

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

DELIBERATIVE FORUM

OCTOBER 1, 2022 **FINAL REPORT**

OVERVIEW

This document provides an overview of the Climate Solutions Deliberative Forum Process, results from a survey of central Pennsylvania residents about climate change used to inform the deliberative process, and the themes and priorities the emerged from the Forum itself.

What is a Deliberative Forum?

Deliberative forums have been used to gauge considered public opinion for over 30 years.¹ Considered public opinion emerges from thoughtful deliberation and engagement among citizens who have considered balanced information about a topic. These forums give citizens the resources they need to develop an informed opinion that comes from relevant facts, expert information, and an understanding of the way issues and policies affect other citizens as well as their community.

The primary goal of a deliberative forum is to make sure the voices of ordinary citizens are heard and considered as collective decisions about issues of consequence are being made.



The Climate Solutions Deliberative Forum Process

([link to DF Process and Climate Change Framework documents](#))

The process used for the Climate Solutions forum was straightforward. The organizers of the event:



Topics discussed during the Climate Solutions forum:



SOLAR



TRANSPORTATION/ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVs)



AGRICULTURE



FLOODING



¹ See James S. Fishkin (1991) *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

The Climate Solutions survey: Climate Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behavior

To better understand community knowledge and attitudes about climate change and to establish the community's baseline beliefs, the Climate Solutions team conducted a representative survey of central Pennsylvania residents ([link to topline summary document](#)). Data collection for the Climate Solutions Survey was conducted from September 6 - 18, 2022 and included 656 completed interviews. The survey, conducted by the Center for Opinion Research at Franklin & Marshall College, used a mixed-mode survey to collect data for this project. The Center sampled households in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry,

and York counties ([link to full methodology statement](#)).

The survey found that most (79%) central Pennsylvania residents believe that the earth is warming and most (61%) of these respondents believe that warming is caused by human activity. These beliefs about climate change exist despite the fact that respondents scored moderately low on climate knowledge, with an average knowledge score of four correct answers out of seven items that asked specific questions about weather and climate ([see Table 1](#)). The climate knowledge score was calculated by summing the total correct responses to the questions listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment of Climate Knowledge

	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Do Not Know
Weather often changes from year to year. (T)	59%	29%	6%	4%	2%
Climate means the average weather conditions in a region. (T)	40%	37%	7%	6%	10%
Climate often changes from year to year. (F)	30%	28%	19%	19%	4%
Ocean currents carry heat from the equator toward the north and south poles. (T)	29%	34%	4%	4%	29%
Weather means the average climate conditions in a region. (F)	18%	31%	16%	24%	12%
Climate and weather mean pretty much the same thing. (F)	8%	17%	24%	44%	6%
The atmosphere carries heat from the north and south poles toward the equator. (F)	7%	17%	14%	22%	42%

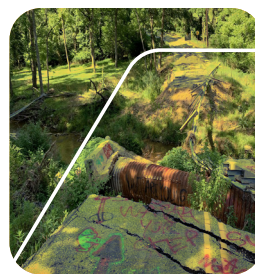
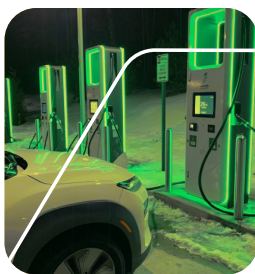
Note: The questions asked, "Do you think each of the following statements about the earth's climate is definitely true, probably true, probably false, or definitely false?"

The relative consensus that residents expressed about the existence of rising temperatures and the role of humans in that change did not lead to any consensus about local impacts or policy solutions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Perceptions of Selected Climate Impacts and Policy Actions

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do not know
The frequency of flooding in my area has increased because of climate change	17%	19%	16%	38%	9%
The intensity of storms that produce flooding in my area has increased because of climate change	22%	19%	15%	34%	11%
Policymakers in PA should work to increase the share of vehicles on the road that are electric	28%	20%	12%	34%	6%
The air is often bad in my neighborhood	10%	17%	21%	47%	4%
Agricultural production is hurt by climate change	47%	17%	11%	19%	6%
Instead of trying to stop global warming from occurring, we should focus on adapting to a warmer climate.	9%	25%	19%	41%	6%
Transitioning to renewable energy will reduce the number of jobs in central PA	19%	15%	19%	33%	14%
I'd like to have access to transportation options for local trips other than a private vehicle	28%	26%	15%	26%	4%

Note: The questions asked, "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"



Perhaps the most significant finding from the survey given the Climate Solutions partnership and goals is that an equal proportion of respondents (46%) believe that reporting about the climate by news organizations has mostly resulted in scaring people as believe that reporting has helped people be more knowledgeable about the problem.

