



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT
COMMUNITY & EQUITY



CECE Annual Report 2025-2026

AUGUST 2026

Summary

The Center for Environment, Community, & Equity (CECE) continued to grow during the 2025-2026 academic year, despite the challenging funding environment. We reinvested in our commitment to being one of the only interdisciplinary centers that focuses on the nexus between environment, society, and equity in North America.

During this year, we expanded our reach and leveraged our connections across campus and beyond.

In particular, we:

- Expanded our research portfolio through external grants, which included \$2,800,000 in new funding from the National Science Foundation, AmeriCorps, EarthHQ, Freedom Together Foundation, and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
- Published 16 articles in peer-reviewed journals (since summer 2024)
- Developed new partnerships and strengthened existing ones, and
- Broadened our reach through events, online content creation, and public engagement.

CECE's Growing Team

The CECE Team expanded during the 2025-2026 academic year. Thanks to additional funding for our Workforce Development and the 4Rs project, we welcomed a new Research Assistant Professor. Additionally, one of the 2025 DataCorps Fellows joined our team full-time as a Research Associate. The CECE team also now includes a Graduate Communications Assistant.

Our Team



Dana R. Fisher
Director

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W. Chris Jayko
Assistant Director, Workforce
Development and the 4Rs Project

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Kyra Jones
Senior Operations Manager

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Abeer Y Al-Eryani
Energy Transitions Postdoctoral
Fellow

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Arman Azedi
Postdoctoral Fellow

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Natalia Piland
Research Assistant Professor

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Michael Culbert
Research Associate

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Magnolia Mead
Research Specialist



Olive Swan
Communications Assistant

Expanding Innovative Interdisciplinary Research

Interdisciplinary research is fundamental to meeting the environmental challenges that lie ahead for our country and the broader global community. CECE continues to expand its research program through investments in faculty research projects, external grants, and independent research with affiliated researchers.

The CECE Faculty Research Incubator Program

During the 2025-2026 academic year, CECE granted its third wave of seed grants through our [Faculty Research Incubator Program](#). We supported two interdisciplinary research projects during this academic year:

The primary award, “Renewable Energy Technologies and Multidimensional Inequalities in Refugee and Host Communities,” was granted to CECE post-doctoral fellow Dr. Abeer Al-Eryani¹ in collaboration with Drs. Claire Brunel (SIS), and Michael Alonzo (CAS). The project brings together faculty from the SIS Departments of Environment, Development, & Health and Politics, Governance, & Economics with Environmental Science in CAS to examine how Renewable Energy Technologies are deployed in humanitarian settings. The research is using data on national-level trends and community-level variations across refugee and host populations to understand energy inequality in humanitarian environments and explore how to create more inclusive and context-sensitive renewable energy projects.



Photo (L to R): Mike Alonzo, Abeer Al-Eryani, and Claire Brunel

¹ Since she is a post-doctoral fellow at CECE, Dr. Al-Eryani did not receive any funding for her work on the project.

A smaller secondary award, “What are the Socioeconomic Impacts of Hurricane Exposure in the US?” was granted to Drs. Andrew Martinez (CAS), Gabriella Meltzer (CAS), Claudia Persico (SPA), and Claire Brunel (SIS). This collaboration across the Departments of Economics; Environmental Science and Health Studies; Public Administration & Policy; and Politics, Governance, & Economics brings together disparate datasets on hurricane hazards, student test scores, school suspensions and absences, housing assistance, and domestic migration to assess the broad effects of hurricane exposure across the US.



Previously funded projects have continued to yield research products: the team from [The Climate Story Gaps Project](#), which received a CECE grant during the 2023-24 academic year, just published a paper on the project in *Journalism Studies* (see the Research Products Section of this report for details). [The Remote Sensing and Knowledge Co-Production in Northern Haiti](#) project, which also received a grant during the 2023-24 academic year, was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation’s Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences in fall 2026. This new award, [“Monitoring Changes to Land Use and Value in Northern Haiti through Collaborative Ethnographic and Remote Sensing Approaches,”](#) by Scott Freeman (SIS) and Mike Alonzo (CAS), extends their work from the faculty research incubator project to build collaborative research models in Northern Haiti that integrate dense time series of parcel-scale remote sensing, collaborative ethnographic research, and participatory knowledge co-production workshops.

External Funding

In addition to granting funds to faculty at American University, CECE continues to bring in external support for its research projects. **During the 2025-26 academic year, we brought in \$2,800,000 of new funding through external research grants.** Each grant is profiled in this section.

AmeriCorps ORE. The “[Workforce Development and the 4Rs](#)” project received additional funding from AmeriCorps in fall 2025 that supported additional research on disaster response and recovery across the US. The funding supported creating multimedia content about our work through a partnership with the Center for Environmental Filmmaking (CEF), as well as our hosting a Learning Opportunity for AmeriCorps partners and grantees. For more information on this project and what the funding has supported, see the following sections: “Educational Mission” (DataCorps), “Events” (Learning Opportunity), and “Public Engagement” (partnership with CEF and related publications).



Photo (L to R): Michael Vulbert, Dana R. Fisher, Natalia Piland, and Armand Azedi

NYSERDA. In spring 2026, we launched the “Place-based energy systems infrastructure” project, funded by the New York State Energy Research Development Authority. For this project, researchers at CECE are partnering with the Central x South East Brooklyn Community Development Corporation to understand visions for an energy transition at the hyper-local scale in Flatbush, Brooklyn. The collaboration is building community capacity, assessing knowledge and attitudes, and co-developing visions for an energy transition. To date, the project has implemented an energy systems internship with local Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School and Brooklyn College students.

EarthHQ. Researchers at CECE were funded to conduct a landscape assessment of the climate communication ecosystem in the United States and Canada. The assessment is being conducted in partnership with the newly launched [Talking Climate Collaborative](#). The project explores who are climate communicators in the US and Canada, what are their attitudes towards specific climate solutions and tactics, how are they connected to one another, how does information diffuse through

the network, and what are their main goals. The report from this project will be formally launched at an event at Climate Week NYC in September 2026.

Freedom Together Foundation. In July 2026, CECE received a grant to study the movement to protect democracy in the US. This grant is facilitating additional research studying civic engagement trends that support a more informed and engaged democracy. It will leverage findings from research about dominant forms of civic and political engagement to create materials that will educate the public about trends in civic engagement, the right to various forms of public participation, and broader democratic engagement in the US.

Educational Mission

The CECE² certificate continues to grow.

Over the past year, we welcomed eight new students and celebrated the graduation of the third cohort of the CECE Certificate in Environment, Community, & Equity (CECE²). Since its launch, the CECE² certificate has trained twenty-one graduate students who have come from schools across American University. The program also continues to encourage interdisciplinary community through regular cohort-building activities and CECE-wide events that connect students across schools and cohorts.

CECE² alumni have gone on to work in a wide range of environment- and justice-focused roles in nonprofits, international organizations, advocacy groups, and research institutions around the United States. They hold positions in areas such as climate justice organizing, sustainability project management, and food systems and community development, reflecting the program's emphasis on integrating equity, environment, and community building.



Photo: CECE2 Students and CECE Team attending Impact Preview: The Way of the Whale

Second year of the DataCorps Graduate Fellows Program.

We continued the AmeriCorps-funded DataCorps Graduate Fellows Program in summer 2026 with three new fellows. The fellowship provides graduate students with an opportunity to learn about civic engagement and service through the lens of disaster response and recovery, as well as gain hands-on experience with data collection and evaluation of disaster-related service corps and volunteer programs. Together with the CECE research team, the 2026 DataCorps cohort conducted fieldwork in Seattle, Washington; Los Angeles, California; and Austin, Texas collecting focus group and survey data from members of service corps and volunteer programs. Each fellow produced a report about the findings from their individual research project. The [2026 cohort reports are available on the CECE Clearinghouse](#).

The DataCorps Graduate Fellows program is funded to continue during the 2026-27 academic year and will be recruiting its next cohort in spring 2027.



Photo (L to R): CECE Research Team (including DataCorps Fellows) at site visit to EarthCorps HQ in Seattle, WA

Events at CECE

Events are critical to fostering relationships across campus and building community among faculty and students at AU and beyond. During the 2025-2026 academic year, CECE hosted six events, co-hosted one, and co-sponsored two additional events for the American University community. Together, the events served to generate engagement with collaborative initiatives, promote research, and foster interdisciplinary partnerships. We highlight some of the most notable events here ([a complete list of events from the 2025-2026 academic year is available on the CECE Clearinghouse](#)).

