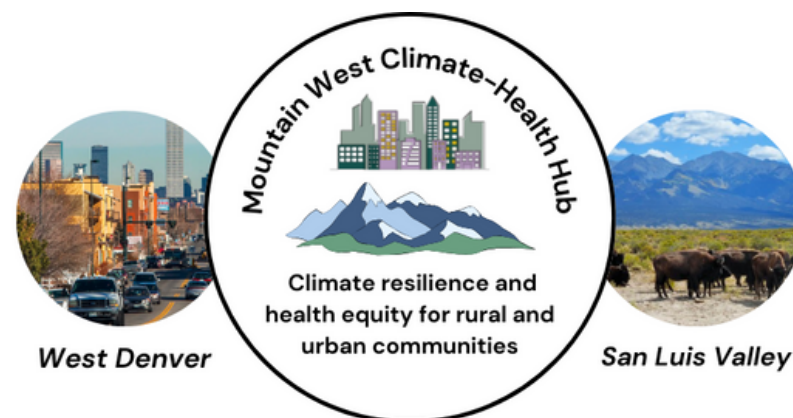




# West Denver Climate Conversations Guide

**Empowering the West Denver Community to Understand, Discuss,  
and Act on Climate Change**

Created by The Mountain West Climate-Health Engagement Hub



colorado school of  
**public health**  
Public Health Elevated

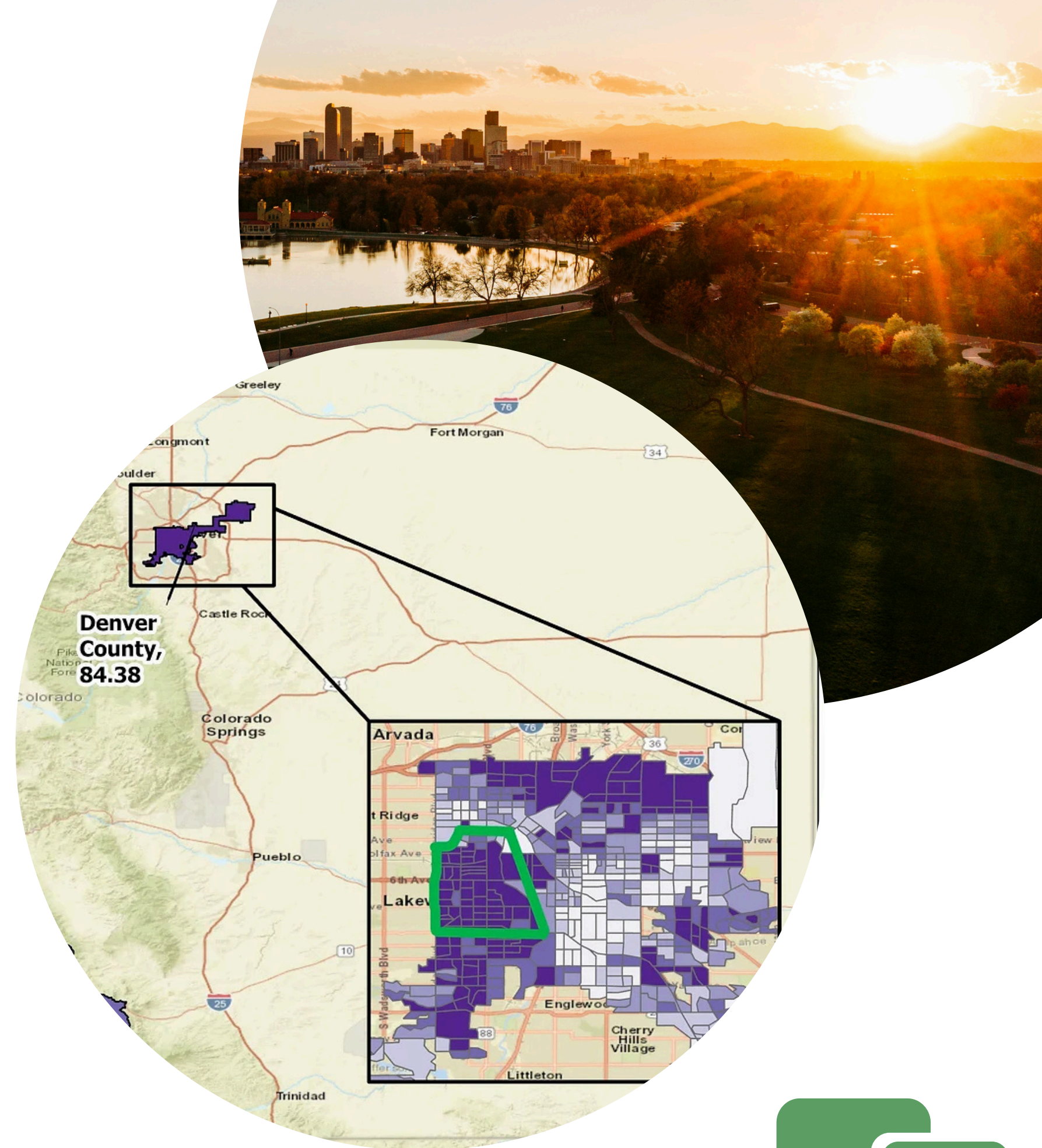
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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO



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- Introduction to the Climate Conversation Guide
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# Introduction

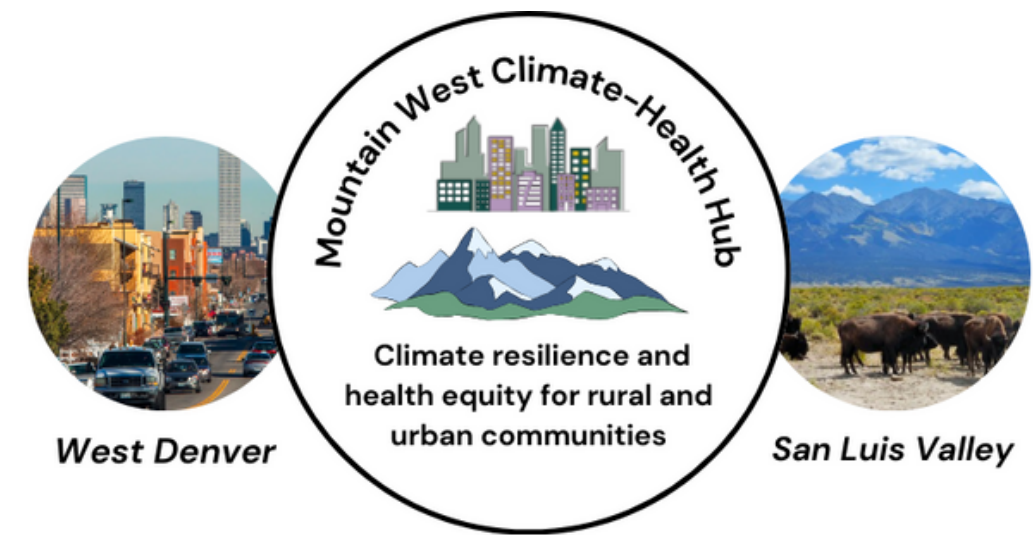
to the Climate Conversation Guide



# About the Mountain West Hub

The **Mountain West Climate-Health Engagement Hub** was launched in March 2023 to promote **climate resilience** and **health equity** for rural and urban communities in the Mountain West region. To help us share knowledge exchange, build capacity, and work towards action, we have worked with **West Denver community leaders and residents**, along with researchers with expertise in climate change and health, and environmental policy and practice experts.

Our advisory boards **identified resourcefulness, strong social networks, and community education** as crucial factors that **enhance community resilience**. They also expressed a strong desire to be able to talk with more of their community members and neighbors about climate change in order to drive meaningful action. **We formed the West Denver Climate Conversations Core and worked together to build this guide as a resource to engage diverse audiences and build capacity for climate action.**



“  
Throughout this guide, we've included quotes from our West Denver community advisory board members to highlight key points and perspectives.  
”



**Climate Resilience:** refers to the ability for communities to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from climate change related adversity, such as extreme weather events, drought, air pollution and/or wildfire

**Health Equity:** a state where historical and current forms of injustice have been addressed so that everyone in a society has equal opportunity to be as healthy as possible



# Who is this guide for?

This guide has been **built to help West Denver community advocates** reach out to others in their communities and bring them into the climate space. It was **designed for everyone** who wants to **positively impact their community** by facilitating meaningful discussions around climate change.

**As a West Denver community advocate**, we hope that you will read through this guide, take the lessons that work for you, and use them to have your own conversations with neighbors, friends, family members, elected officials, co-workers, and anyone else who needs to be a part of our collective climate story!





