

Chapter Spotlight: San Diego SSN Collaborates with Civic Organizations in Their City

DECEMBER 13, 2022

Dominik Doemer

"As advocates, we decided that working directly with academics to help engage in the design of experiments, as well as the dissemination of critical information to decision-makers and communities was an obvious and necessary step to enacting crucial climate policies." - Mikey Knab, Director of Policy, Climate Action Campaign

As a city-based chapter, San Diego SSN has always focused on addressing issues right in their backyard. And over the course of the last two years, these efforts have revolved around two of the most pressing issues in San Diego: climate change and homelessness.



Brian Adams

In the spring of 2022, San Diego chapter leaders [Brian Adams](#) and [Samuel Greg Prieto](#) decided to convene a group of academics from multiple local universities with community advocates around the shared goal of addressing climate change in their city. The University of California, San Diego in particular is a hub for climate scientists and other academics who study climate change. And chapter members from UCSD were eager to apply their expertise to their own community.

One of the organizers in attendance was a representative from Climate Action

Campaign, a prominent San Diego-based climate organization founded in 2015, and a collaboration was born. Continuing into fall of 2022, Climate Action Campaign's Director of Policy, Mikey Knab, has organized several meetings with the scholars to strategize their involvement in key local priorities. For one, San Diego is debating implementing a rough road usage fee which would charge drivers for miles driven, instead of a gas tax, to fund transportation projects. The city also passed a landmark climate action plan several years ago that now requires support during the implementation phase in order to keep the city on track to meet its targets.



Greg Prieto

On the role of academics in these policy debates, Knab told SSN:

"When it comes to the climate crisis, our elected and appointed leaders must be armed with the best data possible, but they also must understand the broad implications their decisions will have on the health and safety of our region for generations to come. As advocates, we decided that working directly with academics to help engage in the design of experiments, as well as the dissemination of critical information to decision-makers and communities, was an obvious and necessary step to enacting crucial climate policies."

Looking forward, Climate Action Campaign aims to bring academics to meetings they hold with city leaders, invite them to speak at public meetings, and disseminate research findings about local priorities to build public support and awareness.

At the same time, San Diego chapter fellow [Stacey Livingstone](#) began building a collaboration with the Homeless-Experienced Advocacy and Leadership Network, or HEAL, a local organization founded in 2019 focused on bringing the voices of individuals with lived experience of homelessness into critical local conversations.

"This work comes directly out of being involved in the Scholar Strategy Network a few years ago when we had [Jennifer Nations](#) as our postdoc," said Livingstone. "She started this collaboration across all these providers and scholars in San Diego who work for or conduct research on housing and homelessness to basically figure out what gaps in the knowledge there are for providers so that researchers could partner with them and do more meaningful research."

Livingstone, who researches housing insecurity and homelessness, wanted to build on these partnerships and decided to reach out to HEAL when she learned about the organization through Nations' project. After winning a grant to fund this work, Livingstone began working with five individuals from HEAL as a research team for a summer collaboration. Together, they developed a study to investigate the structural factors that influence service provider–client relationships in San Diego. To complement their research, the team set up a learning collaboration to bring in local experts on photojournalism and grant writing to build out the skillset of the group.



Collaborators (from left to right): Stacey Livingstone, Amelia Broadnax, DeForrest Hancock, Dennis Larkin, Kuni Stearns

The project culminated in an October event that brought together the research team with local advocates, service providers, scholars, city officials, and community members to share their findings and advocate for this model of research collaboration. "Utilizing data, structure, and quantitative analysis of academics along with the qualitative or humanizing elements engendered by people with lived experience is a model that can and should be proliferated," said Kuni Stearns, one of the research team members. "The strengths of each group complement the project, creating a more compelling and impactful narrative." To encourage more of these collaborations, the team closed the event by facilitating conversations across the groups in attendance, making space for the type of networking that led Livingstone to partner with HEAL in the first place.

Looking forward, the chapter hopes to continue collaborating with HEAL, the Climate Action Project, and other local civic organizations to apply the cutting-edge research being conducted at local universities to their own community.