

**Joyeta Chowdhury**  
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## **General Experience**

The one thing I've realized is that no matter where I lived/travelled—whether it's in Cape Coral, FL where I lived for the first 6 years of my life before moving to Kansas, or visiting Chittagong, Bangladesh where a majority of my family lives—the people I cared about would be affected by climate change. Heck, people I loathe, people I've never met or cared for, essentially most living organisms on this planet would be impacted by the climatic changes that are occurring over a very short time scale (decades are really short on the geologic time scale). Our inability to address and adapt to these changes easily piqued my initial interest in science and policy.

My time at CEP, while brief, has taught me how little I know about my local government and how local/state government decisions directly affect our lives. Being a CEP intern has educated me on how local and state initiatives are imperative if we want our society to transition into an equitable and sustainable future—where all people benefit from this adaptation.

## **Specifics**

One thing I really delved into these past couple of months is district redlining. While this discriminatory real estate practice was made illegal in 1968, the remnants of this system is still seen in residential communities today. For example, if you google 'Troost Avenue', you'll see that it's "known for: racist dividing line" in the google description. Luckily this semester I was able to learn about the EJScreen Tool for one of my classes, and the EPA also happens to be hosting a speaker series on environmental justice and systematic racism (I definitely recommend this [series](#)), which also provided useful resources such as historical data on district redlining. While no tool is perfect, these were incredibly helpful to me as an intern.

Another thing I delved into, along with Michelle who also worked for CEP at the time, is youth advocacy. As we worked together through the past couple of months, especially after CEP hosted their WEALTH Days conference, we realized that the environmental youth advocacy movement in Kansas is rather disconnected. After interviewing and hosting the first Youth Advocacy Panel for WEALTH Day, the people on the panel and both Michelle and I—while amazed and appreciative of everyone's work—had no idea the others existed within the state until the panel began. It was a hopeful moment for us, as well as the older audience that observed the panel, many who wanted to learn more about youth advocacy. There are a couple of things both Michelle and I recognized:

1. While unaware of each other, people within our age group want to participate in environmental advocacy and connect with others. People want their concerns heard.
  - a. However this doesn't necessarily always mean joining current environmental organizations as an intern, but providing support and resources for younger

advocates to create spaces of their own where it's probably more likely their concerns heard and understood.

2. There really isn't an environmental youth advocacy network in Kansas. Hence this became another significant focus on our work for the past couple of months.

### **Takeaways**

Something I've noticed while learning about environmentally disenfranchised communities is that oftentimes people in positions of power in institutions that are responsible for providing resources and developing infrastructure for communities will not actively seek or involve the very people living in these communities in the decision-making process. Information conveyed to these communities is limited as well. For example, the lack of park development in certain areas of a city limiting access to parks for the residential communities nearby, or when people find out their community is close to a superfund site. I realize a lot of this depends on population density, tax revenue, property values, etc., but it also seems like these factors contribute to the skewed distribution of resources and infrastructure. I mean if you're lower income, live in a rural area, are BIPOC, or are younger—would you truly be represented in these factors?

If we want local governments to be better representatives for us, not just in the environmental context, we need to focus on where residents and people of every demographic have a voice...and where they don't.