Respondents who were randomly selected to participate in the survey were also invited to participate in the Deliberative Forum itself. More than 100 survey participants signed up to participate and Center for Opinion staff selected and invited 60 survey participants who collectively provided a representative sub-sample of all survey participants.



The Climate Solutions Deliberative Forum Priorities

The forum deliberations were designed to identify participants' main climate priorities among those topics covered during the day. Some groups did not agree on which issue deserved the most urgent attention, suggesting how complex these issues are to tackle, how inter-related the issues are to one another, and participants' feelings that they needed to learn more. But the consensus of those who did rank the issues identified solutions around flooding as the main priority, with the other topics generating similar levels of concern. In addition to prioritizing flooding, the forum deliberations also identified four clear themes:

THEME 1

Give people incentives to choose things like electric vehicles or solar power, but don't mandate personal choices.

THEME 2

Government mandates were favored for some things, such as requiring new development to be solar-capable.

THEME 3

Polluters should pay to help those affected by climate change – such as farmers – adapt to challenges they face and losses they may incur.

THEME 4

We need to know more. All groups mentioned education in various ways – underscoring the need for accurate, independent information on the issues we face and potential solutions.

The Climate Solutions Deliberative Forum Post-Forum Survey

The forum produced more than priorities and consensus in the aggregate—it also produced some change in the participants' personal attitudes. Forum participants were invited to complete a post-forum survey that repeated some of the questions asked in our initial survey as well as additional questions that asked for feedback about the forum experiences. Three in four (18 out of 24) forum participants completed the post-forum survey, and although the sample size is small, it does provide useful insights into how the survey affected participants' knowledge and attitudes about climate change.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that participation in the forum changed how people thought about climate change. By matching responses from the post-forum survey to each

participant's response to the Climate Solutions Survey, it was clear that more participants believe the earth is warming and that human activity is responsible for that warming as a result of their conversations at the forum. More also believe there is consensus among scientists that global warming is happening (rising from 83% to 94%). These changes led more forum participants to believe that policymakers should prioritize renewable energy and promote greenhouse gas reductions ([link to climate forum participant topline summary](#)) than did so prior to the event.

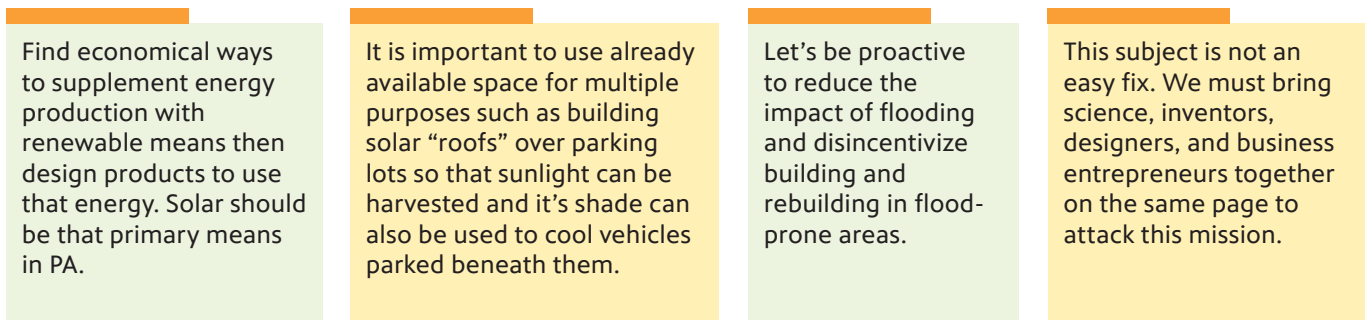


Forum attendees' reflections

Post-forum reflections from attendees speak to the effectiveness of the deliberative forum format. Many participants praised the process and the experience:



The forum gave participants access to information and experts, and a format that allowed them to discuss ideas and solutions without the weight of politics. Their reflections underscored the complexity of the subject matter and the forum's success in bringing out thoughtful discussion and ideas on how to address climate challenges. A sample:



Conclusion

Climate Solutions' deliberative forum marked the beginning of a conversation among attendees and the Climate Solutions partnership. For example, Climate Solutions has kept the attendees informed about its work, and has sought (and received) their input on that work. A subset of attendees is now part of a group that is meeting regularly to examine climate issues and how solutions-based journalism can help address the finding that almost half of survey respondents said climate reporting more often scares them than helped them increase their knowledge.

The deliberative forum and its two associated surveys have also provided Climate Solutions – and any public or elected official, government agency, news organization or other interested party – with a roadmap about what people know about climate-related issues, how eager they are to learn more, and their level of interest in finding real-world solutions to the challenges posed by climate change.

*Material researched and written by Madison Goldberg
Research assistance from Sriya Chattopadhyay*

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS PARTNERS:

