiện này không?
    - Bạn có lo lắng về sự thay đổi môi trường khí hậu và tác động của nó không?
  - Nếu không, thì tại sao không?
    - Bạn có nghĩ rồi những sự kiện trong tương lai sẽ ảnh hưởng đến ai?
- Bạn có nghĩ rằng cộng đồng sẽ bị ảnh hưởng bởi các sự kiện trong tương lai liên quan đến thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
  - Nếu có, thì bằng cách nào?
  - Nếu không, thì tại sao không?

**Chuẩn bị cho thay đổi môi trường khí hậu:**

- Bạn có chuẩn bị cho thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
  - Nếu có, bạn chuẩn bị như nào?
    - Bạn còn cần thêm gì nữa để chuẩn bị cho thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
  - Nếu không, bạn có muốn chuẩn bị tốt hơn không?
    - Nếu có, bạn cần gì để chuẩn bị tốt hơn?
    - Nếu không, tại sao không?
- Bạn có nghĩ rằng một số yếu tố sẽ ảnh hưởng đến khả năng bạn chuẩn bị cho thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
  - *Nếu người được phỏng vấn hỏi những loại yếu tố nào, bạn có thể đưa ra ví dụ như lợi tức, chủng tộc, tình trạng nhập cư và rào cản ngôn ngữ*

**Nối kết với bệnh dịch COVID-19:**

- *Giới thiệu ngắn gọn về dịch bệnh COVID-19*
  - Khi chúng tôi nghĩ đến việc chuẩn bị, chúng tôi muốn biết kinh nghiệm của bạn với dịch bệnh COVID-19 và cách bạn chuẩn bị để đối phó với các ảnh hưởng.
- Dịch bệnh COVID-19 có ảnh hưởng đến bạn không?
  - Nếu có, bằng cách nào?
    - *Các câu có thể trả lời: tiếp cận thực phẩm, chăm sóc trẻ, lợi tức, nhà ở, việc làm*
    - Bạn có nghĩ rằng lợi tức, chủng tộc, tình trạng nhập cư và/hoặc bằng ngôn ngữ ảnh hưởng đến việc bạn trải qua đại dịch như thế nào không?
      - Nếu có, bằng cách nào?
  - Nếu không, tại sao không?
- Những tài nguyên và dịch vụ nào bạn nghĩ là cần thiết trong đại dịch?
  - Bạn có dùng tài nguyên nào trong số này không?
  - Bạn có thể tiếp cận những gì bạn cần không?
    - Nếu có, điều gì làm được vậy?
    - Nếu không, tại sao không?
  - Những tài nguyên và dịch vụ nào khác bạn muốn thấy được cung cấp?
- Bạn có nghĩ rằng các tài nguyên và dịch vụ này cũng sẽ giúp bạn chuẩn bị cho các tác động của thay đổi môi trường khí hậu không?
  - Nếu có, làm thế nào?
  - Nếu không, tại sao không? Điều gì nên làm?

**Nối kết với Cộng đồng:**

- Bạn có thấy rằng những lo âu của bạn đang được chính quyền địa phương lắng nghe/giải quyết?
  - Bạn có thấy được đại diện đầy đủ trong chính quyền địa phương?
- Bạn có muốn tham gia thêm nữa vào chủ đề này ở Dorchester không?
  - Nếu có, bạn muốn tham gia như thế nào?
    - *Ví dụ: diễn hành, kiến nghị, gọi cho dân cử địa phương, trao đổi tin tức với mọi người trong cộng đồng.*
    - Bạn có biết được một cơ hội nào để tham gia?
    - Bạn có biết một nhóm hay tổ chức địa phương nào làm việc về thay đổi môi trường khí hậu?
    - Chúng tôi có thể liên lạc với bạn qua (email/số điện thoại) không?
  - Nếu không, tại sao không?
    - Có bất kỳ bất tiện nào đang ngăn cản bạn dẫn thân thêm không?
      - *Ví dụ: thiếu giữ trẻ, trở ngại ngôn ngữ, giờ làm việc không thuận tiện*
- Làm thế nào bạn biết đến cuộc phỏng vấn?

## Methods: Youth Focus Groups

Eligible participants who were under 21 years old were sorted into focus groups that met virtually via Zoom. Because this population included students who had been used to virtual classrooms by then, technological competencies were not a concern. The focus groups were facilitated entirely by all five Youth Researchers who had decided on their roles beforehand. I briefly introduced myself and the objectives of the project but otherwise kept my camera and microphone off so that participants and Youth Researchers would not be distracted. Questions posed to the youth focus groups were the same as ones used for older residents.

In contrast to the resident individual interviews, the youth focus groups were more interactive, and participants were encouraged to discuss their responses, potentially building on ideas and experiences shared by one another. Many slides also included blank sticky notes for participants to record their responses before discussing as a group. Examples of these slides can be found in Appendix H.

Even though there were more participants in the focus group compared to the individual resident interviews, we still limited the sessions to approximately one hour, recognizing that young people were likely burnt out from months of virtual classrooms. We also wanted to avoid losing their attention if the focus group ran too long.

## Findings

There were 39 residents in total who participated in the interviews and focus groups. Of those, four participants were youths between 14-16 years old and who were part of the focus group. Of the 35 adult resident interviews, 28 were conducted in Vietnamese and 7 in English. In part because we relied heavily on VietAID's meal distribution network, we found that 95% of our participants identified as Vietnamese while only 5% identified as either White or Black. There was a semi-even distribution of ages among our participants: 28.2% were those between 14-20 years old, 33.3% were those between 21-50

years old, and 38.5% were 50-75 years old. However, we saw a large imbalance in participants' gender, with 64% identifying as female and 36% identifying as male. In the analysis section/chapter, I will discuss potential theories about this uneven distribution.

The Youth Researchers analyzed transcripts of all resident interviews and were able to explore the following six themes:

1. Participants all had very different definitions of climate change. As the interviews were taken place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, health and immunity were top of mind for many participants. Thus, when asked to talk about climate change and climate related events, many instinctively thought about the change in weather and seasons throughout the year. Like Dot Survey, interview participants were equally concerned about colds, allergies, and other health impacts that are typically associated with colder seasons. Many participants talked about individualized concerns rather community-level impacts.
2. There are contrasting senses of self-reliance and independence during emergencies. Again, because the COVID-19 pandemic was top of mind for most participants, many echoed recommendations and public health announcements: wash your hands regularly, wear a mask, avoid large crowds, etc. Many felt that these recommendations were applicable to their concerns about health risks associated with climate change, so they felt that they only needed to follow similar procedures to fend off cold and allergies season. Moreover, many believed that because they were resourceful enough to purchase essential supplies from online retailers such as Amazon during periods of high demand and shortage, they will only need to stock up on essentials ahead of a potentially similar future events. However, there were participants who sounded rather resigned about inability to cope with unforeseen disasters. While older residents felt they could rely on Eastern medicine, Amazon, and their own adaptability, young people

expressed uncertainty and helplessness because they will have to trust that the adults in their life will be able to take the necessary steps to stay safe.

3. Different types of support and aid must be considered during periods of emergencies and disasters. Older participants expressed helplessness about being able to access resources and information. As such, many will have to rely on the government to guarantee them safety and can only hope that safety announcements will be available in Vietnamese. However, while some people spoke at length about being grateful of the government issued stimulus check and food distribution, others stressed the importance of community resilience and having a centralized community center such as VietAID, where they can work part-time for additional income, receive free meals, and help one another.
4. Certain social identities are likely to impact how different groups experience impacts relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. When asked whether they believed race, immigration, income, or language barriers might impact how they experience climate change, many admitted that they are not knowledgeable enough on the topic to answer this question. Despite an interest in the topic and a desire to learn more about it, many are unable to participate in such discussions because the information presented is never in Vietnamese. They also pointed out that during COVID-19, when the government was regularly releasing action plans and public health advisories, the Vietnamese community could not really follow along because they could not understand the information and could consult with one another about next steps or best practices. However, almost all participants identify as low-income and worry about disruptions in employment.
5. Depending on their personal experiences and awareness, different participants had varying interpretations and levels of understanding of the interview questions. Our interviews confirmed that there while the English terms that we used were translatable into Vietnamese,

the nuanced and colloquial interpretations of those terms have not yet successfully made the cross-over. Terms such as “resources,” “climate change,” and “impacts” will require further review and testing. Regarding the question about whether they believe language barriers will impact their ability to prepare for climate change, one participant said that language and climate change are completely separate issues.

6. If time and language access allowed, many participants would be interested in future engagements around the topic of climate change. However, the interests in participation might depend on the kinds of commitments that are required of residents. Many participants were unsure about joining community meetings and contacting their local leader, but they were much more comfortable with translating information, sharing news, and having conversations with their friends and neighbors. On the other hand, there were participants who said they wanted to join community meetings, but they were uncomfortable doing so because they felt they did not know enough climate change to be able add to the conversations. Participants also listed typical barriers to attending such meetings, such as childcare, language access, and difficulties with commute.

Our interviews also highlighted the disconnect between traditional climate change concerns with residents’ actual priorities, such as housing, food, income, and health. While Thang and I used these findings to plan and design the next steps in our resident engagement process, Youth Researchers developed two spin-off projects based on their conversations with participants:

1. Develop a social media campaign to disseminate language accessible and easy to understand bite-sized climate information to Dorchester residents
2. Develop a community garden for Dorchester residents to gain some food autonomy. Many participants were at risk of food insecurity, so a garden will help the community have access to free/affordable healthy foods and will build social resilience among gardeners

## Discussion

There were many similar challenges and findings between the resident interviews and the Dot Surveys. Even using an action-research framework to revisit and revise our methods as we go, incorporating lessons and feedback from each stage of the process, we still found that our greatest barrier was language. The entire research team, including myself, was comprised of Vietnamese American Dorchester residents. Everyone was either first generation or generation 1.5 immigrants. However, even for those of us who identified as generation 1.5, because we grew up using English as our primary language in the US, we found we were not able to have advanced conversations in our native language. One Youth Researcher was a recent immigrant from Vietnam and had the strongest Vietnamese within the research team. Yet, during the interviews, they also struggled to explain the questions to Vietnamese participants because these were concepts they did not learn in Vietnamese. For example, in explaining climate change, this Youth Researcher was able to define the term in Vietnamese as “the change in climate,” but they were not able to elaborate further on the topic. For English speakers, this literal definition is secondary, and the general population tends to associate climate change with a human-driven shift in global climate patterns, but in Vietnamese, the term for “climate” has many definitions, including weather, temperature, and to a limited extent, atmosphere. Therefore, to define “climate change” as “the change in climate/weather/temperature/atmosphere” leaves much room for interpretation.

