

Project Justification

Climate change is an unwieldy global issue with tangible local consequences. The scale of the mitigation and adaptation challenges are daunting for individuals (Bales, 2009). We must come together as communities to address the challenges systemically (Frameworks Institute, 2017). But where do we start, how, and with whom?

In many ways, the City of Belfast Maine has been remarkably active with regards to climate change. Since December 2018, the city has sourced 90% of its electricity from a solar array. In 2015 the City Council commissioned a Climate Change Committee to research sea level rise and the risk it posed to our coastal city. Among the findings of their report was a recommendation that the city pursue a citizen science approach to generate the local data needed to inform planning decisions. In summer 2019 the City and this project's partner the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) launched a design process to create a citizen science project to do just that, inviting the library's Brenda Harrington to join the Design Team. That project will launch in winter 2020. Additionally, the Climate Crisis Committee has started a series of community events hosted at the library.

Through our participation in and hosting of these events, we have noticed that attendees represent a fairly narrow sample of Belfast residents (mostly those over 50 years of age, including recent retirees to Belfast). These residents have been vocal and active, and it is likely that these residents will continue to shape the City's climate mitigation and adaptation agenda. But what about the 20-45 year-olds who will live well into the changing climate, and who are raising the next generation? What perspectives, ideas, and priorities do they or others have that are not being represented? All segments of our community must have a voice in these conversations if we are to create a livable future for everyone. The Belfast Free Library is uniquely positioned to take on **the challenge of fostering the city-wide dialogue on climate change that is essential to building a more cohesive community and informing more equitable planning and decision making to benefit all of Belfast.**

Therefore, we propose this **Community Memory project** that we call **All of Belfast: Climate Dialogues (ABCD)**. Our project goals are to:

- Engage a broader cross-section of Belfast residents in dialogue about climate change impacts, where in our community are those impacts most keenly felt and by whom, potential collective mitigation or adaptation actions, and priorities
- Create and promote a collection of high quality, research-informed educational materials to explain how climate change works and support deeper understanding among residents (Bales, 2009; Frameworks Institute, 2015)
- Conduct a collaborative design process with community members to develop a dialogue-based program to support people in what might be their first conversation about climate change
- Use that dialogue-based program to both build our city's knowledge of what matters to residents and to enhance community cohesion and civic engagement
- Generate and archive the full range of Belfast residents' ideas and priorities with regards to mitigating (or preventing) and adapting to climate change impacts

While ABCD will benefit all of Belfast, we will **focus on reaching those members of our community who have been absent thus far in community conversations about climate change**. We suspect that there are numerous reasons for this lack of engagement, from distaste for politics to demands of work and family to lack of opportunity or knowledge regarding how to engage or why. We will leverage our networks to recruit people from the diverse constituencies of Belfast to join our Design Team, thus involving the beneficiaries of the project in its planning.

The ABCD project will **draw from a number of research efforts and promising practices** including:

- The resources created and assembled by the American Library Association's Libraries Transforming Communities project, which was funded by IMLS; of particular interest to us are resources featuring the practices of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation
- The best practices promoted by the National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation (NNOCCI) and based on the Framework Institute's Climate and Ocean Change social science research, reports, and recommendations (supported in part by grants from the IMLS)
- Best practices regarding community engagement, data quality assurance and documentation, and project design from the maturing fields of research (e.g., Shirk et al. 2012) and practice of citizen science (e.g., the experience of our partner, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute)
- Guidelines for collecting and making this community history material available to any interested party, as explained in the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists Joint Statement of Access: Guidelines for Access to Original Research Materials

The Belfast Free Library is both small and rural, serving a city with a reported population of 6,668 in the most rural state in the nation, according to the 2010 census. The nearest urban center is Bangor (population 33,039), 35 miles to our north. Belfast Free Library is the 23rd largest library in Maine by budget (\$674,514 in 2018). The library has a staff of nine FTEs, including five with MLS degrees.

The **ABCD project squarely addresses the goals of the APP initiative** by creating need and opportunity for our small library's staff to master best practices for community engagement and dialogue and employ them in the creation and development of ABCD. The **proposed work fulfills the IMLS Goal to *Build Capacity* of libraries to improve the well-being of their communities**, especially the objective of "*Service as trusted spaces for community engagement and dialogue.*"

Through our collaboration with the GMRI, the ABCD project will be ready for reuse by other communities and libraries in the Gulf of Maine watershed, an area that includes all of Maine, parts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and portions of three Canadian provinces. The ABCD project will persist on the Network website beyond the proposed project period, serving as a resource and model to us and other libraries in the region.

