

From Local Voices to Systematic Change



20
25 **Impact Report**

Letter from The Executive Director

Dear Friends and Partners,

This past year was one of steady, thoughtful work at the Climate Democracy Initiative. It was also a year that consistently reminded me how much this work depends on patience, trust, and people willing to show up for one another in uncertain times.

Across CDI's work in 2025, we focused on building foundations. That meant taking the time to support dialogues across differences, walking alongside educators and young people as they stepped into civic leadership, and creating space for thoughtful conversations among collaborators to unfold. This kind of work asks for patience and care, but it is what allows progress to be shared, trusted, and sustained for the future.

One of the most meaningful aspects of this year was the opportunity to spend time in conversation with people navigating climate decisions in very real, immediate ways. In rural communities, classrooms, and broader civic spaces, we listened as people connected climate challenges to their work, their families, and their hopes for the future. Those conversations continue to inform how we show up and how we understand our responsibility in this work.

This year also brought moments of recognition that felt meaningful, not as accolades, but as signs that the idea of climate democracy is resonating more widely. Invitations to contribute to new initiatives, fellowships, and global conversations affirmed a growing appetite for approaches to climate action that are inclusive, democratic, and grounded in lived experience.

I am deeply grateful to CDI's Team, Senior Fellows, Advisory Council, Board of Directors for their care, integrity, and steady leadership throughout the year. I am also thankful to the many individuals and organizations who supported our work by offering guidance, asking tough questions, sharing resources, and walking alongside us as we learn. Your support makes this work possible.

As we look ahead, I feel both clear-eyed about the challenges before us and hopeful about what can be built through sustained effort. We will continue to focus on preparation as much as response, on listening as much as leading, and on building the capacity needed for climate decisions that are shared, informed, and durable.

Thank you for being part of this work.

With deep gratitude,

Natalie Montecino

Natalie Montecino
Executive Director

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Executive Summary

In 2025, CDI focused on strengthening the conditions necessary for inclusive and effective climate decision making, particularly in contexts shaped by polarization, institutional distrust, and uneven access to participation.

CDI centered its work on the governance systems that shape how decisions are made, who participates, and whose perspectives are reflected. This included supporting efforts to expand civic capacity, facilitate cross sector collaboration, and equip educators and emerging leaders with the tools to engage meaningfully in climate related decision processes.

This work reflects a broader recognition that addressing climate change requires not only technical solutions, but also governance systems capable of navigating complexity, disagreement, and change.

A central milestone this year was the launch of Community Visioning in Colorado, a program designed to help communities build power before critical environmental and development proposals arrive. Early engagement for this initiative reached seven Colorado counties, primarily in rural and semi-rural areas where residents are demanding a greater voice in how climate strategies are shaped and implemented.

The ECLIPSE program expanded its statewide footprint, sharpening its role as a connector and capacity-builder to make environmental and civic action possible for students. This expansion was strengthened by a key collaboration with Pueblo District 60's Project-Based Learning coordinators, which helped build local youth leadership ecosystems.

Throughout 2025, CDI directly engaged over 900 youth, educators, and community members, supporting more than 35 youth-led civic and climate projects and providing training to over 300 educators to increase their confidence in supporting student-led action.

These efforts have moved communities from a reactive stance toward a future of coordinated, community-led planning. By strengthening democratic engagement as part of climate solutions, CDI is ensuring that climate decisions are shared, informed, and durable. As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to transforming narratives and empowering communities to thrive, ensuring that both people and the planet are resilient in the face of growing challenges.

CDI is supporting local leadership and advancing inclusive climate planning to rebuild trust in civic systems. By doing this, CDI is creating resilient communities and a vibrant democracy where both people and the planet can thrive.



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The Climate and Democracy Nexus

Climate change is more than an environmental crisis—it is a direct threat to the public institutions and civic systems we rely on for safety and stability. As climate change impacts intensify, they strain our ability to solve problems collectively; when democratic systems are weakened by distrust or polarization, communities become less capable of planning for and recovering from these challenges.

This burden is not shared equally. Marginalized and rural communities face the greatest exposure to climate risks but often possess the least political power and resources to influence solutions. This exclusion creates a self-reinforcing cycle: when those most affected are left out of decision-making, it undermines the trust and coordination needed for long-term resilience.

CDI works at this critical intersection by:

- Supporting local leadership in rural and historically marginalized areas.
- Rebuilding trust in civic systems through inclusive, responsive planning.
- Creating pathways for intergenerational learning and shared responsibility.

By strengthening democratic engagement as a core climate solution, CDI ensures that both people and the planet can thrive in the face of an uncertain future.