# Why talk about climate?



## **It's impacting West Denver communities.**

We know that climate stressors, including heat, air quality, wildfires, and drought, affect West Denver communities in a lot of ways.

**Conversation tip:** "Climate change" can feel really big. Make the conversation more specific by talking about climate stressors that matter to your conversation partner(s).



## **People care about climate change.**

Those living in West Denver may care a lot about things that are connected to climate without really thinking about these connections. In other words, people probably care a lot about climate change and climate stressors without always knowing that they do.

**Conversation tip:** Start your conversation by asking what your conversation partner cares about. Their kids' health and safety? Make connections between these concerns and hopes and climate action.







## Advocacy and action is underway.

Denver is already doing a lot to fight climate change and improve people's lives through climate action.

**West Denver communities** worked hard to create the **West Area Plan**, which puts residents' quality of life front and center and includes lots of climate-related pieces. Thanks to the advocacy of Denver residents, Denver's **Climate Protection Fund** was created to support community-driven projects.

**Conversation tip:** Emphasize the "wins". What have community members already achieved by coming together and working for change? This guide contains more examples. It is important to share positive messages about what is happening in Denver and how people can be a part of that.



“

[We] really [need to be] deeply engaging in communities, creating supportive initiatives, and technical assistance around the work in general.

”





# How to use it

This guide is meant to be practical and adaptable. We've structured it to support a variety of settings and purposes, **whether you're having a one-on-one discussion, hosting a town hall meeting, or leading a workshop. Here's how to get started:**

1

## **Read and Reflect.**

Familiarize yourself with the content, paying attention to sections most relevant to your audience. Consider how climate issues personally or professionally affect your community.

2

## **Tailor Your Approach.**

Each community and each gathering is unique, so customize the conversation points based on your setting and what matters to your conversation partner. For example, focus on air quality in urban areas or drought impacts in agricultural regions.



4

## Facilitate & Listen.

Effective conversations involve listening as much as talking. Be open to diverse perspectives and encourage a respectful exchange of ideas.

5

## Take Action.

Use the final section of the guide to identify next steps your community can take, whether through community building, policy engagement, community projects, or everyday lifestyle changes.

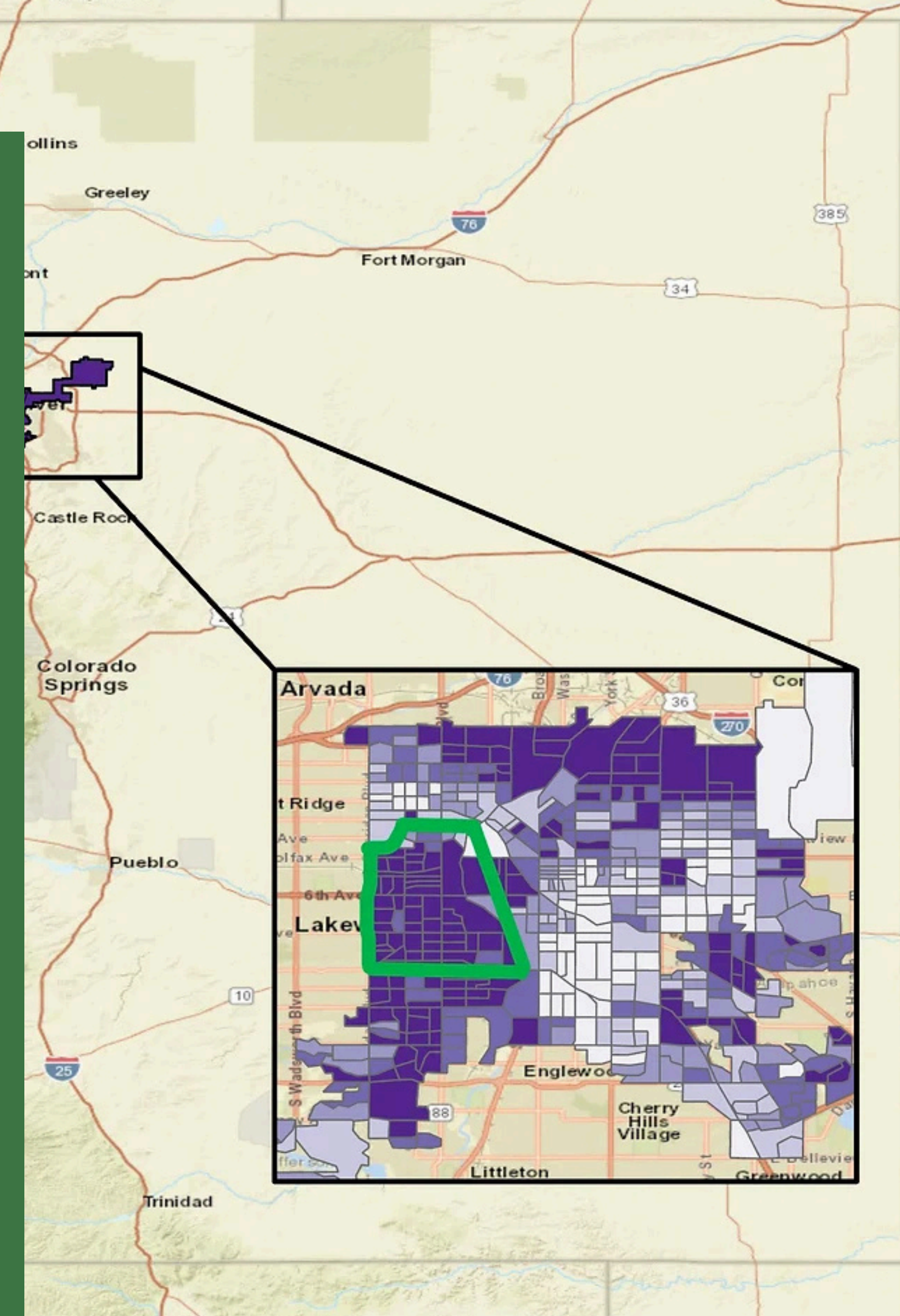
We envision this guide as a living resource—one that evolves as climate awareness and adaptations in West Denver grow. Let it be a springboard for capacity and resilience-building.