[Project Work Plan](#)

Brenda Harrington, Belfast Free Library's Adult Programming Coordinator, will devote a month of time each year to lead this project, participate in the community of practice and attend the IMLS cohort activities. As described in the budget justification, we will contract with a qualified individual to assist

Harrington and free her time for this project. ABCD project development will follow a similar design process to the one GMRI has led and Harrington has participated in to develop the Belfast Coastal Flooding project, which will launch with the Ecosystem Investigation Network in winter 2020 at investigate.gmri.org. Our partner GMRI, and staff member Sarah Kirn assigned to this project, bring extensive knowledge and assets to this work. GMRI has been a pioneer in the design of projects that generate valuable data for science and valuable, relevant experience for project participants. Kirn was an invited presenter to the National Academies panel on Citizen Science and Learning (NAS, 2018). Our ABCD project will join the Belfast Coastal Flooding project on the Ecosystem Investigation Network, GMRI's second-generation citizen science platform and community created with funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. This Network is focused on supporting community- and scientist-led projects investigating climate change and its impacts on the species, communities, and habitats of the Gulf of Maine and its watershed. Our GMRI partners see the ABCD project as a critical human community-focused addition to the Ecosystem Investigation Network projects.

Low participation by Belfast residents is the biggest risk to the success of the ABCD project; engaging residents as co-designers is our primary strategy to mitigate this risk. Leveraging the proven models for community engagement is another (NCDD 2010). We will begin by identifying and recruiting influential members of the community who have not been visibly engaged in climate mitigation and adaptation conversations. These community members will join library staff including Harrington and Kirn from GMRI to form the ABCD Design Team. This team will meet periodically to respond to drafts, generate ideas, and otherwise inform the work of the compensated staff of the library and GMRI, who will do the majority of work associated with the project.

Once Design Team members have gotten to know one another through introductory activities, the design process will get underway with a visioning exercise to engage the Design Group members in imagining for themselves what the community will feel like and be working on if the project is successful. Building from our experience in designing the Belfast Coastal Flooding and Storms citizen science project, we will follow this exercise with a presentation explaining the science of climate change. This presentation will draw heavily on the NNOCCI and Frameworks Institute materials and advice regarding the kinds of framing, analogies, and tone to use (Bales 2009; Frameworks Institute 2017; NNOCCI 2016). The presentation will serve to bring the Design Team to a common place of understanding from which to work, to give a common learning experience from which to draw inspiration, and serve as a model of what climate change explanation might be useful in the ABCD experience.

The design process will result in the following products:

- A climate change explanation and introduction to dialogue, for in-person presentation and video
- An interview protocol, including open-ended discussion questions, questions designed to categorize concerns or hopes to facilitate analysis (see Draft ABCD Experience below)
- A list of relevant barriers to participation in climate dialogue, strategies to address these barriers, and **the most relevant demographics or self-identified descriptions to collect from participants to meaningfully track our progress towards engaging a broader representation of perspectives**

- A plan for augmenting ongoing library programs and events with ABCD resources and/or create new programming to engage priority audiences around their interests; events types may include evening lectures or presentations, movies, readings, or crafting, and may be held concurrent with children's events to free parents; event topics might focus on history, science, or future planning
- A draft plan for how the aggregated interview responses will be analyzed and presented to inform the project progress and ultimately, the Belfast community; the final product (a presentation of raw, anonymized answers and the final analysis) will become a permanent part of the Belfast Free Library collection, serving to document the community's perspectives on climate change at this point in time
- An informed consent document in plain language that discloses details regarding how interview responses will be held and with what if any potentially personally identifiable data

The ABCD interview instructions and documentation will be delivered to participants via online project pages hosted on GMRI's Ecosystem Investigation Network. There will be a space and laptop computers designated in the library for people to use to hold their interviews. Librarians and library staff will be on hand to provide technical or social support to pairs. The community will also be welcome to participate outside the library, and the Design Team will plan for using other venues in their community engagement strategy.

Draft ABCD Experience

Our experience tells us that it is often more productive to ask community stakeholders to respond to a project draft than to create one from whole cloth. We have therefore drafted the following ABCD interview experience, which leverages the best practices referenced previously, as a place for the Design Team to begin. We share it here to illustrate our vision for the ABCD project.

Interview Framing

Interviews will benefit from participants' holding shared understanding of how climate change works, of the characteristics of dialogue, and the ultimate purpose of the ABCD project--giving all residents a chance to inform Belfast community climate action, have a voice in shaping community priorities, and gain experience in being in dialogue with others about challenging issues. These elements will either be incorporated into the ABCD event or will be presented as videos on the project web pages. The climate change explanation will draw heavily on the recommendations from NNOCCI and the Frameworks Institute ((Bales 2009; Frameworks Institute 2017; NNOCCI 2016). The presentation of the idea of dialogue will draw from the definition offered by the National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation: *"Dialogue is a process that allows people, usually in small groups, to share their perspectives and experiences with one another about difficult issues we tend to just debate about or avoid entirely... Dialogue is not about winning an argument or coming to an agreement, but about understanding and learning"* (NCDD, n.d.). This shared learning experience will give interview pairs a chance to develop rapport, understand the format and ground rules for their dialogue, and be introduced to a common vocabulary to reference.

Residents will be encouraged to partner with someone they do not know well. While conversations with strangers can be intimidating, conversations with people we know on weighty topics we have not

previously discussed can be even more so because they can have lasting consequences. Our hope is that by encouraging people to talk with someone new and providing interview pairs with the questions to ask, we will “let them off the hook” of knowing what to ask and bearing responsibility for being inquisitive.

The Interview

The purpose of this interview is two-fold: give people a chance to engage in dialogue and document residents’ varied perspectives on climate change impacts, mitigation, and adaptation. Each participant, having signed an informed consent form, will take a turn asking a series of questions, listening, and taking notes on each other's response. Each participant will review and have a chance to edit the notes their partner made before submission.

The following list includes possible interview questions, which will be modified by the Design Team.

1. What climate change impacts do you see? How are weather conditions different today than when you were growing up here/when you were raising your family here/when you arrived here?
2. Who in our community do you see being impacted the most? Are some people at greater risk?
3. What do you see happening in the future? Will impacts change and why?
4. If you don’t like that future, what would you like to see our community and/or our institutions do differently? What could we do together to make the biggest difference?
5. How would you categorize your biggest climate change concerns?
6. How would you categorize your highest priority for adaptation?
7. Please characterize your current level of civic engagement and/or past or current participation in climate change conversations or activity.

Interview pairs will be invited to share with each other what surprised them about the experience of their dialogue. Finally, they will collect their “I participated in the All of Belfast: Citizen Climate Dialogues” project pin (our hope is that these pins, like “I voted today” stickers, serve to build project awareness and normalize participation). Participants will be encouraged to refer their friends and neighbors and help the project document all climate change perspectives held by residents of Belfast.

ABCD Project Phases

There will be three phases of project roll-out to allow the project to be modified based on the lessons we learn as we proceed. The **Pilot phase** will be the preliminary roll-out of the project, with library and GMRI staff asking participants for feedback on the questions and experience, and how and why they came to participate. This feedback will be used to refine the project and the engagement strategy before Implementation. The **Implementation phase** will comprise a five-months long rollout of engagement events and interviews, after which the preliminary results will be shared. These results will give the community a sense of the issues and ideas raised, the diversity of perspectives represented thus far, and a chance to shape the final phase of participation by sharing ideas on what perspectives are missing and how to reach them. The **Final phase** will be a focused effort to reach those under-represented groups.

Following these implementation phases, we will document what was done and work up the anonymized data into a shareable format for inclusion in the permanent collection of the Belfast Free Library.

Project Outcomes

We will consider the project a success if:

- At least 10% of Belfast residents participate in ABCD events and interviews
- We can document participation by previously unengaged residents (using the metrics (demographics, self-described prior engagement) established by the Design Team
- Participating library staff self-report increased confidence in their ability to design events to engage residents in dialogue on challenging topics
- The project results produces documentation of the full array of Belfast residents' concerns, hopes, and priorities for adaptation or mitigation of climate change impacts
- The project stays on schedule and on budget.

Beyond those measurable achievements, project outcomes will include:

- Expanded capacity of the Belfast Free Library to serve as proactive convenor and facilitator of community discussion around challenging issues and recognition for doing so
- Enhanced civic and cultural engagement in Belfast through facilitation of library-hosted dialogue and learning among residents about climate change impacts and priorities for mitigation and adaptation

Too often, the all-important stakeholder engagement or community engagement processes in public-serving or civic efforts are skipped over because of time, knowledge on how to conduct a process well, or myopic focus of experts on their task. If such engagement processes do happen, libraries often provide meeting space; rarely are librarians sought as expert partners with the capacity to lead or coach these engagement activities and ensure their effectiveness. The ABCD project will upend this unfortunate pattern and set a new example for the role of librarians and libraries in building cohesive communities. The ABCD interview experience we create will be a lasting resource for us as we support civic engagement and dialogue in Belfast, and for other small, rural libraries interested in actively fostering purposeful dialogue to improve their communities well-being. Thanks to its position as a project on GMRI's Ecosystem Investigation Network, ABCD will be a visible example and resource to other communities and efforts exploring the impacts of climate change in our region. We hope that our commitment to broadening civic engagement through a dialogue-based approach will encourage and facilitate other cities and towns to begin gathering data on what matters most to their residents, culture, economy, and quality of life.