Similarly, we learned that we can also lose important terms and phrases to translation even if the translator was more fluent in Vietnamese than English. For example, when our VietAID translator translated the terms “resources” and “services” (in the context of the question “Do you think these resources and services will also help you to prepare for the impacts of climate change?”) literally as “capital” and “(transactional goods and) services.” This explains why, during interviews, participants were often confused about context and often asked for clarification. However, because we did not

realize until we all shared our interview sessions at the end that we were experiencing the similar challenges.

Moreover, the first few interviews that Youth Researchers conducted were unsupervised because Thang and I felt that we had prepared them well enough. We also wanted to respect their ability to work independently. However, they soon reported that they needed much more support during the interviews because they were often unable to rephrase questions so that residents would understand or so that residents would provide more than one-word responses. This was difficult for our Youth Researchers for two reasons: they were already inexperienced in terms of conducting open-ended interviews and now they must try to maintain the flow of the interviews in a language they do not use regularly.

Based on our results, we also began exploring some cultural barriers that might exist when we talk about priorities and emergency preparedness. As I had touched on in Chapter 3, these interviews further highlighted the need for cultural sensitivities when we have conversations about climate change and wanting to reframe what it means to be resilient. Most of Dorchester's Vietnamese residents are refugees after the Vietnam War. There may be other reasons, but it is my perception that our participants' responses heavily lean on either self-reliance and the fatalistic attitude because of their migration journey and resettling in the US. While Vietnamese participants said they were grateful and hopeful about government assistance during the pandemic, not many expressed that there was an implicit expectation that their government provide these resources and services and part of its duty to look after its citizens. This seems to reflect many immigrants' experience with the American government after their arrival in the country. Many feel that simply being able to live in the US and afforded citizenship was more than a generous starter-kit to Americanness. To thrive will depend on how the individual uses the opportunity.

This likely translated over to their responses to the question “Do you think certain factors will impact your ability to prepare for climate change?” When asked for clarification, we provided examples such as income, race, immigration status, and language barriers, with the expectation that participants would reflect on their own circumstances and think about how their social identities might have a role in their climate preparedness. Some participants said that they think that a lack of income would prevent them from being able to stockpile necessities such as fresh water and nonperishable goods. Others worried that their limited English abilities would prevent them from being able to access important announcements such as evacuation instructions. However, among Vietnamese participants, there were no concerns about the influence of race or immigration status on climate impacts and preparedness because “climate change impacts everyone.”

Overall, there were recurring concerns about health, access to necessities, and access to information. While some said they were worried about climate change, those worries were tied closely to health impacts, which participants said they were prepared for. Participants who were worried about environmental impacts, such as floods and storms, viewed them as out of their control. These findings were very helpful and informative, but in many ways raised more questions than answers, namely, how can we relate climate change back to residents’ priorities and concerns so that we can better understand the disparate levels of concerns across these different issues. A second layer that we wanted to explore was how we can better communicate the topic of climate change and go beyond the Vietnamese understanding of the concept as weather and seasons.

## Chapter 6 – Phase 3

Phase 3 consisted of climate workshops that were held in spring 2021. The intention of these workshops was to test different framings of climate change that would resonate with residents, with the hope that we might uncover the reasoning for the responses from our summer interviews. A major finding from the climate workshop was that if we lead climate change conversations with residents' priorities and use examples that are relatable to peoples' experiences, it matters less *how we define* climate change and more *how residents understand the impacts* of climate change. Another significant finding was that Vietnamese immigrants can be eager to talk about other social issues, such as racism and inequality, but they are often hesitant because they do not want to enter such conversations inadequately informed.

### Resident Climate 101 Workshops

#### Methods

Following our Summer 2020 resident engagements, Thang and I spent Fall 2020 incorporating interview results and lessons into climate workshops that were meant to address residents' disconnection between future climate impacts and their own assumptions about climate preparedness. With the application of the action research framework for the project, it was not enough to collect information from residents based on questions that were presented to them. We were interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how participants interpreted the questions, why they answered the way they did, and how we can make more meaningful connections to their needs and priorities. The workshops were also a helpful way to test out different framings of climate issues and translations of relevant terms or phrases that we struggled with in the first two phases.

Our primary objectives for the workshops were as follow:

1. Inform and review the scientific basis of climate change with participants
2. Identify the personal impact(s) that resonate most with participants

3. Explore the effectiveness of the language and messaging in conveying information to participants
4. Determine whether participants can distill and relate information back to their own circumstances
5. Identify potential leaders who can lead/participate in the climate steering committee

Because Youth Researchers had returned to school full time and were at capacity with schoolwork in addition to their after-school curriculum with VietAID, the workshops were designed, developed, and facilitated by Thang and myself, with guidance and feedback from Penn Loh and Lisette Le. However, rather than recruiting from the general Dorchester population, we wanted to assess whether responses from the summer interviews might change if they received a primer on the fundamentals of climate science. Therefore, participants for the climate workshops were selected based on whether they participated in the Summer 2020 interviews. Recruiting was done by a summer Youth Researcher who volunteered to take on this role and who was appropriately compensated for their time. Workshops were also expected to last two hours, so the participant compensation was adjusted to \$50 to reflect the increased time commitment.

Similar to the resident interviews, former participants who were interested in the workshops were referred to an online form which they can fill out with their contact information. We assisted those who were unable to fill out the form by either walking them through it or filling it out on their behalf. Because we collected information on their preferred method of contact, we were able to text, call, and email participants with follow-up instructions to join the workshops via Zoom. We offered to assist by walking participants through downloading the app onto their phone and joining the meeting. For those who had difficulties with their phones, we also provided a Zoom number that they would be able to call into so that they would not have to worry about downloading an app.

Having the workshops virtually online allowed us to use slides to help participants visualize different concepts they might not be familiar with. The slides also included exercises meant to encourage participants to engage in discussions with each other rather than simply respond to workshop facilitators. All three workshops began with brief explanations of greenhouse gases and their major contributors. Following feedback from the first workshop, the two latter workshops accompanied the science information with real life examples of extreme weather events in both Vietnam and the United States as a way of putting the issue of climate change into a global context. Based on the responses from the summer interviews, we learned that participants struggled with providing examples when they were asked open questions such as “what resources do you need.” As a result, for the workshop, we provided many examples that might inspire participants or that they might choose from.

Sức Khỏe	Gia Cư	Thu Nhập	Thực Phẩm	Giáo Dục
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thời tiết khó lường: quá nóng hoặc quá lạnh</li> <li>Các mùa dự ứng dài hơn</li> <li>Chất lượng không khí kém hơn</li> <li>Thời tiết khó lường dễ dàng lây lan các bệnh qua đường hô hấp hơn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nhà cửa bấp bênh do thiên tai (Bão lụt có thể phá hủy nhà cửa cư dân như đã xảy ra ở Huế)</li> <li>Phá hủy tài sản (Nhà ở gần bờ biển dễ bị ngập lụt hơn)</li> <li>Giá nhà/tiền thuê có thể gia tăng khi nhiều người buộc phải di dời</li> <li>Nếu nhà quá cũ hoặc không có máy lạnh hoặc hệ thống sưởi, bạn có thể không giữ ấm được vào mùa đông hoặc mát vào mùa hè</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nguồn thu nhập không ổn định (bão có thể phá hủy đường xá và phương tiện chuyên chở công cộng, cản trở chúng ta đi làm)</li> <li>Một số công việc sẽ khó làm hơn (như làm nông trại)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thời vụ trồng trọt không dự đoán được, có thể dẫn đến thiếu hụt lương thực</li> <li>Tăng vụ tiêu diệt sâu bệnh vì mùa mưa kéo dài</li> <li>Vài loại thực phẩm sẽ trở nên đắt đỏ và khó mua hơn (gạo, cà phê, v.v.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trẻ em và thanh thiếu niên có thể không được đến trường do bão lũ</li> <li>Trẻ em và thanh thiếu niên có thể không có internet để đến trường trực tuyến do bão</li> <li>Không thể ra ngoài tập thể dục và tận hưởng thời tiết</li> </ul>

Figure 11 Workshop slide with examples of climate impacts<sup>5</sup>

Additional examples of workshop questions and interactive slides, which were available in both English and Vietnamese, can be found in Appendix I. There were three workshops in total, with each subsequent workshop incorporating feedback and lessons learned from the previous ones.

<sup>5</sup> Translation: Which of the following categories will be impacted by climate change (health, housing, employment, food, education)? Below each category are examples of potential disruptions.

## Findings

Because our targeted population were Vietnamese participants from the summer interviews, all three workshops were conducted in Vietnamese. The first workshop was comprised of four VietAID staff members, all of whom were bilingual. While we had also planned for four participants each for the subsequent two resident workshops, due to issues with technology and unresponsiveness, there were only two residents in each workshop. Despite our efforts to reach out to all participants a few days before and on the day of, some residents who signed up did not respond and did not end up attending their scheduled workshop.

*Table 6 Process review*

	<b>1st Workshop</b>	<b>2nd Workshop</b>	<b>3rd Workshop</b>
<b>Number of Participants</b>	4 VietAID Staff Members	2 Viet Residents	2 Viet Residents
<b>Technology</b>	All participants were able to use ZOOM.	1 potential participant was not able to download ZOOM on their phone. Participant was not able to call in and did not participate.  1 participant had technical difficulty with their headphones during the workshop.	A third potential participant joined Zoom on their phone, but did not know how to unmute or turn on the camera. Assistance from facilitators and other participants were not successful. Participant eventually left the meeting.
<b>Presentation</b>	The google slide was also interactive and we encouraged participants to write down their responses.	To accommodate participants' varying levels of tech abilities, we stopped using interactive slides.	Both participants were passionate talking about race and racial injustices both at the beginning of the pandemic and after future climate related events.
	<b>1st Workshop</b>	<b>2nd Workshop</b>	<b>3rd Workshop</b>
<b>Other Observations</b>		Participants had a disagreement about using English during the workshop, prompted by slide about climate justice/equality.	We implemented a community agreement to encourage participants to discuss their ideas with each other and to use the language they are most comfortable with.