“  
**Acknowledging the  
inadequacies of  
existing systems,  
which have  
contributed to  
failures, propels us  
toward a more  
promising path  
forward.**  
”

HOW





# Climate Impacts

in the West Denver Community



# Climate Stressors of Concern

Local voices are most important. The community has expressed the following climate stressor concerns:

- **Human, built, and natural environment:** Climate impacts on our health, infrastructure, and natural spaces are interconnected, and challenges in one area, like extreme heat or poor air quality, can affect the others, shaping the resilience of our whole community.
- **Air quality:** A measure of how much pollution there is in the air.
- **Wildfires:** Unplanned fires that occur in a natural area. They can be caused by human activities or by natural forces like lightning.
- **Drought:** A prolonged period of abnormally dry weather.



“The wildfires that occurred up by Boulder, you know, we breathe the same air, and it's closer to proximity to us.”



# Climate Stressors & Health Risks



**Respiratory Issues:** Poor air quality due to proximity to industry and highways, linked to historical injustices and worsened by climate change and wildfires, leads to increased respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis, especially affecting vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and outdoor workers.



**Mental Health Effects:** The stress and anxiety associated with extreme weather events and climate instability contribute to a rise in climate-related mental health issues.



**Heat-Related Illnesses:** Rising temperatures and more frequent heatwaves increase risks of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, particularly for those who work outside or lack access to cooling resources.



“

**"There's a lot of kids here who do have asthma, which I know the air quality has a great effect on those kids who have asthma."**

”



# Concerns & Strengths

The community has concerns, but also has many strengths that can help address these concerns. Acknowledging and addressing these concerns and community strengths is key to communicating solutions.



## Concerns

Gentrification, reduced community connections, safety issues, and a lack of accessible resources exacerbate vulnerabilities. There is also a deep-seated distrust of institutions.



## Strengths

West Denver's diversity, resourcefulness, and the strength of family and social connections contribute to community cohesion. Youth engagement in climate initiatives is seen as a positive force.



**The foundation of trust within the community heals the wounds inflicted by longstanding racism, poverty, and addiction, fostering a sense of belonging.**







# How to Talk About it

with and on behalf of the West Denver Community



# Key Terms

There are strategies and tools you can use to effectively communicate about climate change to different types of audiences within your community.