When Communities Need Us Most: Empowering AmeriCorps and Its Partners to Lead in Times of Crisis. On May 27th and 28th, CECE hosted AmeriCorps and its partners from across the country for a two-day Learning Opportunity focused on what it means to lead effectively when communities face their greatest challenges. This event brought together various AmeriCorps programs, local emergency management offices, and non-profits for cross-sector knowledge exchange and resource sharing.

The goal of the event was to strengthen collaboration across agencies and organizations. Throughout the two-day event, participants explored different understandings of disruption and crisis. A [full recap of the Learning Opportunity is available on the CECE Clearinghouse](#).



Photo: CECE team at the Learning Opportunity

Colloquium Series. CECE expanded our Colloquium Series during the 2025-26 academic year, doubling the number of colloquium events. Each colloquium featured expert speakers who presented research on environmental topics, followed by a community discussion. The first colloquium featured the awardees of the CECE Faculty Research Incubator grant in 2024-25, Professors Garima Sharma, Sarah Iverson, and Nicole Darnall, who presented their research project “Systems Lens to Increase Sustainable Procurement Success: Co-Creating Insights to Bolster Employee Engagement.” The second was entitled “Workshop on Studying Disaster at AU,” and featured AU Professors Valentina Aquila (CAS), Gabriella Meltzer (CAS), Nicholas R. Micinski (SIS), and CECE Director Dana R. Fisher. The third event, “Colloquium on Environmental Conflict,” featured Professor Stefano Costanzi (CAS) and Postdoctoral Fellows Abeer Al-Eryani (CECE) and Pauline Zerla (SIS). The final presentation of the year featured Oscar Berglund (University of Bristol), who discussed his new research on the global criminalization of climate and environment protest.



Photo (L to R): Pauline Zerla, Abeer Al-Eryani, and Stefano Costanzi; Dana R. Fisher, Gabriella Meltzer, Nicholas Micinski, and Valentina Aquila

Visualizing Environmental Change. On Tuesday, November 11, CECE hosted Megan Martin, Senior Visual Content Producer at [Climate Central](#), who shared insights from her work translating complex climate data into clear, engaging, and trustworthy visuals. Professors Mike Alonzo (CAS) and Garima Sharma (KSB) then led the group in a discussion about the importance of knowing your audience, keeping messages simple and focused, and making visuals relevant by connecting global climate narratives to local experiences. Megan highlighted how design choices such as color, layout, and clarity influence interpretation, and how visuals can help bridge gaps in scientific literacy, disciplinary language, and cognitive understanding.



Photo (L to R): Mike Alonzo, Megan Martin, and Garima Sharma

The Importance and Potential of Environmental Storytelling. On October 14, 2025, CECE co-hosted a panel of environmental storytellers with the [Center for Environmental Filmmaking](#). The event featured three experts who spoke about their experiences in the field and the insights they bring to the future of climate communication. The panelists included Joe Romm, Senior Research Fellow at the

University of Pennsylvania; Maggie Stogner, Executive Director of the Center for Environmental Filmmaking; and Juliana Toloza Serna, award-winning documentarian.



Photo (L to R): Joe Romm, Maggie Stogner, Juliana Toloza Serna, and Dana R. Fisher

CECE also co-sponsored two additional events during the 2025-26 academic year: Impact Preview: The Way of the Whale (co-sponsored with the Center for Environmental Filmmaking) and Youth and Climate Voices: Scarcity, Conflict, and Challenges in the Arab Region (co-sponsored with the Arab Reform Initiative).