<b>Feedback</b>	<p>One participant felt there was too much reading and extraneous scientific information.</p> <p>Another participant mentioned wanting more visual and imagery to help understanding the concept.</p>	<p>Participants were not asked for feedback due to disagreement.</p>	<p>One participant wanted facilitators with stronger Vietnamese speaking ability.</p>
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Other than during the workshops, the language barrier also prevented some interested residents in participating. Prior to the second resident workshop, Thang and I took turns calling and texting a participant who said they would like help with downloading Zoom. When we provided a call-in number for the Zoom meeting after they were unable to download the app onto their phone, the participant stopped responding. Prior to the third resident workshop, we triple-checked with participants to resolve any technical issues before the start of the workshop. One resident said they did not need help and was able to download Zoom onto their phone, but they were unable to unmute themselves during the workshop so we were not able to hear them.

The first workshop with VietAID staff was meant to be a trial run, during which we tested out the technology, language, pace, and visual presentation of the materials before using them on resident participants. Although participants from the first workshop were VietAID staff, they were still members of the Vietnamese community in Dorchester and their responses were equally important to include in our analysis.

Our findings were broken down as seen below:

*Table 7 Workshop findings*

<b>Workshop Modifications to Meet Objectives</b>			
<b>1. Inform and review the scientific basis of climate change with participants</b>	<p>Did a semi-thorough explanation of differences between weather/climate/season. Also explained greenhouse gases and their impacts on the atmosphere.</p>	<p>Based on feedback from 1st workshop, eliminated scientific materials and truncated them into a brief process chart about pollutants &gt; emissions &gt; warming &gt; disasters</p>	<p>Slightly modified process chart and split it into two slides, with a slide in between about emission sources.</p> <p>Both participants acknowledged that</p>

		Both participants had trouble understanding the concept of fossil fuels as a major contributor to GHG. One participant could not grasp the concept that using gas/oil contributes to GHG emissions because they have a gas stove at home and they don't have an issue with air quality.	factories/industries and transportations are major contributors to GHG. One participant kept insisting that although these factors are major contributors, they as individuals can do small things to help the environment (recycling, taking more public transportation, etc.)
<b>2. Identify the personal impact(s) that resonate most with participants</b>	One participant said they would have liked to see more about impacts on youths.	The participant who did not speak English said language access for them is most important because they read signs	Both participants have children so they were most concerned about impacts on education and health, as well as the future for their children.  One participant said they get very uncomfortable/unhappy when talking about inequality because of its prevalence in this country
<b>3. Explore the effectiveness of the language and messaging in conveying information to participants</b>	One participant suggested that images were more impactful than using text.	Both participants had a difficult time seeing how family size, income level, occupations, etc. could impact their experiences with a climate change event.  One participant said that the ability to travel more will expose people to more pollutants because have to be outside the home a lot (in reference to the wealthier family)	Both participants understood the concept of climate justice and recognized that communities like them should not carry the burden for climate change.
<b>Workshop Modifications to Meet Objectives</b>			
<b>4. Determine whether participants are able to distill and relate information back to their own circumstances</b>		The participant who can speak English was knowledgeable about global impacts and policies, but did not relate information back to their own circumstances. They expressed that there is not much an individual can do--it is all industry and government.	Mostly successful. Participants recognized that their identities as immigrants of color and limited capacity to speak English impact their levels of climate preparedness as well as their current ability to advocate for change in their community.

<p><b>5. Identify potential leaders who can lead/participate in the climate steering committee</b></p>		<p>Facilitators did not get the chance to ask about their interests in future engagement.</p> <p>The participant who is more comfortable with English might be a good person to lead future engagement.</p>	<p>When asked if they would like to help facilitate future workshops, the two participants said yes. One said they are very eager to learn new things and are excited to continue engagements.</p>
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From these workshops, we were encouraged to learn that not only are Dorchester residents interested in having conversations with each other climate change, they are also concerned about justice and equity, even if they may not express those concerns as such. We were also able to identify potential participants who might continue this work as either workshop facilitators or as potential future community organizers.

#### Discussion

Our challenges with translating English materials into Vietnamese was consistent across all the steps in this project. In our second workshop, one participant was bilingual and used both Vietnamese and English in their responses, but the second participant felt this was unjust because they felt excluded since they were not able to speak English. Following this participant’s feedback, we introduced a set of community guidelines at the beginning of the third workshop to enforce language justice and maintain respectful interactions. We also began to avoid using English when communicating with participants, instead encouraging them to trade ideas with each and offering to translate for participants if English was spoken by either one. At the end of the third workshop, when we asked our participants how future workshops could be improved, one said that they would prefer facilitators who were able to speak better Vietnamese.

One interesting feedback that we received during the VietAID workshop came from a participant who had experience hosting/facilitating community meetings and workshops for Vietnamese residents. This participant suggested that we eliminate interactive components of the workshop and

remove sections that ask for participants to reflect and discuss. The reasoning was that older Vietnamese residents are not accustomed to those activities, are shy, and prefer to digest information rather than discuss. My personal experiences with older Vietnamese residents, particularly older males, resonated with that suggestion: elderly Vietnamese men overwhelmingly prefer to observe in silence. Here, Thang and I briefly disagreed because while he felt we should push forward with discussion-based, I felt that part of the action-research process was to listen to feedback and adjust our methods accordingly. However, if we are to truly aspire to achieve equity, climate justice, and reframe resilience to include underrepresented voices, we have to at least provide residents the opportunity to challenge those generalizations. One way that we decided to approach this was by removing questions that required participants to synthesize concepts and relate them back to personal circumstances, a traditional educational approach. Instead, we presented a lot of real-world, such as increased flooding events in Vietnam or heat waves in Dorchester, and asked residents how they felt these events would impact them and their community.



Figure 12 Figure 12 Example interactive slide: compare and discuss the families in the images below

We also incorporated an exercise which asked participants to compare two images. This activity was meant to help participants make a visual association between climate change preparedness and access to resources. It also helped us as facilitators to know how to enter into that conversation: e.g. “why do you think Family A is more prepared for climate impacts?” or “what do you think makes Family B more vulnerable to climate impacts?” Here, we had different reactions to the images between two workshop groups. The first resident workshop pair was unable to understand the relationship between income level, occupation, and climate change impacts. Further, one resident from this group said that having the disposable income to travel by airplane would expose one to more atmospheric pollution than being stuck indoors. There is some logic to this line of thought, but it also suggests there is for some, there is limited understanding about the nature of pollution and a somewhat skewed perception of wealth.

Most of our resident participants were parents and they shared that some of their priorities revolve around their children’s health, education, and quality of life. VietAID staff, though not parents themselves, also pointed out their constituents’ concerns about young people’s quality of life in the future. On racism and justice, one participant said that they felt very uncomfortable and unhappy

discussing the topic because inequality is so prevalent in this country. However, they recognize that the distribution of climate burdens should not disproportionately fall on their community (low-income, immigrant, non-White). Most participants also confess that despite their awareness and concerns, they feel that their identities as immigrants of color and their limited capacity to speak English negatively impact their levels of climate preparedness, as well as their current ability to advocate for change in their community.

By the end of the workshop series, despite the small sample, Thang and I considered the process a great success because we were able to not only talk with residents about climate change, but we also discussed their priorities and thoughts on racial justice. We were also encouraged to hear from participants that they were very interested in future engagement opportunities with the project because they were eager to learn more about the topic. Even though we had to readjust VietAID's initial goals to build out a steering committee, these ongoing engagement processes can help us to identify potential facilitators if the organization were to host similar workshops in the future.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

### Takeaways

One of the major findings of this project is that there is still much to be done to meaningfully engage immigrant communities so that cultural and language sensitivities are factored into how climate conversations take place, and how responses are interpreted and incorporated into climate change policies. As we were able to learn through three different phases of engagement over the course of nearly ten months, older Vietnamese-American residents in Dorchester have not been traditionally active or vocal in the environmental movement or in climate advocacy, but it is not so much due to the lack of interest and more so due to language and cultural isolation.

Almost all the Vietnamese adults who participated in this research project expressed some level of helplessness when it comes to accessing the news and understanding public announcements during emergencies. These feelings were supported by the experiences of some key informants that we interviewed: one said that during the pandemic their work almost entirely shifted into helping local Vietnamese business owners complete financial assistance applications available only in English, while others mentioned that the digital divide made it even more difficult for residents to attend virtual community meetings and access critical information. This tells us that during time of crises, even with state- and city-level coordination, essential services were not reaching everyone who needs it, particularly low income and non-English speaking populations. If we are to apply a climate resiliency framework that prioritizes justice and equity, then we must correct the current exclusion of non-English speaking immigrant populations. By having in-depth conversations with the Vietnamese community, we were able to identify and learn more about residents' priorities, their own perceptions of climate readiness, and other social issues that they care about. Only by taking these steps can we begin to create climate solutions that actually address the immediate needs of underrepresented communities.

We are also seeing evidence that it is possible to have climate conversations across cultural and language barriers. By taking a slow, thought-out, and intentional process that engaged both the elderly and young people in the Dorchester, VietAID has initiated community-level involvement in Vietnamese residents around the topic of climate resilience and preparedness. Moreover, by incorporating social issues that were highlighted during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as racial justice and anti-Asian racism, we were able to learn about some of the reasoning behind residents' reluctance to attend or participate in community meetings. Many said they felt that they were too uninformed to meaningfully contribute ideas and felt self-conscious about not being able to communicate with non-Vietnamese speakers.

Even though my participation has ended, VietAID's climate justice work continues in terms of vision planning, revisiting organizational goals, and how it decides to move forward given the findings from this action research project. The action research approach for this project has taught us a lot about the importance of participatory action research as a form of community organizing, how to engage with the Vietnamese immigrants in Dorchester, and how to help immigrant youth become more active members in their community. This section provides some insight and recommendations for VietAID's next steps and similarly situated researchers also looking to do this work in their own community.

## Recommendations

First, the challenges and unique advantages of first-generation or 1.5 generation Gen Z remains under-researched and under-documented. Most of the youth in Dorchester are either first generation or 1.5 generation immigrants and they share many of the same experiences as our Youth Researchers: they are intimately aware of the struggles of the generation that came before them, they can understand their native language, and they have similar daily concerns as the adults in their family. However, some of their challenges seem to be compounded by their multicultural identity: they can speak their native language but only conversationally and they do not have the vocabulary to have nuanced conversations;

they share the same daily concerns with the adults in their family, such as health, income, housing, but they also have additional worries about other issues such as racism, environmental justice, and climate change, which they cannot discuss with their family either due to their limited language abilities or different stances on such issues within the household; and they want to make a difference in their community based on the issues that they are passionate about but they do not have the tools to be able to effectively engage with their own culture.