Who We Are

20 25

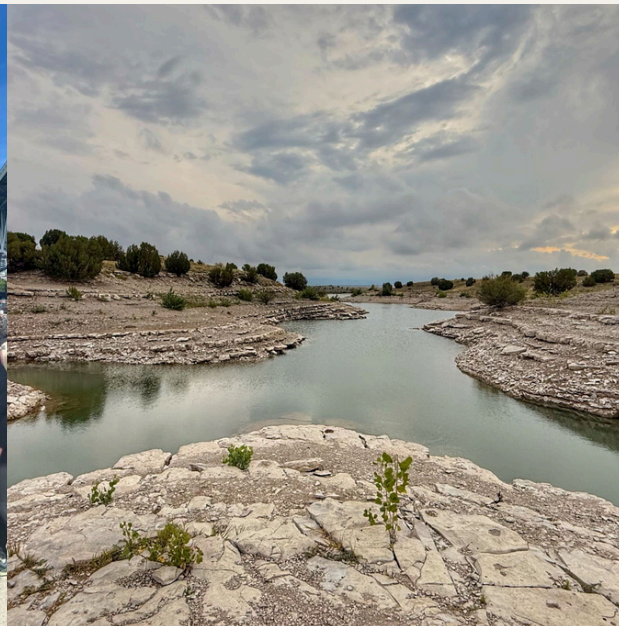
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Our Mission

To build public trust, local leadership, and people-centered systems for navigating a future of environmental change.

Our Vision

A world where all communities have the power to shape environmental decisions through strong democracy, creating resilient, fair, and inclusive outcomes.



Our Values

Inclusion

All voices matter, and everyone has a role in shaping their community's future.

Trust

Strong, lasting relationships are built by listening, showing up, and putting communities first.

Intergenerational

People of all ages bring valuable perspectives and have a role in shaping the future.

Commitment

We stay engaged for the long term, through both challenges and opportunities.

ECLIPSE

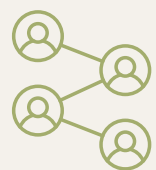
ECLIPSE—Empowering **Civic Leadership** to Inspire Progress through **Student Engagement**—serves as the connective infrastructure that aligns educators, students, and partners to drive real-world change. By bridging the gap between classrooms and community networks, it cultivates **Youth Leadership Ecosystems** where young people are prepared and trusted to lead as co-creators of community solutions. This model builds a more inclusive statewide network, ensuring that youth leadership is a shared responsibility that strengthens community systems without overextending the educators who champion them.

Youth Leadership Ecosystems are cross-sector networks that bridge schools, community organizations, and civic spaces to move young people from participants to co-creators of community solutions.



7 deep
engagement
hubs

How ECLIPSE Works



Connect

Bringing together schools, community partners, and youth-serving organizations to build a shared foundation.



Align

Supporting youth-led, project-based learning experiences that address real-world community challenges.



Sustain

Building long-term systems and adult capacity that reduce educator burden while expanding leadership pathways.

Elevating Youth Voice

In 2025, ECLIPSE supported more than 300 students and 40 educators from 15 Colorado communities in attending statewide leadership summits. By prioritizing transportation and lodging for students from Pueblo, the program ensured that youth from historically excluded districts could see their local experiences reflected in a broader movement. Participants returned to their communities with a heightened sense of agency, immediately developing project ideas for sustainable food access and waste systems. These efforts have laid the foundation for a new statewide coalition focused on activating youth voice in advocacy and procedural decision-making.

From Exposure to Action

Students in Pueblo translated their statewide learning into local action through classroom-based, project-led initiatives. In high school environmental clubs, students identified new pathways to sustain recycling and composting programs. Simultaneously, science classes collaborated with the Pueblo Zoo and the National Park Service to design solutions for habitat resilience and environmental adaptation. By connecting educators directly to community partners, ECLIPSE reduced the capacity burden on teachers and created a shift toward classrooms that center student voice and real-world problem-solving.

"Being in these spaces shows our students that their voices matter beyond their school; it shifts how they see themselves as leaders and how we show up as educators for them."
— Participating Educator

In 2025...

Community Visioning launched in Colorado focused on proactive, community-led future planning for clean energy fields, water developments, hog farms, and data centers

CDI built the program's core framework and governance approach, grounding it in local invitation and trust

Early engagement took place across 7 Colorado counties, primarily in rural and semi-rural communities

4 communities invited CDI into deeper conversations about planning, development pressure, and long-term priorities



4 invites in from communities



Community Visioning

Why Community Visioning?

