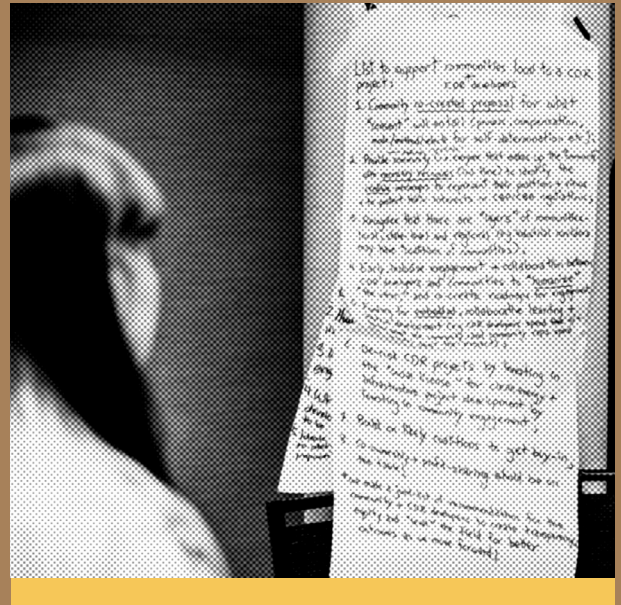


"Recognize that there are 'layers' of communities - local, state and regional (e.g., industrial corridors may have 'coalitions of communities')."



"Communities are not a monolith, do your research, listen, and let them self-define."

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Lessons from the Field: Conversations on Resident-Centered CDR Deployment

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"Define communities by: Who is engaged already? Who isn't? Who has the capacity to engage? Who is disproportionately impacted? Where are interests potentially misleading?"



ABOUT CARBON180

Carbon180 is a climate NGO with a vision to remove legacy carbon emissions from the atmosphere and create a livable climate in which current and future generations can thrive. Based in Washington, DC, we design and champion equitable, science-based policies that bring carbon removal solutions to gigaton scale.

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We want to express our deep gratitude to the 100+ participants whose ideas, coordination, and cross-sector expertise shaped the lessons we've captured here. To respect the discretion of participants, we won't identify contributors individually, but you can learn more about the speakers and sessions from the 2024 Carbon Removers Summit [here](#).

Images of the 2024 Carbon Removers Summit by [Lancer Photography](#).

Introduction

Lessons from the field: Conversations on resident-centered CDR deployment

CDR must be as much about people as it is about removing carbon

Overview

Great scholars, movement builders, and leaders remind us that a better world does not happen by accident. A better world is built by people who organize one another around bold ideas — and do so with care, clarity, and courage.

If carbon removal is to play a real role in solving the climate crisis, then its champions must take the perspectives of local communities and residents seriously. CDR advocates can rise to the moment by:

1. Listening with care: staying proximate to and curious about community expertise.
2. Building trust through truth: communicating clearly and consistently about project developments.
3. Being daring: beginning each process by centering local communities in every decision.

This memo offers field notes, key themes, and recommendations for carbon removal leaders committed to working better with communities to earn social license to operate. This work is rooted in conversations with stakeholders across the CDR field, in a collective effort to move from holding good intentions toward achieving better outcomes. May this memo operationalize the work to make community-centered carbon removal not just a goal, but a practice.



The Exercise

In October 2024, Carbon180 hosted the third annual Carbon Removers Summit, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders — from community advocates and farmers to project developers and policy experts. For the first time, we facilitated a participatory workshop: *Meditations on community power and developer objectives*.

Unlike traditional panels or keynotes, this hands-on session flipped a typical conference format. Through reflective discussions, strategy exercises, and guided meditations, participants worked in groups to produce two sets of recommendations: one for communities seeking to shape carbon removal in their regions, and one for developers aiming to engage communities responsibly.



Participants edited each other's ideas, debated tradeoffs, and explored what makes for truly collaborative, community-rooted carbon removal projects. The result?

One hundred unique recommendations from over 100 attendees, including funders, academics, startups, and frontline environmental justice organizations.

Each field note that follows synthesizes participant discussion points that were raised and remained significant during the workshop.



"Consult elders."

"Transparency around process: how will they give back to the community?"



Field

#2 Engagement isn't the end goal. Use it to build durable partnerships.

Community engagement is built on trust — it creates the social infrastructure for people to shape a project, not just react to it. Real engagement is inclusive by design: meetings held at convenient times, in accessible languages, with food, childcare, and compensation for participants.

