

1. When education institutions are the #1 trusted civic authorities and forces for community impact

The fierce urgency of now.

Climate change and environmental degradation as a result of human development must be addressed. The sense of urgency felt when developing our solutions could not be extrapolated out to 50 years. Instead, we reflected on the stories of emergency response scenarios and wartime evacuations, an experiential triage of how to best respond to our scenario:

“Climate disaster and the role of education when education institutions are the #1 trusted civic authorities and forces for community impact.”

Our premise evolved into identifying some of the processes a potential climate refugee would go through in a given community - one that is perhaps much different from where they were coming from, probably in a different language than one they were familiar with and assuming that they were seeking stability and peace as soon as possible. Finding shared values across our narratives, we established a set of key words that would help refine our conversation:

- Crowd Sourced - the future is likely to contain solutions that arise from across the system, rather than being supplied from a single source.
- Conservation - continued economic and social development can occur so long as it is decoupled from environmental degradation.
- Continuity - Providing a continuous experience between one way of living and another will be necessary to build long-term commitment and wellbeing.
- Charter-Community - a shared set of values that would guide the innovations of those within the community of practice; built around a sense of shared purpose and responsibility for our planet and people.

Finding our values

We envisioned a new role for education centers (schools, colleges, universities etc.) that would serve as a Community Connection Center. This would be a nexus of our design aspirations and a place for people to find security, continuity and contribution to the health of themselves and the systems around them. After day one, we arrived at a shared set of ‘simple rules’ that would guide our thinking for our next design sessions:

- **Change what I can, care when I can’t.**
 - Everyone has a part to play in the conservation of our shared environment. Sometimes our life contexts intervene and we aren’t able to play an active role, but that should not be replaced with apathy and disengagement, but rather a sense of caring towards those who are able to make a positive change.
- **Use and share resources equitably.**
 - This is what got us here in the first place: inequitable distribution of resources - material, economic, cultural and social resources are ubiquitous in their presence, but limited in their distribution. In order to share resources, we must cultivate a sense of security, empathy and trust.
- **Critical systems should have fallback plans that are increasingly technology independent and “focused on the leaves.”**
 - Decentralized and distributed technology will likely herald the next generation of innovation. Monopolization will fade into an age of distributed technology with shared capacity and open development
- **Recognize personhood in all living systems.**
 - Environmental personhood is a legal designation that assigns environmental entities the rights, protections, privileges, responsibility and legal liability of a legal personality - in any case, this provides a legal basis for protecting, conserving and interacting with the environment in the future.

The Innovation:

After reflecting on the outputs of our design session, our product can be best described as a Transition Plan. We could not address the future of climate impacts without contextualizing the increasing severity of climate disasters, human displacement and social system evolution. We recognize that in order to arrive at a new place and time, there must first be a transition period that provides continuity between one stage of development and the next - otherwise things get uncomfortable.

Inspired by existing emergency management and preparedness plans, you will see similarities between our draft transition plan and the Five Steps of Emergency Management as outlined by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency: Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery ([link](#)). [There are also influences from organizational structures and methodologies such as design thinking, Agile methodology and futures thinking for systems development.]

Community Connection Center Evolution Plan

Communication

Before arriving at any community response center, a person must first be aware of what awaits them - or have a reason to go there: this is where communication is imperative. Without clear and consistent messaging from a trusted source, coordinated action is nearly impossible. So, local education institutions must have clear and consistent messaging for their communities: the who, what, where, when and why to what should be expected of people before they arrive at the community center.

Physical and Mental Health and Safety

There is a lot to cover here; more than we're able to define and explain. The gist of it: people cannot support each other and their communities if they do not first feel safe and secure in their own minds and bodies. Community Response Centers must perform a triage on a person's physical health and wellbeing, in addition to their social, emotional, and intellectual faculties - this is important to facilitating their transition into the new environment and providing continuity. If a lifelong professional arrives in a new place, their skills and qualifications can be accounted for and applied appropriately. If they identify a gap in their knowledge or abilities they would like to address, they can begin planning their remedial training. After everything is accounted for, they can move forward into the next phase of community response.

Education and Training

Teaching and learning are critical to systems' success and sustainability. If someone has skills to share with others, they should be supported in doing so. If someone would like to develop their knowledge, abilities or other characteristics, they should be supported in doing so. This is a cycle of educating others and training the self that is applicable to all learners of all ages. It's important to understand that this cannot happen by force, and it cannot happen without a learner being stable and secure in body and mind - otherwise learning may be met with defiance, or educating may occur without empathy.

Critical Community Response Team

Simple by design, complex in execution - any time someone leaves the education cycle, they would likely be out in their community helping others. This is a direct application of their learning, skillset, character and humanity: communicating to others through the chaos to inform them of the resources available; bringing others to a Community Connection Center to provide them safety and security; or teaching the next cadre of responders or preparing themselves to join the efforts.

Conclusion?

Putting it all together is the hardest part. Each community will have to cultivate their response plans and personnel, but hopefully this framework will serve as a useful guide.