The climate project has proven that young people have the interests and the ability to be able to organize in their own community, and their multicultural backgrounds give them the advantage of being able to engage with a wider audience. However, the effectiveness of their community organizing will largely depend on the support and guidance of community leaders who are willing to allow young people to take the initiative and craft their own vision for what they want the future to look like for them, and those who come after them. Whatever VietAID's next steps look like, they should include at least some capacity for young people to participate in the planning process so that they can contribute to the crafting of such plans, continue to develop their leadership skills, and eventually become leaders adept at bridging the cultural divide in their own community. Through the literature review and the experience of the Youth Researchers in this project, we are seeing supporting evidence that there is a lot of traction in Gen Z and their engagement in the climate movement. What the climate movement needs now is to not just include the perspective of young people of color, but elevate their unique positions as the bridge between cultures and developing leaders of the next generation. For example, of the two spin-off projects that emerged from the summer interviews, Youth Researchers were much more interested in the development of the community garden compared to workshop facilitation. It is safe to assume that young people want to make a direct impact in their community by implementing a project that they can design, execute, take ownership of, and see through to the end.

Next, the findings of this project also show that when climate change issues are framed as topics that community is concerned about today—health, housing, income, or education—residents are more likely to engage in conversations about how climate change might impact those areas in the future. By initiating conversations with our participants based on their priorities and needs, we were able to establish trust and showed residents that we were coming from a place of understanding, not as experts or outside researchers, but as empathetic fellow community members who are equally concerned about these very same issues. Moreover, it was through establishing trust and mutual understanding that we were able to have deeper conversations about sensitive topics such as racism and socioeconomic disparities. I do not believe we would have been able to have such meaningful discussions about residents' stance on these topics because of the self-consciousness about coming off as ignorant or uninformed due to lack of access to American mass media. Instead, by having a personal connection with and understanding of the community that we were working with, Thang and I were able to navigate those conversations with sensitivity and used our own personal experiences as Vietnamese-American immigrants to interpret our data.

Here, I feel that having a facilitator and researcher who is a part of the community, either as a long-time resident or one who shares a similar background, is significant because that person can understand some of the underlying reservations or biases that might have traditionally prevented certain populations from vocalizing their needs and concerns. In the case of our project, having Youth Leaders be core contributors, both as researchers and participating community members, we were able to not only include the perspective of young people, but also empower them to pursue their own interests and vision relevant to this work. To revisit our working-definition of resiliency, any climate change solutions or plans must include priorities and concerns that come directly from the people most impacted by climate change. Including the perspectives of young people and the elderly, particularly in

immigrant communities among populations for which English is not a primary language, can ensure that the benefits of climate actions moving forward are inclusive, just, and equitable.

Finally, all our lessons, learnings, and recommendations would not have been possible without the application of an action research approach. This approach was particularly crucial to our project because it gave us the flexibility to revisit our steps and modify our goals based on what we learned at each step. For example, if we had continued with the project based on our initial goal of implementing a community-wide survey, despite learning about the significant language and cultural barrier, we would not have been able to collect any meaningful data because non-English speaking residents would not have been able to complete the survey. Moreover, it was through cycles of reflection throughout the project that we were able to consult with one another about which key terms and phrases needed to be further broken down and how we could standardize our translation. In terms of skill development, this was also very helpful to our Youth Researchers because they were able to learn about all the unique challenges of engaging with non-English speaking populations and how to overcome those challenges. This shows that if VietAID were to replicate the project or if a similar research project were to be conducted elsewhere, it will not be enough to enlist an outside interpreter who can be the bridge between English-speaking researchers and non-English speaking participants. All those who are involved must be able to recognize when things are lost in translation so that adjustments can be made to engagement materials, such as surveys, questionnaires, or plans, if necessary.

## Reflection

This project was a series of firsts for me: the first time working with youth, the first time designing and implementing a community research project, and the first time working directly with the Vietnamese immigrant community in Dorchester. This being the case, I have gained a lot of new experiences and now have a deeper appreciation for my bi-cultural and bi-lingual experiences, without which I would not have been able to have a fundamental understanding of project participants’

experience, background, reservations, and cultural norms. This understanding has in turned helped me to make sense of certain preconceived notions that are actually deeply rooted in racism, xenophobia, and colonialism. For example, when underrepresented groups are written off from important conversations or in policymaking decisions, it is important to explore the reasons for the lack of representation, since different groups have different reasons for not being vocal, be it immigration status, lack of accessible information, or lack of meaningful engagement opportunities from their local government. Some important questions to consider are: what are the repercussions for speaking out? What do folks have to gain by sharing their experiences and vulnerabilities? How will the knowledge generated by community members be used?

The third question was something that we kept in the back of our mind throughout the resident engagement process. Doing this has also helped me to develop a commitment to non-extractive means of community research. How can we ensure that we do not just collect information from residents, but that we help them come to a deeper level of understanding about critical issues so that they can generate their own knowledge? Moreover, how can we approach this process so that the knowledge is shared with the community in a way that benefits everyone and not just the researchers? As someone who was simultaneously a Tufts researcher and a Dorchester resident, I am finding that it is becoming increasingly important for underserved and underrepresented populations to be able to organize around their priorities and other issues that they care about so that they can receive the services and resources that they need. That is not to say that these populations are entirely responsible for their own unmet needs, but that we need to recognize that cultural and language isolation are more than just inconveniences; they are significant barriers to the participation of vulnerable groups in important policymaking processes and decisions.

As I reflect on my roles during the VietAID climate project—a graduate student who is conducting an action research project, an embedded researcher working closely with VietAID, and a

community researcher engaging directly with Dorchester residents—it would be important for me to consider how they complement each other to help me gain a more rounded perspective of the Vietnamese experience with climate change. Using autoethnography to reflect has helped me to understand that these identities do not conflict and do not require me to separate them out in order to use different lens to analyze our process and results. Rather, these three different roles create three different layers of understanding how to approach the subject of climate change, how to engage meaningfully with Vietnamese residents, and how to incorporate different interpretations of the responses we collected.

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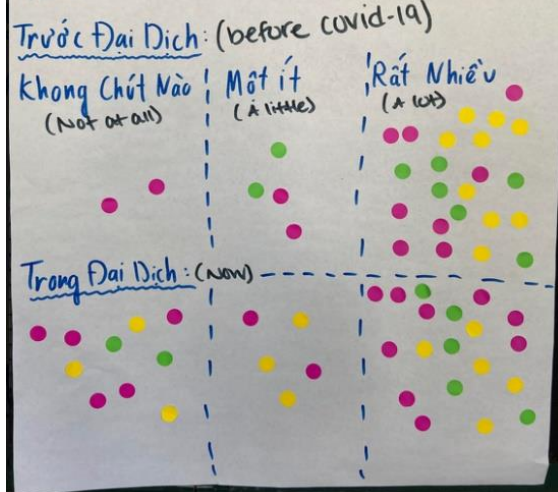
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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Dot Survey Responses – First Day, Morning Session

Việc bạn có được thực phẩm thay đổi như thế nào từ khi có đại dịch?  
How has your access to food changed since the pandemic?

Bạn có cảm thấy được VietAID hỗ trợ không?  
How supported by VietAID do you feel?



Bạn có cảm thấy được chính phủ hỗ trợ không?  
How supported by the government do you feel?

Trước Đại Dịch: (before covid-19)

Bạn nghĩ khu phố này được chuẩn bị tốt đến mức nào để đối phó với các thảm họa như bão tố, đại dịch, sóng cực nóng hay hạn hán?  
How well did you think this neighborhood was prepared to handle disasters such as hurricanes, public health epidemics, extreme heat waves, or droughts?

Trước Đại Dịch: (before covid-19)



Bạn có nghĩ việc bão tố, sóng nhiệt, hạn hán ảnh hưởng ít nhiều đến...  
How much did you think change events such as public health epidemics, heat waves, or droughts affect you?

Trước Đại Dịch: (before covid-19)

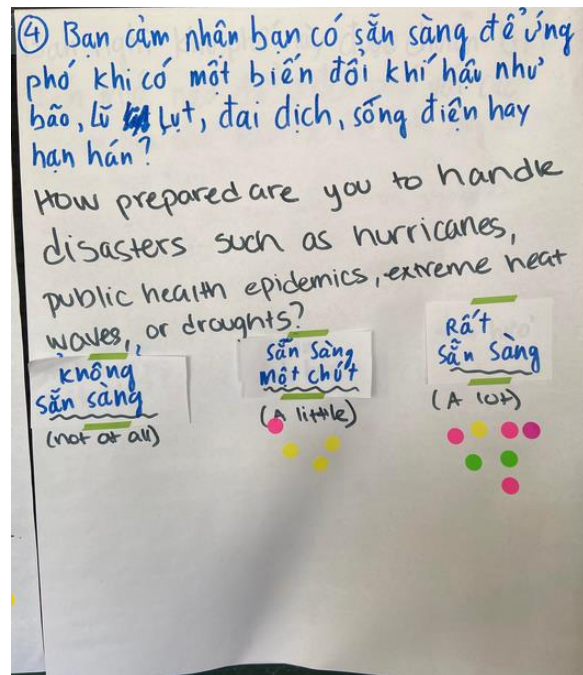
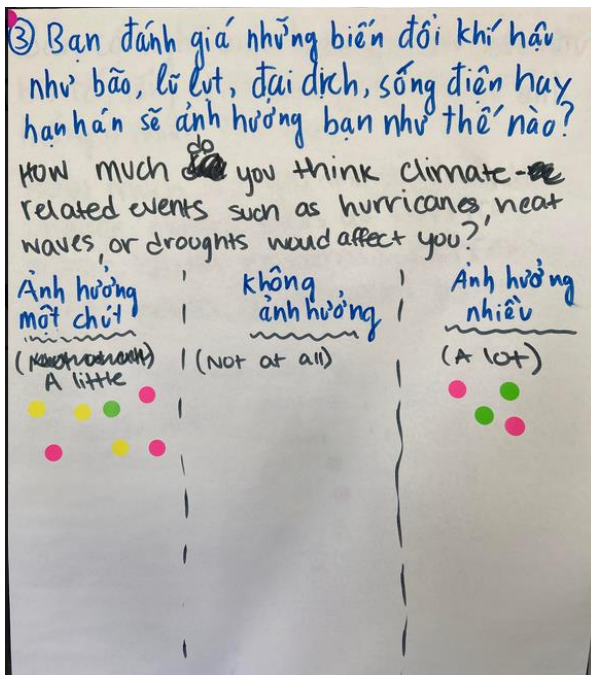
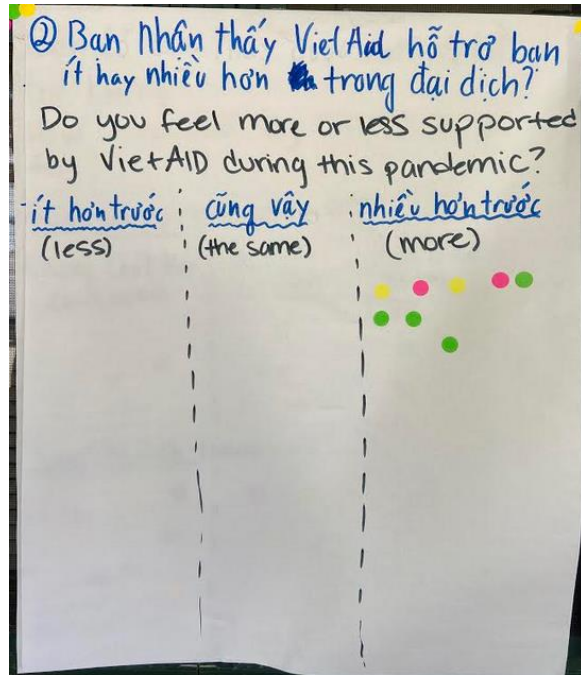
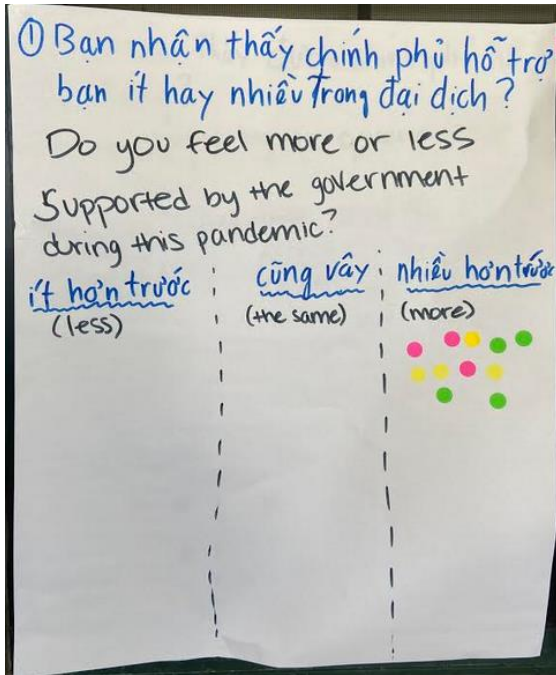
Không Chút Nào (Not at all)

Trong Đại Dịch: (now)

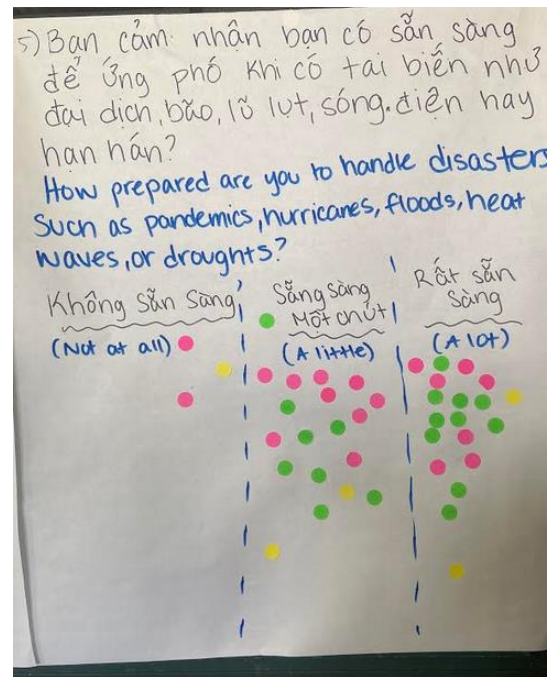
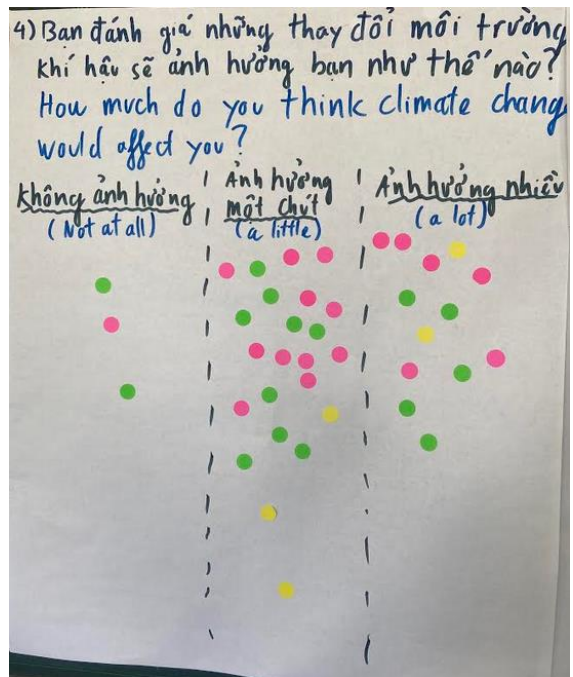
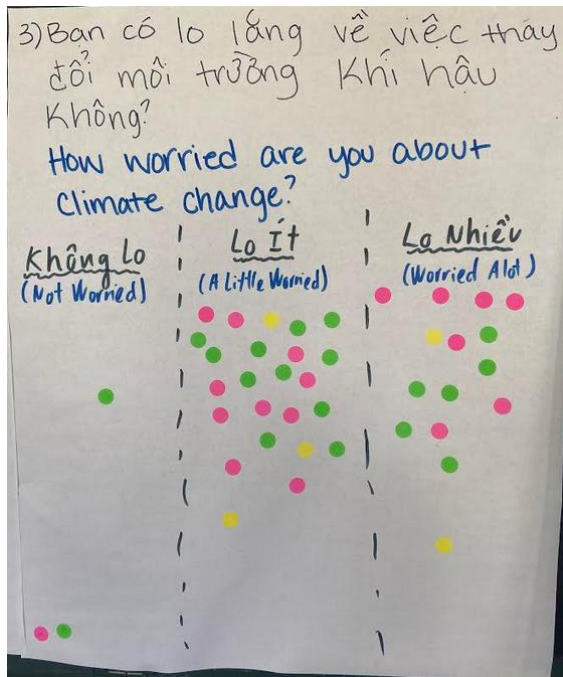
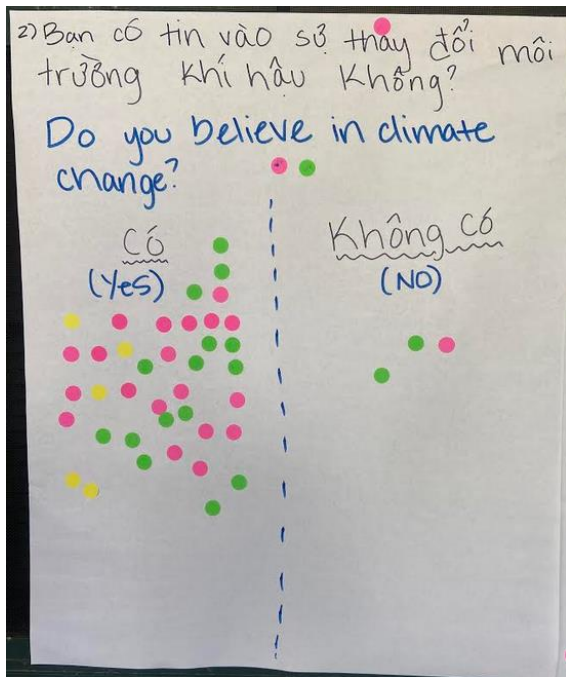




Appendix B: Dot Survey Responses – First Day, Afternoon Session



Appendix C: Dot Survey Responses – Second Day



## Appendix D: Key Informant Interview Guides

### Agenda:

- I. Introductions
  - A. Everyone: Introduce your name, pronouns, your role at VietAID this summer
    1. Hoai/Thang: give a brief description of the climate change work (survey, end goals, etc.)
    2. Youth: give a brief description of what you are learning and working on this summer
- II. Consent Information
  - A. Review form and ask to record the interview
  - B. Hoai/Thang will start recording the interview
- III. Questions: Refer below!
- IV. Thank them for their time!

### Youth 1: Monday, July 27th @ 1:30pm

- Can you briefly describe your role at X Organization and your experience working with residents to advocate for climate justice?
  - What role does X Organization play in the community?
- We are thinking about creating a steering committee with residents to lead climate work in Fields Corner. What has been your experience leading X Organization?
  - What are some best practices you would recommend?
  - What has been most challenging?
- How do you center underrepresented voices and ensure inclusivity in your work?
  - What do you think are the barriers preventing certain groups from engaging in these conversations?
  - How do you think we can engage with residents who might not be interested in these conversations?
- What role do you think young people can play in climate work?
  - How do you think we can engage young people in climate resilience and preparedness work?

### Youth 2: Tuesday, July 28th @ 1:30pm

- Can you briefly describe your role as a XX at X Organization and your experience advocating for climate justice?
- As an advocate for ecological & social justice and youth engagement, how do you make those issues more intersectional?
- Is your organization engaging with other community organizations on climate resilience and preparedness? If so, how?
- How do you center underrepresented voices and ensure inclusivity in your work?
  - What do you think are the barriers preventing certain groups from engaging in these conversations?
  - We are having challenges with bridging language barriers. How are you handling the relationship between climate change and immigration?
- Who do you think are often left out of conversations around climate change?
  - How do you think we can engage with residents who might not be interested in these conversations?

- What role do you think young people can play in climate work?
  - How do you think we can engage young people in climate resilience and preparedness work?
- We hope to broaden our reach beyond the Vietnamese community in Dorchester. We would like to gauge your congregation's interests in participating in volunteering opportunities and/or a paid focus group session in the future regarding this work?

**Youth 3: Wednesday, July 29th @ 10:30am**

- Can you briefly describe your role at X Organization and your experience working with young people to advocate for climate justice?
- In your experience, what is the most effective way to recruit and engage young people in climate justice work?
  - How has X Organization centered youth voices?
- What resources have been crucial for X Organization in pursuing climate work in Boston?
  - What has been challenging in procuring those resources?
  - Do you feel like these are enough resources to help you meet your end goal?
- How do you think we can make climate justice work more intersectional?
- Whose voices do you see are often left out or forgotten about in climate work?
  - In your work, who do you feel has been underrepresented?
  - How do you think we can make climate work more inclusive?
- What role do you think young people can play in climate work?
  - How do you think we can engage young people in climate resilience and preparedness work?
  - What opportunities are there for young people to get involved in climate work?
  - Ask about doing a focus group with their Dorchester youth

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

To better understand the climate change movement in Boston, we decided to interview stakeholders who are working on climate change and leaders in the Dorchester community. The purpose of these interviews is to help us to better visualize how to engage and work with Dorchester residents who have been left out of climate change conversations. Although there were a lot of amazing stakeholders and leaders we wanted to interview, we narrowed our list down to five individuals that each of the Youth Leaders interviewed. Through our interviews, we identified three main themes about climate change work in Boston below.



## THREE MAIN THEMES

1

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES ARE NOT WELL REPRESENTED IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES

2

MANY LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR LACK THE RESOURCES TO DEAL WITH THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

3

CLIMATE CHANGE WORK OFTEN HAPPENS IN ISOLATION AND WE NEED TO MAKE CLIMATE CHANGE MORE CONNECTED TO OTHER ISSUES THAT RESIDENTS CARE ABOUT

## THEME ONE

One theme that emerged through the interviews is that communities of color and low-income communities are not well represented in the decision-making process and conversations around climate change. Our stakeholders mentioned many reasons for the lack of representation such as the lack of translated documents and opportunities for people of color to get involved. For instance, one Dorchester neighborhood advocate emphasized that language barriers make it difficult for many Vietnamese residents to engage with the climate change movement. Like this advocate, a City of Boston program coordinator, a community organizer, and a youth organizer noted that information about climate change and its impacts is not accessible to these communities. A religious leader in Dorchester mentioned that many immigrants are afraid to get involved in the movement because there are folks out there who are xenophobic and do not want immigrants to have a voice in this country. Additionally, the City program coordinator and the religious leader discussed how the government often ignores these communities. They elaborated that this sparks distrust in the government and makes it harder for many minorities to get involved in climate change work. Both the youth organizer and religious leader acknowledged that this is extremely unfair since communities of color are disproportionately impacted by climate change. The program coordinator further noted that their city department is slowly building trust with these communities by partnering with community organizations such as VietAID. For them, it is very difficult to shape the chaotic system that is the City government. All of the stakeholders also underscore the power of youth in the movement. In particular, the youth organizer and community organizer believe that young people can work together to dismantle this system of environmental and climate injustices. They hope to create leadership opportunities in the climate change movement for young people.

## THEME TWO

A second theme that emerged from our interview is the fact that many communities of color do not have the resources and necessities to prepare for the impacts of climate change. Through the interviews, we learned that the City does not know how to engage with low-income, immigrant, and communities of color about climate change and so it is difficult for the local government to know what these communities need to be climate resilience. The City program coordinator mentioned that many of the fundings and resources for climate change come from private development. They emphasized how these sources of funding will likely contribute to gentrification and displacement. This will make it harder for immigrants, low-income, and communities of color to be prepared for climate change. Along with the program coordinator, the youth organizer and community organizer noted how COVID-19 made it a lot harder for them to reach out to residents because of quarantine and how residents have to worry about their immediate needs right now, such as access to affordable housing, food, and healthcare. A few stakeholders emphasized that residents will not be prepared for climate change unless they also have access to affordable housing, food, and healthcare. Although the neighborhood advocate and their organization do not work directly on climate change, they are conducting a survey to see the needs of small businesses in Dorchester during the pandemic. They predicted that understanding these needs will also help their organization and the city prepare these businesses for the impacts of climate change. All the stakeholders connected the lack of resources back to the lack of representation in the climate change movement. The religious leader discussed how when a community is not heard and recognized, that community is a lot more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The City program coordinator acknowledged that the City needs to hire more people of color as they discussed how their identity as a white person makes it difficult for them to engage with many communities of color. The youth organizer and community organizer both believe their role is to help prepare residents to join climate change conversations. The youth organizer is currently advocating for a climate change curriculum in Boston Public School with the young people at their organization. The neighborhood advocate said that there is no way to combat climate change unless all residents become more aware about the issue. By spreading awareness, they believe that residents will become more comfortable with advocating their needs and what resources they want.

## THEME THREE

The last theme that surfaced through our interview is that climate change work often happens in isolation. The youth organizer stressed this point when they discussed the difficulties of engaging with youth leaders under a different committee at their organization. For instance, although the youth in the climate change committee were excited about showing up to an Earth Day event, youth in other committees were not interested. The City program coordinator mentioned similar challenges when they attempted to engage other city departments in climate change conversations. All the stakeholders agree that climate change work needs to be connected to issues that residents care about. They underscored how climate change is connected to housing, food access, and healthcare. The program coordinator, youth organizer, and community organizer also mentioned how many climate change policies do not take into account the needs of low-income, immigrant, and communities of color. All the stakeholders noted that one way to bridge the climate work with other movements is to make climate change work more inclusive and accessible to those who will be most impacted. The community organizer noted that residents who show up to their organization's climate meetings are usually professionals from outside the community and they are currently having a difficult time reaching residents. Because of COVID-19, they had to rethink their outreach strategies so that they can bring in those who have been left out of the conversation. The youth organizer mentioned how those who have power and a voice in the climate change conversation should think critically about ways to share that power and center communities who will most be impacted by climate change..

# RESEARCH THEMES



We identified the following six key themes after reflecting on the interviews we conducted:

- 1** DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
- 2** SELF-RELIANCE IN THE FACE OF DISASTER EVENTS
- 3** DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUPPORT DURING DIFFICULT TIMES AND DISASTERS
- 4** THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES ON EXPERIENCES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND CLIMATE CHANGE
- 5** LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING
- 6** INTERESTS IN FUTURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## 1

## THEMES ANALYSIS

When Vietnamese residents were asked about climate change or “thay đổi khí hậu môi trường” (the change of climate environment), the majority of them defined climate change as the weather patterns and the changing of the seasons. One resident shared, *“Sometimes when the climate changes, the result is sudden. I feel sick, it's like it's cold and it's hot and it's hot, and it's cold. I get sick.”* When another resident was asked to elaborate on their answer, they commented, *“Climate change has a lot of natural events. Suddenly, there is snow, and then in summer it is sunny.”* A resident also defined climate change as the changing seasons, but shared that only farmers and fishermen need to pay attention to the weather to make a living. They explained that because they lived in an urban area in Vietnam and did not have to farm, they did not have to think too much about it. However, when the interviewers translated climate change as “biến đổi khí hậu môi trường” (the unusual changes of the climate environment) instead of “thay đổi khí hậu môi trường” (the change of climate environment), more resident were able to associate climate change with long-term impacts that might affect natural disasters.

Another resident defined climate change by listing examples of natural disasters such as lightning storms or floods. They commented, *“These events are up to the gods.”* Other residents expressed a similar cultural belief that these events that they associate with climate change, whether it be a natural disaster or the changing seasons, are not in their control. A resident stated that they used to believe in this cultural norm as well until they immigrated to the United States and saw the pollutants coming from factories. They asserted, *“It is only when I came to the US that I realized the way that we lived will impact this earth. You don't need to be a scientist or have a PhD to understand. Smokes go to the sky and it will need to come down somehow. This is how I understand climate change.”* While some seem to understand the concept of pollution and fossil fuel factories, others do not. However, a majority of the residents recognize that the world is getting somewhat dirtier and more damaged day by day. One of the residents also mentioned that they don't feel safe when they eat food and groceries that may have been polluted due to dirty air and water.

# 1

## THEMES ANALYSIS

In contrast with the many adult residents, a focus group of high school students between 14-16 agreed there is a correlation between pollution and climate change. One youth resident said, "I think climate change could be affected and connected towards COVID because when you're turning land into places where humans can live, you're modernizing it and that brings less space for wild life to live. Therefore I guess more chances for wildlife to come in contact with humans And through that, diseases could be spread. And one of those could have been COVID-19 which is why we're in the scenario where we are in quarantine." They also associated climate change events with negative impacts caused by factory pollution and diseases. Another youth shared that "Deforestation has a really big impact on those things because the trees take away carbon dioxide, and which helps us with the pollution and then we're taking it down to build more cities." In general, young people tend to associate climate change with more scientific and environmental concepts that they have learned from school.

Through these interviews, a majority of Vietnamese residents' definitions of climate change do not align with the western context and understanding of climate change. For this project, the researchers have simplified and defined climate change as a long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional, and global climates over time. On the surface level, Vietnamese residents' responses appeared to reflect this definition of climate change as the average change in weather patterns over time. However, when they were asked to expand on their responses, many contextualized climate change as the natural change in seasons within a region. For this reason, they do not seem to be concerned about its impacts. It is not apparent within the data whether the different contextualization of climate change is a cultural or a language issue. Rather, many residents are more worried about immediate issues such the COVID-19 pandemic, which they attribute to poor air quality associated with the change in seasons.

\*Italicized terms and phrases in this section have been translated from Vietnamese

## THEMES ANALYSIS 2

When asked about their views on climate change, residents shared contrasting fears and concerns about climate change. A few residents shared that they are not prepared for climate change and its impacts. One stated, *"Cause it hasn't happened yet... so I'm not expecting it to happen and... I'm not thinking about the consequences."* Other residents shared a similar belief that climate change events are very unpredictable so they do not know what to look out for and how to prepare for the impacts.

