

# COLLECTING CLIMATE ACTION A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING AND DISPLAYING CLIMATE ACTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Organizations all around the Chicago region are engaging their communities in “climate action” activities: addressing climate change and improving quality of life at the same time. As part of this work, they are helping residents understand how climate change relates to their everyday lives.

This tool was developed by Field Museum anthropologists for partner organizations to use in the projects they were working on as part of the Museum’s Chicago Community Climate Action Toolkit. Learn more and download additional climate action tools:  
[climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org](http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org)



## BECOME A CLIMATE ACTION CURATOR OF YOUR COMMUNITY.

Organizations can use this guide to engage community members to be “curators” of their communities. Museum curators choose meaningful objects to collect, and they display those objects in ways that show how they are meaningful. With this guide from The Field Museum, organizations can use museum curation techniques to identify and showcase aspects of community life that connect climate action with local culture. It focuses on “material culture”: the objects, places, and symbols that show what people are doing to adapt to climate change now, and what they can build on to take climate action in the future.

### USE THIS GUIDE TO:

- Explore your community’s strengths and how they relate to climate action.
- Create a “collection” of climate action-related objects, places, and symbols.
- Showcase your community using exhibition techniques to craft and communicate what residents find valuable.
- Envision your community’s future based on objects and images that represent pride in place.

### THIS GUIDE CONTAINS THREE SECTIONS:

1. Making Your Collection Worksheet: Use this worksheet to identify and record objects, places, and symbols that relate to climate action in your community. This guide includes a Sample Worksheet with some examples filled in.
2. Interpreting Your Collection: This section includes basic instructions for analyzing what you collect and showcasing important aspects of your community.
3. Using Your Collection: This section includes ideas for displaying and interpreting climate action using a variety of media formats and then using it to engage your community in climate action projects. It also includes examples of how two communities used curation techniques in their projects.

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You’ll probably be surprised by what this guide will help you uncover. You will undoubtedly find a number of obvious examples of climate action already happening, symbolized by things like bird houses, recycling bins, solar panels, or community gardens. But this guide will also help you highlight activities, traditions, and values in your community that can serve as starting points for involving residents in your projects. For example, public art can be seen as a way of taking care of the environment and demonstrating community pride—and it can also be used to communicate complex ideas like climate change. Similarly, you may have a very active library that is well-loved and well-used by residents—and libraries are the ultimate recyclers and encourage sharing and reuse. These may be less obvious as climate action but key to engaging lots of people and developing projects that take advantage of community strengths and improve local quality of life.

Record the following information about each object, place, or symbol you identify. Fill in as many categories as possible—and feel free to add your own.

1. OBJECT, PLACE OR SYMBOL	2. PHOTOS Y/N?	3. LOCATION	4. WHAT DOES THIS OBJECT, PLACE, OR SYMBOL MEAN TO YOU?	5. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? TO YOU? TO YOUR COMMUNITY? TO OTHERS? DOES IT MAKE YOU THINK OF THE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE? HOW SO?	6. DO YOU HAVE A STORY ABOUT IT? IF SO, TELL IT HERE OR USE ADDITIONAL SPACE.	7. IS THERE A PARTICULAR PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH IT? IF SO, EXPLAIN HERE.	8. HOW OLD IS IT?	9. HOW IS/WAS IT USED?	10. HOW DOES IT HELP TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE?
Cierrale Ad that shows hands turning off a water faucet, with the caption that reads "Cierrale" which in English means "Turn it off!"		1970s ad from Mexico City; found on the Web	Water conservation is important in Mexican culture	The ad shows that cultural heritage is one way to connect to climate action, and that immigrants bring environmentally friendly practices with them when they move to a new country like the US.	In Mexico in the 1970s, "Cierrale!" became a household phrase, like the "Got milk?" campaign in the US.	A current Pilsen resident shared this example. We can contact her in the future (contact info to be included).	From the 1970s	The ad was created to promote water conservation.	The ad draws attention to the responsibility people have to conserve our planet's resources. Connects water conservation with cultural heritage.
Grapes grown in Bronzeville		The Bronzeville area of Chicago	I can grow my own produce!	Important for communities to recognize the value and ease of growing food locally.			Recent (approximately 2010)	This photo depicts growing local produce, something we can all do!	Local food minimizes the "food miles" and packaging associated with non-local produce. But it's complex because grapes aren't a native species, which are better for the environment.
Purple coneflower	[Photo of purple coneflower]	Chicago backyard		Beautiful and easy to plant; also has medicinal function?			Recent (approximately 2010)		Native species don't just look pretty, they're good for the environment (use less water; help soil)
Calumet Park	[Photo of Calumet Park]	9801 S. Avenue G., Chicago					This photo was taken in 2001.		Helps people connect with and value the outdoors.

## STEP 1: SAMPLE MAKING YOUR COLLECTION WORKSHEET\*

Use this sheet to identify and record objects, places, or symbols in your community that relate to climate action. You can print out the Worksheet and take it to a group meeting, or you can take it right out into your community to start looking around. Fill out as many of the categories as possible—and feel free to add your own.

You can use it to cover all kinds of climate action or, if you already know that your project or interest involves a particular topic—such as energy or water conservation, waste reduction, protecting native species, etc.—you can tailor it to that topic.

Here is a sample collection worksheet to give you a sense of how this works.

\* We left some of the categories blank or only partially filled in to show that it's okay not to know everything about the objects that interest you. You can continue to gather information throughout the curation process.

# STEP 1: MAKING YOUR COLLECTION WORKSHEET

Record the following information about each object, place, or symbol you identify. Fill in as many categories as possible—and feel free to add your own.