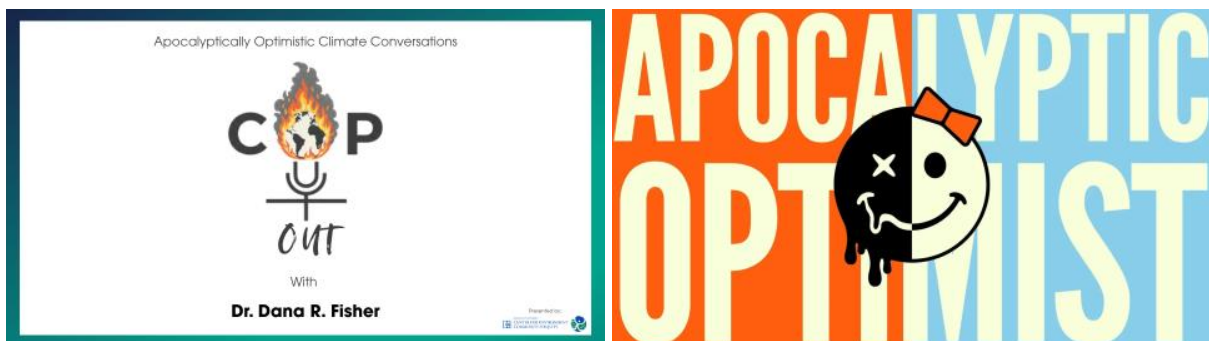
Public Engagement and Empowerment

To continue expanding our public outreach and engagement this year, CECE developed new ways of broadcasting our work. As part of this effort, we partnered with the Center for Environmental Filmmaking ([CEF](#)) to create video content showcasing the [Workforce Development and 4Rs project](#). A team of graduate student filmmakers accompanied the CECE research team on a trip to Washington state in April and joined us for the AmeriCorps Learning Opportunity in May. Both short documentaries are available on the CECE website on our [CECE-CEF Partnership](#) page under the [Explore tab](#).



Photo: CEF Film Team shooting on site in La Conner, WA

CECE also launched two podcasts this year to help us reach a broader audience. Timed to coincide with the 30th Conference of the Parties of the climate regime (COP30), CECE Director Dana R. Fisher hosted climate activists, scientists, and communicators to talk about the promise and failures of the climate regime and the role it plays in global climate action for our limited series: the [COP-Out Podcast](#). Dr. Fisher also launched [The Apocalyptic Optimist Podcast](#) in partnership with [Pique Action](#). The podcast focuses on what's broken and how we fix it. To date, the podcast has hosted notable guests, including Adam Conover, Katherine Wilkinson, Naomi Oreskes, and Chris Gloninger. As of July, the podcast had received over 80,000 views and 180,000 impressions across various platforms. All podcasts can be found on CECE's [Explore Tab](#), [Youtube page](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [Spotify](#).



CECE continued to release [whitepapers](#) and research reports, which have had over 122 downloads over the last academic year. The most recent whitepaper, "[Understanding Community Response to Disaster: Results from Three AmeriCorps Programs](#)," presents an analysis of data collected from focus groups at three sites (California, Louisiana, and Utah) during the summer of 2025. In addition

to producing project-related Whitepapers, we also publish independent reports. In November 2024, we released [Visualizing the Loss of the American Climate Corps](#), which mapped out the reach of the American Climate Corps to understand where jobs and communities were most impacted when the program was shut down. This report gained substantial media attention after it [was featured in an article in GRIST](#) in January 2026. We also published a [report visualizing how media diets are changing in America](#), which was based on data collected through our national survey in Fall 2024. As we move into the 2026-2027 academic year, we plan to continue producing Whitepapers and reports that feature the findings of our research.

CECE Director Dana R. Fisher also continues to work to gain attention for our research by appearing in the media and writing up her research findings for a general audience. During the 2025-26 academic year, her work was featured by the Brookings Institute, the Guardian, Grist, The New York Times, The Economist, Scientific American, and ProPublica. You can access a comprehensive list of her [media appearances here](#).

Looking Forward to 2026-2027

Academic year 2025-2026 was a time of growth and connection for the Center for Environment, Community, & Equity. Our work would not have been possible without the external funding we have raised. To date, we have brought in over \$4,240,000 from external sources, including our recent funding from AmeriCorps, the National Science Foundation, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, EarthHQ, and the Freedom Together Foundation.

In the coming year, we look forward to continuing our research, expanding our student programs, and continuing to engage with communities across American University and beyond. **If you are interested in contributing to the durability of our efforts and supporting our research, outreach, and educational programs, please consider [donating to CECE directly through this link](#).**

Do not hesitate to get in touch: feel free to email us at cece@american.edu.

Scholarly Publications and Research Reports by the CECE Team and CECE-funded Affiliates

CECE staff and affiliates have been very successful at publishing their scholarly work, which contributes to CECE's mission. Over the past two years, the CECE team has published 17 papers in peer-reviewed journals and 5 research reports.