Many residents strongly believe that they are not the ones who should be tasked with preparing for climate change. A resident believes that climate change is a bigger problem that is more suited for experts to handle. Another expressed, *"I can't do anything about climate change...The government is the one who should come up with a plan for us... But I hope the impacts of climate change won't be too bad."* When asked about their preparedness level for a crisis event such as COVID-19, one resident stated that they trusted the government to take care of its citizens. They shared, *"The government is taking good care of me. If the government didn't take care of it, the situation would be a lot bigger."*

On the other hand, there were those who felt that they are resourceful enough to be able to access things they would need during a crisis. For example, when asked whether there were resources or services that they needed during the COVID-19 pandemic, one resident said they did not need anything because they were able to purchase everything from Amazon.com. Another expressed, *"we as humans have the ability to adapt to the environment and any situation. I will just be uncomfortable, but everything will be ok."* A few residents simply commented that they will just have to pray for the best and that they will just have to live with the impacts. The attitude appears to be that "whatever will happen, will happen" and residents are merely bracing themselves for the inevitable.

Additionally, there were a number of residents who felt that they could rely on medicine, such as Tylenol or traditional Vietnamese remedies, to stay healthy in order to get past another major crisis. It is unclear whether the pandemic has reshaped how residents think about personal impacts from major climate events, but many stress the importance of health and cleanliness. One stressed how his physical wellness impacts his ability to cope with climate change and its effects. Older residents in particular believe that because of their advanced age, there is not much else they are able to do to prepare for climate change events other than to encourage younger people around them to eat healthy and practice good hygiene. One shared, *"I'm pretty weak myself and can't do much. I just try to help the kids to not be affected."*

## THEMES ANALYSIS 2

Other residents pointed out how they feel powerless against climate change because the conditions of the planet have already deteriorated too far and are irreversible. They shared that there is no point in taking further action. This resident stated, *"Right now, we are not prepared and we can't undo everything and that's going to be another four years wasted."* Most say that currently they only have just enough in means and resources to address their short-term needs such as food and other necessities.

One resident was mostly concerned about the logistics of reacting to a natural disaster. They predicted that if an extreme event were to occur, they would grab important documents and just listen for instructions from local leaders. They did not elaborate on whether their reaction is because they feel like there is nothing else they would be able to do or because they do not even know what else to do.

When asked about how prepared they are for the impacts of climate change, a few residents interpreted the question as how they can help prevent the impacts of climate change. One resident answered, *"You can't really be prepared for the impacts of climate change because you don't know what is coming. Sure, the most we can do is to keep the environment clean by throwing away trash in the community. For the bigger scale problem, we should leave them to the professionals."* Another commented that if they do not change their way of life now, future generations will have to clean up their mess just like how they are cleaning up the last generation's mess. When asked to elaborate, they shared, *"Like trying to plant back the trees like to make up all the ones that we cut down to help the Greenhouse Effect and the glaciers, recycling, start composting."*

Overall, the interviews revealed a wide range in how differently Dorchester residents think about disaster preparedness. While some feel that the responsibility should fall on the government and professionals, others feel helpless because they are not equipped with either the resources or the knowledge to make any plans. As a result, those who are more concerned about preparedness are primarily concerned with the things that are actually within their control, such as health and hygiene.

*\*Italicized terms and phrases in this section have been translated from Vietnamese*

### 3

## THEMES ANALYSIS

When residents were asked whether they felt they were supported during the pandemic, a vast majority stated that what they were has been more than enough. A resident shared how grateful they were to receive so much support during COVID-19 because they came from an impoverished area in Vietnam. They also said that the opportunity for them to live and reside in the U.S. is already good enough for them. Others felt content with the resources they are currently receiving. One answered, *"...everything I have been given is way more than enough already."* A few noted that they cannot think of any other resources because their basic necessities, such as food and water, are being met through food banks and government support. This sentiment can be summed up as "Somehow it helps me. Because if you get something it's better than nothing."

During this COVID-19 pandemic, many Dorchester residents have been receiving a lot of support and resources from the government, such as food pantries and unemployment benefits. Families and elderly residents in particular expressed great appreciation for all the assistance and services that they have been receiving. From the interviews, it was found that a number of residents receiving food assistance from community centers believed that the service was actually provided by the City of Boston, rather than donations. For many, it seems that there is a lot of faith and support in the local government. One stated *"In the US, they have a lot of programs and resources to help us elders a lot."* Conversely, another resident believed that *"the local government only does things for the sake of doing them, not putting in effort or thoughts."* It is clear that there is a wide range of feelings from residents regarding how they view the government during this pandemic. On one hand the government is viewed as a great asset that provides a lot of resources for them. On the other hand, the government does not really solve their problems and just does things simply for the sake of doing them.

Although many residents have been satisfied with the resources and aid they have received from the government during COVID-19, others highlighted the importance of access to those resources and services. A majority of the Vietnamese residents who participated in the interviews had difficulties accessing these services due to language barriers, which prevented them from getting the important information they needed. For example, one resident shared that they were not able to contact the state unemployment office when they did not receive Unemployment Insurance, and that they were not able to get help because they did not know how to speak English. Another resident strongly expressed, *"Language is a great factor that affects me. It is hard to speak and express your ideas when you can't speak the language."* The language barriers pushed many residents to turn to community organizations that provide translation services and assistance with accessing these government support programs during the pandemic. Some shared that they relied on VietAID to apply to programs such as Unemployment Insurance and the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance since VietAID was able to provide them with a translator.

### 3

## THEMES ANALYSIS

It appeared that English-speaking residents generally did not face the same issues regarding accessibility. One resident felt that being white afforded them the privilege to have ready access to essentials during this pandemic. They also acknowledged their economic status; they have enough in savings to not have to worry about money while they are unemployed. The resident stated, *"I have to say probably because by birth as a white middle-class person, I don't have a problem with race. I don't have a problem with economic status. I'm not working right now but I have savings... Someone like myself would have easier access to that information or resources."*

Another form of support came in the arrangement of temporary employment. One resident shared that they were hired by VietAID as a temporary worker when they did not receive any government assistance. They commented, *"I am working at VietAID right now and that is my main source of income."* Another mentioned, *"The community here helps each other when there is a situation. I am thinking about communities like the one at VietAID."* Many residents also relied on VietAID for groceries and food delivery and help with filling out important paperwork. A few residents expressed frustration that they were unable to receive Unemployment Insurance due to their immigration status. One resident asserted, *"I believe that the government should help people regardless of their immigration status, whether they have papers or not, have a job or not, so that they can overcome this pandemic... they need a source of income so they can pay rent, buy groceries like rice, get clothes in this moment. This will boost their morale so they can overcome this pandemic."* The interviews highlight the important role that community centers like VietAID play in bridging the gap between what residents need and what the government is not providing.

\*Italicized terms and phrases in this section have been translated from Vietnamese

## THEMES ANALYSIS 4

When residents were asked whether they believed race, immigration, income, and language barriers might impact their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, a few expressed worries about racism. According to one resident, their minimal English comprehension limited their ability to seek other employment opportunities since they were only able to work among other Vietnamese speakers. They also worried about racism working in an environment where most employees are not Vietnamese. Another resident said that they feared American reactions to Vietnamese nail salon workers because of the impression that Asians were more contagious.

When residents were asked whether they believed race, immigration, income, and language barriers might impact their experiences with climate change, many mentioned how language barriers prevent them from fully understanding the topic of climate change and its impacts. Most Vietnamese residents said that when climate change is not introduced and discussed in a language that they can understand, they can not process how it would impact their daily lives and therefore cannot start to think how the factors above might impact their experiences. Unlike the pandemic, which is still a large concern and priority, the issue of climate change is often seen as distant and abstract due to the lack of accessible information. One resident shared, *"When there is an announcement on TV I can't understand it because of the language barriers."* Similarly, many residents also pointed out that because they are immigrants and English wasn't their first language, they cannot read or listen to the local news, or talk about climate change with other members in their community. Another resident stressed that if the government were to come up with action plans for disasters such as COVID-19 or a flood, they wouldn't be able to fully carry it out because of the lack of language access. The same resident revealed solutions such as strengthening the Vietnamese community by passing out flyers in Vietnamese and building more programs similar to those at VietAID where people can visit and receive information.

Additionally, a few residents emphasized the importance of money and having a source of income to support their daily needs during difficult times. Many residents felt they did not have the financial means to prepare for the impacts of climate change. One commented, *"I feel like my income would prevent me from having those things that would really shelter me and if there is a world disaster I don't have 6 months worth of income just for me to have to deal with it."* Another resident pointed out that the funding from the government might not always be helpful or enough: *"Income will impact me directly... Even though the government is providing aid... it does not help everyone."* The resident elaborated that the government did not provide financial assistance for them during COVID-19 because of their immigration status. The interviews indicate the different ways that income level can impact residents' experiences during a disaster event.

## THEMES ANALYSIS 4

One resident shared their difficulty with balancing between having a source of income and supporting the environment. They pointed out that even though their job contributes negatively to the environment, they cannot just quit because to them, money is still money. Other residents also shared a similar sentiment that the present is more important than looking into the unexpected future. They shared, *"So sometimes we must do something to get income to meet living costs...we can't do anything against this job because it gives the money for us to live."* However, the same resident noted that they want to find an environmentally friendly job, but are unable to due to the pandemic. These residents all share a similar belief that having a source of income is their first priority and so they cannot prioritize climate change.

When interviewers asked residents whether they are worried about climate change and its impacts, some revealed concerns for their, and others', wellbeing when it comes to health, economics, and housing. One resident shared, *"Yes, I am worried. Because it impacts one's own life and family. Storms and the temperature, if increased can cause floods."* They also noted how climate change can also affect their families in other places where there is less governmental support. Similarly, another resident who is worried about climate also responded that unusually hot temperatures will lead to floods and worry that their home will be at risk.

On the other hand, there were a number of residents who shared that they do not think climate change will affect them. One stated, *"climate change impacts everyone, so I'm not that worried."* This resident strongly believes that the government will take the charge and act to support and protect citizens since climate change will affect everybody. Through the interviews, many shared that they believe climate change equally impacts everyone and it is considered to be a natural phenomenon. However, it is not clear whether they think the impacts will not be powerful enough to affect them, or whether they believe that the government will solve the problem because of its potential to harm everyone. Regardless, many do not think about the issue much.

The interviews show that there is a range of understanding and perspectives that tend to vary according to age. Younger residents between 14-18 years old shared that they do not believe they will be impacted by climate change. Because of their age, these residents still rely on their legal guardians for essentials and tend to look to the adults in their life to guide them through whatever disasters they may face. In contrast, residents between 27-70 years old who believe they will be impacted by climate change were chiefly concerned about their language access, income, housing security, health, etc. There were no residents who participated in the interviews who were between 19-26 years old.

