

SUMMARY: Environmental Justice in Milwaukee

Wisconsin Climate Action Navigators (WI-CAN) Network

January 14 & 15, 2026

Canaan Baptist Church & America's Black Holocaust Museum



Overview

On January 14 & 15, 2026, over 100 attendees from more than 75 organizations gathered at Canaan Baptist Church and at America's Black Holocaust Museum for a Milwaukee regional gathering of WI-CAN (Wisconsin Climate Action Navigators). The event was jointly hosted by Canaan Baptist Church's Beecham Outreach Center, The WEBB at Walnut Way Conservation Corps, and OSCE (Wisconsin's Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy).

The event was designed to: (1) Support shared understanding of Milwaukee regional work on climate action and environmental justice; (2) Enhance skills in applying the concepts and tools of environmental justice within the climate action movement; (3) Strengthen connections among WI-CAN organizations within the Milwaukee region; (4) Invite new Milwaukee organizations into WI-CAN; and (5) Gather information on climate action priorities, work, and support desired for WI-CAN organizations in the Milwaukee region.

Attendees learned about climate action programming happening at Canaan Baptist Church, attended skill-building workshops focused on community organizing and environmental justice, and participated in topic-specific small-group action planning. They also learned about the evolution of Milwaukee's EJII (Environmental Justice and Infrastructure Initiative) into The WEBB (Wisconsin Ecojustice Base Builders) – and participated in a facilitated workshop to help build Wisconsin's Climate Resilience Strategy.

Themes that emerged from the event will help shape WI-CAN's strategic plan. These include:

- power of a complex ecosystem of climate actions and organizations;
- value of hearing the details of work and impact from colleagues;
- need for equity lens and recognition of interdependence; and
- value of gathering with colleagues to grieve, connect, and heal.

Evaluations of the event were overwhelmingly positive – and provided helpful insights for strengthening future events. 94% of respondents rated the event as excellent or good.

Respondents said they valued the opportunity to connect and learn, the diversity of perspectives, and the thoughtful design and facilitation.

The gathering was designed, led and staffed by a team from OSCE, Walnut Way and Beecham Community Center. Please see linked Appendices below for attendees and materials.





Themes

The themes captured below emerged from participants' discussions and report-outs on the afternoon of the second day. These themes, as well as the detailed transcription of small-group work that generated them, will be used to inform WI-CAN's strategic planning work.

1. Equity and justice are foundational to climate action.

Across water, energy, air, housing, and food, participants highlighted the need for approaching climate action with an equity lens. We need to do this work in ways that broaden accessibility, distribute costs fairly, and strengthen local knowledge, voices and power.

2. Communities and issues are deeply interconnected and interdependent.

Water, air, energy, housing, food, and health are experienced together at the household and community level — not as separate policy silos. What happens to your neighborhood and family is connected to what happens to my neighborhood and family. Participants highlighted the need to understand this and to tell this story.

3. Gathering provides important opportunities for connection, reflection and nourishment.

Trust, connection, and sustained relationships are prerequisites for engagement and action. People are carrying grief, burnout, and frustration. Participants named the importance of slowing down, creating space for healing, and not forcing immediate action steps. They also named the value of hearing detailed stories of work and impact from colleagues.

4. Change calls for a complex, connected ecosystem of climate actions and organizations.

Participants highlighted the power of connecting multiple, diverse approaches to climate action – including resisting, reforming, re-creating, and re-imagining. They named the value of place-based work in shaping systems change efforts like policy and litigation.

5. Communications could be a game-changer.

Participants noted that community health data, funding information, program details, and regulatory processes can be difficult for residents (and organizations) to find and understand. There is strong value in providing clear, relevant, easily-accessible information about everything from home repairs to air quality to democratic participation.

Next Steps

Next steps for WI-CAN coming out of this gathering include:

- Continue articulating WI-CAN's mission, metrics and strategies [draft by Summer 2026]
 - Sources include this work, the final CCAP (due out later this year), and additional feedback and guidance from WI-CAN members including from other WI-CAN regional and statewide gatherings.
 - Develop implementation & evaluation plans – including specific, actionable next steps – to support action and learning.
- Continue strengthening climate action movement in Wisconsin [ongoing]
 - Provide backbone infrastructure (including funding) to convene members, strengthen communication, articulate shared mission and mutually reinforcing activities, and develop shared metrics.
 - See 2026 calendar of gatherings in Appendices.

Appendices

- [Gathering Agenda](#)
- [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Attendee List](#)
- [Pastor Teresa's land acknowledgement](#)
- [Transcription](#) and [images](#) of Day 2 small group work results
- [Evaluation summary](#) with links to transcription and images
- [2026 calendar of WI-CAN events](#)

