

Engaging Partners and Community Leaders of Savannah in Climate Vulnerability Assessment Development

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

This case study focuses on a collaborative partnership between Georgia Tech students and the Harambee House to develop a comprehensive climate vulnerability assessment for Savannah, emphasizing community engagement and local expertise in addressing climate change impacts.

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Since its inception in 2018, students enrolled in the Georgia Tech's Sustainable Cities minor have worked with communities in Georgia on the development of sustainable solutions to solve some of their most pressing issues. One of the most pressing issues in the region is climate change. During the summer of 2020, students enrolled in the Sustainable Cities minor collaborated with the City of Savannah Office of Sustainability to engage local community leaders for the elaboration of a comprehensive climate vulnerability assessment. Assessing vulnerabilities is necessary to identify what assets are more likely to be negatively impacted by one or more climate related hazards, and a fundamental step in the elaboration of a climate adaptation plan.

LESSON LEARNED

"The main lesson learned during the development of Savannah's Climate Vulnerability Assessment was the importance of working with the community in the identification of issues, and potential solutions, which in this particular case were related to leverage community assets (ABCD framework) such as the empowerment of small business owners in Savannah, to participate in the development of climate and sustainability plans that directly affect the present and future socio-economic development of these communities."

Principles in Action

- » *C1 - Trust:* Build long-term, mutually respectful relationships with community partners; show up for each other to build trust, meet people, and see where things lead. Be an octopus: grow your tentacles.
- » *C2 - Learning Mindset:* Work with community partners, not for them; be humble and learn from partners as experts and innovators.

To reach out the community, students in the Sustainable Cities Studio worked with collaborators at Georgia Tech-Savannah, which is a hub for education that has become "an essential resource to the local industry and a valued contributor to the coastal region". The hub has built long-term and mutually respectful relationship with communities in Savannah, specifically with the Harambee House, a local community organization which mission is to "educate, inspire, organize and build the capacity of African Americans and other communities of color in Savannah, to create and sustain safe, economically vibrant, and healthy neighborhoods that promote healthy living, wellness, environmental justice, and green sustainability". Through this mutually respectful relationship, the Director of the Harambee House, Dr. Mildred McClain, kindly accepted to work with the students in Sustainable Cities minor on the elaboration of Savannah's Climate Vulnerability Assessment. It was only through this partnership with the Harambee House that Georgia Tech students were able to work with, and not for, members of the Savannah community. These community members are the local experts in the identification of the socio-economic conditions and inequalities that the community is facing. The framework used during the work was based on ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) principles. Some of the conditions identified included the impact of floods on small businesses owners, mainly people of color, and the problem of saltwater intrusion in groundwater aquifers, which also affected these communities.

Related Resources:

- [More information on Savannah's Climate Vulnerability Assessment.](#)
- [Public participation, engagement, and climate change adaptation: A review of the research literature.](#)
- [Planning and Adaptation](#)