\*Italicized terms and phrases in this section have been translated from Vietnamese

## 5

## THEMES ANALYSIS

When residents were asked whether they believed race, immigration, income, or language barriers might impact their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic and how they might experience the impacts of climate change, many residents either skipped the question or needed interviewers to rephrase the question. For the residents who skipped the questions, a few explained that they cannot think of an answer from the top of their head on the spur of the moment, while others only said they did not understand and would like to move on. A few simply answered “yes” without elaborating on their answers. For residents who asked for clarification, the interviewer rephrased the question and provided examples such as how not knowing English or having enough money to pay for rent might impact their experiences during a pandemic. Some residents misunderstood the question and thought that the interviewer was asking if factors such as race, immigration, income, and language barriers contributed to the pandemic or climate change. Since the question was translated into Vietnamese, it is unclear whether residents did not understand the question because of the translation or they truly did not know if facts such as race and language barriers would impact their experiences. For some residents who understood English, the question appeared to be straightforward and they were able to answer.

For the interview, the term climate change was translated into Vietnamese as “thay đổi khí hậu môi trường” (the change of the climate environment). When Vietnamese residents were asked about their thoughts on climate change, many of their answers revolved around the weather and temperature being too hot or cold. It seemed that they associate the phrase “thay đổi khí hậu môi trường” (the change of the climate environment) with the fluctuating temperature, weather, and the changing of the seasons. In other words, the phrase “thay đổi khí hậu môi trường” does not have the same context in Vietnamese as the term “climate change” has in English. One resident commented, *“When you ask me about climate change, everyone will think of the weather where they live. You have to explain to me that climate change is about the environment or air pollution.”* However, when interviewer replaced “thay đổi” (the change) with “biến đổi” (the unusual), more residents, though not all, were able to think about climate change within the context of global warming and natural disasters.

## 5

## THEMES ANALYSIS

For one resident in particular, when asked what climate change meant to them, they questioned the interviewer what the definition of climate change should be because they were not familiar with the subject. However, when the interviewer encouraged them to just explain in their own words how they understood the phrase, the resident was able to describe climate change as *"the change in the environment over time."*

Another term that many residents had a difficult time understanding was resources which was translated into Vietnamese as "tài nguyên." When asked which resources and services they found necessary during the pandemic, many residents did not understand what resources meant in that context. As a result, many either skipped the question or said that they did not need any resources during this time because they were able to either purchase necessities from Amazon or because they were able to stay healthy on their own. They interpreted resources as physical goods rather than intangible goods and services such as information, access, services, assistance, etc.

In one instance, a Vietnamese resident who preferred to do the interview in English, was not able to understand one of the follow-up questions: "What are some potential climate change events that you can think of?" They requested that the interviewers translate this question into Vietnamese, after which the resident was able to understand what was being asked of them. After that question, interviewers used a combination of English and Vietnamese for the remainder of the interview. Even though this resident was very comfortable with speaking and understanding English, it was found that more nuanced terms and phrases such as climate change, potential, impacts, etc. still pose a challenge when directly translating between the two languages.

The data from the interviews confirm that in addition to the English comprehension barrier, there are many English terms and phrases that have not successfully made the cross-over into the Vietnamese language, either due to culture, access to information, or something else entirely. Interestingly, when asked whether they believe language barriers and income would affect their climate readiness, one resident felt that language and climate are two separate issues and *"have nothing to do with each other."*

\*Italicized terms and phrases in this section have been translated from Vietnamese

## THEMES ANALYSIS 6

When asked whether they would like to further participate or engage, the majority answered positively. One shared, *“Even though we Vietnamese residents might not contribute much, we still have a voice to represent the vietnamese community in climate change conversations.”* However, the resident pointed out potential barriers to engagement such as language barriers and inconvenient meeting times. They hope that climate change organizations will take into account the multiple roles that residents hold. For instance, since they are also a parent and a working individual, they do not have a lot of time during the day to attend meetings. Another resident discussed how they do not have the opportunities and resources to participate in these meetings such as not being able to drive.

Additionally, there were a number of residents who would like to attend events and community meetings, but felt that they were too uninformed about the subject of climate change to participate. Other residents commented on how they are simply not aware of any opportunities in Dorchester to get involved with climate change work. If residents were unsure of the different opportunities to be involved, interviewers followed up with examples of ways to engage: “marches, petitions, calling your local representatives, having informed conversations with people in your community.”

A few residents emphasized similar sentiments about not having control over climate change and so they felt like their engagement was pointless. One expressed, *“if the impacts of climate change are too much, there is nothing I can do. Pollution and climate change should be up to the government to handle.”* Another resident was enthusiastic about further engagements but emphasized that the true responsibility lies with the government and big corporations to find a solution to climate change. The same resident mentioned that there is room for volunteer work but worried about the funding for such work.

## THEMES ANALYSIS 6

The interviews highlighted a recurring concern about money within the context of climate change preparedness. A few Vietnamese residents pointed out that, culturally, they believe the Vietnamese community prioritizes immediate needs such as money and income. One shared, *"Time is money. The Vietnamese community cares a lot about income and not so much about the climate... They also believe that climate change is too distant. My parents would tell me that we should worry more about immediate issues like COVID-19."* They noted that these cultural attitudes make it difficult for them to discuss climate change with the Vietnamese community.

A resident who said that they are not interested explained that it is because they did not know enough about the topic of climate change to be further involved. However, if they were to see a benefit from these engagements, they would think more about it. Similarly, another resident expressed that of course they would participate in community engagement opportunities since it would benefit them to be able to share their thoughts and concerns. A resident who identified as white was very interested in this topic and expressed support for climate advocacy in Dorchester. However, they do not want to enter spaces that should prioritize the voices of people of color.

Most Vietnamese residents seemed unsure about wanting to commit their time to climate change work. Many feel more comfortable with translating and spreading information and news about climate change to their community. A resident demonstrated interest in small community projects like establishing a community garden. Younger residents noted how they are less likely to be active within the larger community, but are more willing to engage with climate change work through their schools.

*\*Italicized terms and phrases in this section have been translated from Vietnamese*

Appendix G: Flyers for Interview Recruitment

Tufts University and VietAID

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

IF YOU ARE A **DORCHESTER RESIDENT**, WE WANT TO INTERVIEW YOU ABOUT THE **ISSUES MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE RESILIENCY POLICIES AND PRACTICES**. THE INTERVIEW WILL TAKE ABOUT **30 TO 60 MINUTES**.



**YOU WILL GET A FREE \$25 GIFT CARD FOR YOUR TIME!**


If you are interested, please sign up with the link below:

[HTTPS://BIT.LY/CLIMATEINTERVIEW](https://bit.ly/ClimateInterview)

This is for a research project coordinated by Tufts University and Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (VietAID).

If you have any questions, please email [thang@vietaid.org](mailto:thang@vietaid.org) or call (617) 701-7766

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Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning



Đại Học Tufts và VietAID

## CHÚNG TÔI MUỐN NGHE Ý KIẾN CỦA BẠN!

NẾU BẠN LÀ **CƯ DÂN DORCHESTER**, CHÚNG TÔI MUỐN PHÒNG VẤN BẠN VỀ **ĐỀ TÀI QUAN TRỌNG NHẤT ĐỐI VỚI BẠN VÀ VẤN ĐỀ THAY ĐỔI MÔI TRƯỜNG KHÍ HẬU**. CUỘC PHÒNG VẤN SẼ MẤT KHOẢNG **30 ĐẾN 60 PHÚT**.

**BẠN SẼ NHẬN ĐƯỢC MỘT THẺ QUÀ TẶNG \$25 CHO THỜI GIAN CỦA BẠN**

Nếu bạn muốn tham gia, hãy điền vào mẫu này:

[HTTPS://BIT.LY/CLIMATEINTERVIEW](https://bit.ly/ClimateInterview)

Đây là một dự án nghiên cứu được Đại Học Tufts và Cơ Quan Phát Triển Cộng đồng Việt Mỹ (VietAID) thực hiện.

Nếu bạn có bất kỳ câu hỏi nào, xin vui lòng email [thang@vietaid.org](mailto:thang@vietaid.org) hoặc gọi số điện thoại (617) 701-7766

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## From a scale of 1-10, how much do you know about Climate Change?

Directions : Grab a ★ and with your NAME, place it on scale

---




1 **Haha** what is CC? 




★

10 **Expert** 


## Write some impacts of Climate Change that may affect you personally:

—

## How Prepared Are You for Climate Change


— 

---


Not prepare Well prepare

Rate from 1-10 how prepare you are for climate change


Grab a cloud on top and write your name then move anywhere on the line



## What is Climate Justice?



Everyone should be protected equally from climate change. People should not suffer from climate change more than others just because of the color of their skin or the amount of money they have. Climate change is not just about the environment, but it is also about our well being and health.



## Bạn nghĩ những các nhân tố nào sẽ ảnh hưởng đến sự trải nghiệm của từng cá nhân với biến đổi khí hậu?



-Income (having the resources to address changes in climate)  
-Race, ethnicity, culture  
-Knowledge of climate change  
-Society's perception of climate change  
-Location (living near highways, gas stations, garbage dumps)

gia đình B live app, se bi anh huong suc khoe, dac biet suc khoe của người lớn tuổi.  
  
nước uống có thể không tốt.  
  
cây cối có thể cũng không tốt.

-age: susceptibility to disease)  
-gender: childcare, employment  
-race,  
-wealth: technology, real estate  
-ZIP code: local infrastructure, resources, social networks

- Một người tuổi lớn hơn có thể khó đi ra ngoài ở của họ lo có emergency  
  
- Immigration status của gia đình có thể ảnh hưởng tới họ cần đi ra nước của họ, hoặc có nhận đc hỗ trợ của nhà nước  
  
- Income and SES (for reasons mentioned earlier) (which is also tied to many other factors that inevitably impact a person's relationship to climate change, like race, gender, culture, etc.)



## Ví dụ về các sự kiện biến đổi khí hậu:

Trên khắp miền Trung Việt Nam, những bão nhiệt đới từ tháng 10 trở đi đã làm ngập lụt cả người sống và người chết, khi lượng mưa kỷ lục nhấn chìm các thị trấn. Năm ngoái, các nhà chức trách cho biết các cơn bão, mà họ gọi là "bất thường", gây thiệt hại cho quốc gia Đông Nam Á 1,3 tỷ USD và giết chết ít nhất 192 người - số người chết cao hơn 5 lần so với 35 Việt Nam ghi nhận số ca tử vong do COVID-19 trong năm ngoái.