Below is a list of scholarly papers published by CECE staff and affiliates in the past two years (Summer 2024-Summer 2026; CECE-affiliated authors are bolded):

Anderson, Elizabeth P., Andrea C. Encalada, Thiago B. A. Couto, ..., **Natalia C. Piland**, *et al.* 2025. "A baseline for assessing the ecological integrity of Western Amazon rivers." *Commun Earth Environ* 6: 623. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-02530-8>

- Azedi, Arman.** 2026. "Religious Trends among Arab Muslims, 2010–2022: Continued Revival, Polarization, or Burgeoning Secularization?" *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 67(3): 354-376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207152251319750>
- Azedi, Arman.** 2025. "From shared grievances to collective action: A multilevel study of economic adversity and protest." *International Sociology* 40(1): 3-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02685809241292076>
- Azedi, Arman.** 2025. "Which Values Distinguish Supporters of Radical Right Populist Parties From Their Rivals? Political Authoritarianism As a Key Ideological Feature." *Political Studies*, 73(4), 1745-1771. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217241310083>
- Azedi, Arman.** 2025. "Selective attention? Human rights organizations and Anti-state naming and shaming, 1995–2018." *Social Problems* spaf050. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaf050>
- Azedi, Arman, Dana R. Fisher, and Magnolia Mead.** 2026. "Surveying a Crowd: A Field Experiment Comparing Data Collection Techniques at Protest Events." *Sociological Methodology*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00811750261453370>
- Campbell, Lindsay K., **Natalia C. Piland**, Julie Capito-Hernández, Erika Svendsen, D.S. Novem Auyeung, Neha Savant, Nichole McClain. 2026. "Stewardship Salons: Sharing biocultural approaches to foster many ways of knowing and caring for land." *Earth Stewardship* 3(2): e70048. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eas2.70048>
- Donald, Rosalind**, Aarushi Sahejpal, Ashia Aubrey, and **Malini Ranganathan.** 2026. "Are cherry blossoms DC's polar bears? Investigating the links between local seasonal climate journalism and equity in Washington, DC." *Journalism Studies*. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2026.2705895>
- Fisher, Dana. R, Magnolia Mead, W. Chris Jayko, and Arman Azedi.** 2025. "What's Radical? How Do Climate Activists and the General Public Perceive Social Movement Tactics?" *Environmental Research Letters*. 20: 114061 <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ae1520>
- Gonzalez, Julie A. and Dana R. Fisher.** 2026. "Wildfire Displacement in the United States: A Meta-Analysis of the Social Consequences." *Environmental Research: Climate*. <https://doi.org/10.1088/2752-5295/ae4a43>
- Henrichsen, Tim, Philip Leifeld, Lorien Jasny, and **Dana R. Fisher.** 2025. "Ground-Truthing Political Elites in the Public Sphere: Measuring the Arena Effects of Elite Opinion." *Research and Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680241307940>
- Jasny, Lorien, **W. Chris Jayko**, and **Dana R. Fisher.** 2024. "Same Old Story with a Different Ending: Homophily and Preferential Selection of Information Within the US Climate Policy Network." *PLoS ONE* 19(7): e0306454. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306454>

Jenkins, Clinton N., Simone Athayde, Claire F Beveridge, ..., **Natalia C. Piland**, *et al.* 2025. “Global importance of Amazonian freshwaters.” *Frontiers in Ecology and Environment* 23(10): e2868. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fec.2868>

Leifeld, Philip and **Dana R. Fisher**. 2025. “Up and Down with... Polarisation? Temporal Polarisation Dynamics in US Climate Policy Debates.” *Politics and Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9933>

Piland, Natalia C., Lindsay K. Campbell, Michelle L. Johnson, and Erika S. Svendsen. 2026. “Drawing systems of stewardship to guide action and reveal critical relationships of care.” *Earth Stewardship* 3(1): e70040. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eas2.70040>

Piland, Natalia C., Thiago B. A. Couto, Maria Pulido-Velosa, *et al.* 2026. “Public Participation in Tropical Conservation and Environmental Management Research: Toward a Locally Grounded and Reflexive Practice.” *Biotropica* 58(1): e70149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/btp.70149>

Victoria-Lacy, LuLu, Thiago B. A. Couto, **Natalia C. Piland**, Jesús Dámaso, Stephannie Fernandes, Simone Athayde, and Elizabeth P. Anderson. 2025. “Amazonian fish migration as a social–cultural–ecological process.” *People and Nature* 7(12): 3297–3312. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.70190>



Center for Environment, Community, & Equity

American University

4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20016-8137

cece@american.edu

www.cece.american.edu

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