Engagement opens the door to dialogue, where strong community partnerships can turn conversations into shared visions. This engagement is most effective when project developers center and incorporate the expertise communities bring; when done right, it opens the doors to shared ownership mechanisms like co-designed research and community-led project monitoring. These are more than project features — they're signs of a project that is built to last.



"Communities are not a monolith, do your research, listen, and let them self-define."

#1 Move at the speed of trust.

Scaling carbon dioxide isn't linear; it requires a commitment to safety and trust. For communities, the credibility of a new project is judged against the success of the last. That is why building meaningful, long-term partnerships is more important for project success than just rapidly scaling. Trust takes shape through actions: learning a community's history, communicating risks and benefits openly, and sharing real decision-making power. That is how CDR moves forward — not just at scale, but with integrity.

Attendees underscored a simple truth: trust takes time, and trust is grounded in transparency.

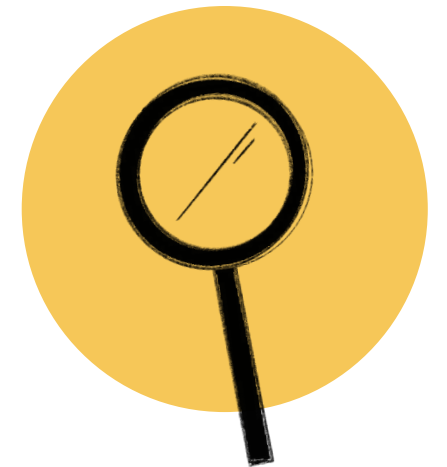
"Recognize that there are 'layers' of communities — local, state and regional (e.g., industrial corridors may have 'coalitions of communities')."



Notes



"Be financially transparent and show people how and why the money moves."



"No unethical filtering."

#3 Define community.

Projects should start with a sense of who the community is, shaped by resident perspectives. Defining a community means asking: Who's at the table? Who's missing? Who bears the risks? Who has the time and resources to engage, and who doesn't? What do different groups within the community want to see?

One approach: gather people to talk through project impacts, group them by proximity to the project, and surface their distinct priorities and concerns. It's easier said than done, but addressing the nuance thoughtfully can make engagement more impactful.



Major Themes



The following are the major themes that appeared throughout both sets of recommendations.

Consent

Consent is an ongoing process, grounded in dialogue and built over time. It should be informed, freely given, and freely withdrawn when promises go unmet or community concerns go unaddressed.

Meaningful involvement

Residents want multiple opportunities to make decisions and share their expertise during the lifespan of a project.



Getting off on the right foot

First impressions seem to last a long time. Communities may place deep value on their initial interactions with developers. The most memorable conversations are those that open with dialogue about values and the outcomes communities hope to see.

Relationships, not experiments

Participants noted that words like “experiment” or “demonstration” can quickly trigger fear or uneasiness, often signaling to residents that they weren’t included in early planning. To ease this tension, developers can emphasize the importance of being specific: grounding conversations in the details of the project, the region, and its expected local impacts.

Recommendations

1. Co-create projects

When you approach a community, bring an idea rather than a ready-to-scale project, and invite the community to explore it. Engaging early helps surface gaps in a project plan, challenge assumptions, avoid duplicating existing efforts, and set standards for accessibility and inclusion. If a project is already underway, it's still essential to tap into community expertise in areas where communities can meaningfully shape what's left, like the co-development of project monitoring standards and data-sharing agreements.

2. Look deeper into cumulative impacts

Communities want project inputs and outputs that are co-researched, co-built, co-designed, and co-created, especially if they've encountered project deployment in the past. In particular, working with local residents to identify preexisting stressors, including source pollutants and environmental risks, may lead to projects that better reflect community priorities and local experiences.

3. Formalize accountability

Trust must be earned and reinforced. Tools like community benefits plans (CBPs), community benefits agreements (CBAs), project labor agreements (PLAs), and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) help make commitments concrete. They clarify what a project will deliver, how it will operate, and what a community can expect in return. This ensures all parties are aligned and working towards shared outcomes.

4. Support community expertise

Local knowledge is invaluable and can solve long-standing challenges and surface new questions. Go beyond project-specific outreach and invite community members into broader conversations. That might mean including local researchers or hiring community members as consulting experts rather than relying on outside firms.



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