1. OBJECT, PLACE OR SYMBOL	2. PHOTOS Y/N?	3. LOCATION	4. WHAT DOES THIS OBJECT, PLACE, OR SYMBOL MEAN TO YOU?	5. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? TO YOU? TO YOUR COMMUNITY? TO OTHERS? DOES IT MAKE YOU THINK OF THE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE? HOW SO?

# MAKING YOUR COLLECTION WORKSHEET, cont.

Record the following information about each object, place, or symbol you identify. Fill in as many categories as possible—and feel free to add your own.

<p>6. DO YOU HAVE A STORY ABOUT IT? IF SO, TELL IT HERE OR USE ADDITIONAL SPACE.</p>	<p>7. IS THERE A PARTICULAR PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH IT? IF SO, EXPLAIN HERE.</p>	<p>8. HOW OLD IS IT?</p>	<p>9. HOW IS/WAS IT USED?</p>	<p>10. HOW DOES IT HELP TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE?</p> <p>Tip: See Chicago's climate action strategies, <a href="http://chicagoclimateaction.org/filebin/pdf/CCAPOverview.pdf">chicagoclimateaction.org/filebin/pdf/CCAPOverview.pdf</a> and <a href="http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/learn#capn">climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/learn#capn</a>, for some ideas.</p>

## STEP 2: INTERPRETING YOUR COLLECTION

Identifying the common aspects of the collection can help your community visualize, showcase, and reach climate action goals.

What stories does your collection tell? Most collections will represent a range of climate action examples. This section will help you organize your collection into groupings that reflect what climate action means in your community.

Look back at the information recorded for each entry in the Making Your Collection worksheet. What common aspects do you find among the collections? Are there sub-aspects within the groupings? Do they connect in interesting or unexpected ways? Do they say something about your community that needs to be heard? What are the most compelling examples?

Using the sample worksheet, you might:

- Group all of the objects, images, and symbols that relate to water. From there, you could create a story about conserving water in your community. This might include the Cierrale ad to show that we have to take control of water conservation, and the purple coneflower to explain and promote gardening with native species in the future.
- Group the objects, images, and symbols that relate to cultural heritage. Within this grouping, you could draw out the importance of recalling and reclaiming cultural heritage in taking climate action. The story you tell could be that cultural heritage is climate action, told through the Cierrele ad to represent the importance of water conservation in Mexican culture, as well as through the Calumet Park photo to show that Latino residents value the outdoors.



Find this and other climate action tools at [climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org](http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org)



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## COMMUNITY CURATION EXAMPLE: SOUTH CHICAGO

Toolkit partners in South Chicago used the Guide’s curation techniques as part of their work creating a community-wide exhibit. The exhibit highlights stories collected by local youth about residents’ green practices and promotes the community’s vision for a green future. It includes nine displays and two outdoor planters, located at sites throughout the Southeast Side. The Field Museum worked with project partners to help them identify story themes and then develop a unifying identity for the exhibit. Learn more: [climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/south-chicago](http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/south-chicago)



Community leaders came together to discuss stories the youth collected, share their own stories, and help identify themes.

### Retrofit Your Neighborhood: From Steel to GREEN Pollution to SOLUTION

Working in partnership to empower the communities of the Southeast Side of Chicago to move towards an environmentally friendly vision for the future.

To learn more, visit: [www.southeastgreengallery.org](http://www.southeastgreengallery.org)



This exhibit is part of the South Chicago  
CLIMATE ACTION PLAN  
Make Your Home Healthy & Green

The project team developed a unifying identity for the exhibit, by creating an exhibit title and tagline featured on this plaque.



The plaque is affixed to each display and planter and identifies them all as part of a larger project.

## STEP 3: USING YOUR COLLECTION

Now that you’ve got a community climate action collection...what should you do with it? The Field Museum displays their collections in large-scale exhibits that interpret scientific research for public audiences. You can use similar techniques on a smaller scale to present climate change and climate action for your residents, in terms and images they will relate to. You may choose to do an actual exhibit, perhaps at a central gathering place like a library, storefront, or community center, or perhaps scattered across the community—like our South Chicago partners did for their Toolkit project.

## USING YOUR COLLECTION CONT.

You might come up with other ideas for using the objects and images you collected to engage your community in climate action. Here are a few possibilities to get your creative juices flowing...

- Design flyers or posters of photographs of objects, places, or symbols paired with explanatory text.
- Create a website or PowerPoint presentation.
- Develop a portable pop-up exhibit to take with you to events and invite the public to contribute objects or stories.

For any project you do, you will want to prepare for it by thinking through these questions:

- Content: What do you want to tell people? What are the objects, images, and other media that you have to work with?
- What are the goals of the project? Community engagement? Media involvement? Education?
- Who is your audience? Do you want them to be simply an audience—or do you want them to contribute their objects and stories as well?
- What is your main message? What is the most important thing you want people to take away?
- Interpretation: How do you want to convey your content? What words will you choose for your signage and labels? What will it look like? How will it be designed? What colors and fonts will you use? Will it feel serious or fun?
- Budget and timeline: How much will it cost? How long will it take to create it?

## COMMUNITY CURATION EXAMPLE: FOREST GLEN

The Forest Glen community used this Guide to create a graphic identity for their project that united multiple activities focused on reducing the community's carbon footprint by engaging homeowners in water conservation and promoting climate- and nature-friendly outdoor practices. The project team held a series of meetings to brainstorm a list of objects, places, and symbols that represent the project in relation to the community's broader identity. We shared this list using Google Docs, an application that allows multiple people to write and edit one document from different computers. The group then worked to create icons and choose fonts and colors that captured the look and feel of the project. These formed the design structure for an advertisement in a local paper and interpretive signage at the project sites. Learn more: [climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/forest-glen](http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/forest-glen)