Communities across the U.S. are being asked to host major projects, lose anchoring industries, and provide their own recovery from increasingly severe storms. Whether it's hurricanes or wildfires, energy developments or water diversions, life-changing policies are being made without local voices at the table.

CV flips that script. We support rural and small communities in defining and advancing their own visions for their shared future. People across the country want their voices back!



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Pillars of Engagement

Proactive Planning



Preparing communities ahead of the curve so they are ready for development proposals before they are offered—or even court their own choice of business.

Inclusive Tools



Using dialogue processes, hands-on training, and accessible planning, to protect culture, strengthen infrastructure, and build negotiation power, so that local voices stay central in development decisions.

Adaptable Platforms



Building community frameworks that are transferable across different industries, from energy development to water management.

Accomplishments

In 2025, CDI moved from setting goals to delivering measurable impact. We fostered collaboration between civic leaders, policymakers, and youth to drive lasting climate progress at every level of decision-making.

Key Highlights

- **Global Leadership:** Represented our mission at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos and the Aspen Ideas Festival, solidifying CDI as a global voice for civic resilience.
- **Policy & Advocacy:** Defended scientific integrity in governance through official EPA regulatory comments and partnered with Harvard Law School to explore the future of democratic resilience.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Co-designed stronger community support systems that enable student-driven projects with Colorado Department of Education and launched deep-impact leadership programs in Pueblo School District No. 60.
- **Field Building:** Co-hosted the False Creek Climate Democracy Campaign in Vancouver and joined the Courageous Colorado initiative to pilot new democratic futures.
- **Organizational Growth:** Expanded our core team, appointed a new Senior Fellow, and launched a refreshed brand identity to scale our mission globally.



Impact Highlights

7

Colorado counties engaged across rural, semi-rural, and urban communities

500+

Youth engaged in civic and environmental leadership

300+

Educators supported through training, coaching, and collaboration

Capacity Built



900+

Total youth, educators, and community members directly engaged

35+ Community & institutional partner organizations engaged

6 Major initiatives & coalitions activated

Engagement

8

Professional development and training sessions delivered

35+

Youth-led civic and climate projects supported

Where We Went

22

Community events, workshops, and trainings hosted or supported

60

Active community, educator, and institutional connections strengthened

4

School systems or districts actively engaged

Supporting Educators



300+

Educators reporting increased confidence supporting youth-led projects

15+

Subject matter experts engaged in educator and youth support

Gratitude and Acknowledgements

This work is strengthened by a wide community of funders, advisors, collaborators and community partners. CDI is grateful to the organizations and institutions listed here, among many others, who supported our efforts this year and helped advance the shared work of climate democracy.



Looking Forward

In 2026, CV (Community Visioning) will transition from its "Include" phase to the "Align" and "Refine" stages within the Town of Granby and the Fraser River valley. Working closely with the Town Council, the Granby Sanitation District, and regional water teams, CV will host a series of workshops starting in March to bridge the gap between community values and public outreach. This foundational work in Granby serves as a blueprint for expansion toward Winter Park, ensuring that local stakeholders remain the primary architects of their region's growth and environmental stewardship.

Beyond the Fraser River, CV is deepening its long-term commitment to the San Luis Valley through continued collaboration with the Boys & Girls Club and the SLV Ecosystem Council. Supported by new affiliations with Planet ReImagine, the National Rocky Mountain Lab, and Denver University, CV is also poised for

strategic multi-state growth. These partnerships will facilitate expansion into eastern Utah and southern Wyoming, bringing our community-led visioning model to new counties across the Intermountain West.

Parallel to these efforts, the ECLIPSE program enters the year focused on institutionalizing youth leadership through deeper school district integration. Key priorities include launching Seal of Climate Literacy Camps with Calwood Education Center and establishing CTE Pathway bootcamps in Poudre and Weld Counties. These programs bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional stewardship, providing rural and underrepresented students with the specific career training and environmental action pathways necessary to thrive in a changing world.

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Finally, ECLIPSE will strengthen the statewide infrastructure for youth-led advocacy by partnering with the Colorado Department of Education to help districts build foundational community partnerships. By expanding coalitions like Generation Wild and creating dedicated youth leadership tracks at major convenings like the Sun Soil Water Summit, ECLIPSE is moving youth from the sidelines to the center of policy-making. Through national alignment with groups like Earth Force, we are ensuring Colorado's youth are prepared, trusted, and supported to lead meaningful change.

By bridging the gap between community-led visioning and youth-driven action, we are ensuring that the solutions of tomorrow are rooted in the collective wisdom of today.



How You Can Support CDI