Here are some general terms to keep in your back pocket:



## **Climate Change**

Long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns



## **Health Equity**

A state where historical and current forms of injustice have been addressed so that everyone in a society has equal opportunity to be as healthy as possible.



## **Environmental Justice**

The concept that all people deserve equal protection from pollution





# Picking your audience

This guide is for West Denver community advocates and champions who are want to bring more of their community members into their climate story.

Using the tips in this guide, some of the people you might want to talk to include:



## **Community Leaders & Organizers**

People involved in local initiatives who can spark action and engagement within community settings.



## **Local Government & Policymakers**

Officials seeking to engage with constituents on climate impacts and policies, fostering informed community input



## **Businesses**

Local employers and business groups looking to take action in business practices and to inform community members through business communications.



## **Educators & Youth Leaders**

Teachers, mentors, and youth group coordinators looking to inform and inspire the next generation about climate issues and solutions.



## **Health & Safety Advocates**

Professionals concerned with how climate change affects public health and worker safety, especially at-risk individuals.



## **General Public**

Individuals who want to better understand climate change and how it affects their families, homes, and livelihoods.



# Successful Messaging Tips

To craft a successful message and communicate effectively about climate change and associated health impacts, we recommend the following:



## **Consider your relationship with your audience.**

A person is more likely to be receptive to facts and evidence when provided by someone they trust. 67% of Americans are comfortable discussing climate change with family members, while 64% feel the same with friends. Fewer feel comfortable with co-workers (29%) and elected officials (23%). (EcoAmerica, 2024).



## **Meet People Where They Are and Listen Strategically.**

Begin conversations by exploring the other person's views and concerns, using open-ended questions tied to their experiences. Use relatable, local examples and personal stories to make climate change tangible, as facts alone often don't resonate emotionally.

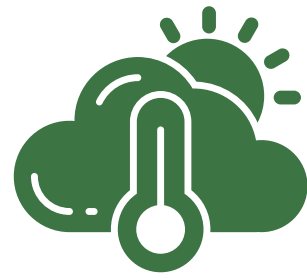


## **Link to Broader Issues and Appeal to Shared Values.**

Climate change should be framed as interconnected with other key issues, such as health and the economy, to broaden its appeal. We encourage highlighting benefits like clean air and job creation, presenting climate action as a way to support both public health and economic growth.







## **Keep It Simple.**

Explaining climate change can be challenging. Here are some tips for making complex processes easier to understand.



## **Use Everyday Comparisons.**

Relate climate concepts to familiar, everyday experiences. For example, you could explain greenhouse gases by comparing them to a blanket that traps heat, keeping the Earth warmer.



## **Break it Down & Avoid Technical Jargon.**

Divide complex topics into smaller, digestible pieces with simple language. Avoid scientific terms when possible and explain one concept at a time, such as the causes of air pollution before discussing its effects on health.



## **Use Visuals.**

Graphs, maps, and illustrations can clarify complex ideas. For example, show a map of local air quality trends over time to explain the impact of pollution.



# Consider Your Phrasing

The choice of the right words can be the difference between being heard and being shut down. The following tips should help you successfully build a climate change message that is best suited to your community. Embrace these terms in replacement of others.

Embrace	Replace	Because...
<b>We Can</b>	We Should	"We can" is positive, it empowers, and it has multiple meanings, such as a can-do attitude, collective action, and choice. "We should" is punitive and implies a lack of choice or conviction.
<b>Damage to the climate</b>	Climate change, climate crisis, global warming	"Damage" implies human causation, which can be prevented or protected against. Other terms are too politically polarizing.
<b>Dirty fuels, out-of-date fuels, outdated fuels</b>	Dirty energy, fossil fuel energy	Pairing "dirty" with "fuel" ties together oil, coal, and gas, which need to be burned to create energy, and helps emphasize that the goal is not to reduce or halt the creation of energy, but to improve the process to reduce the impact on the climate.
<b>Building stronger communities</b>	Build resilient communities	The term "resilient" is not a readily understood term by many Americans; it feels defensive and creates mixed feelings. Americans prefer to live in "stronger communities," a phrase that feels more empowered and inspired.

Table content from the National League of Cities (2016)





# Example Conversation Starters

Here are some examples to help you visualize how to use our successful messaging tips.



## **Start with Local, Relatable Experiences.**

"Hey, have you noticed how the summers here in West Denver seem to be getting hotter each year? I've been feeling it, especially with my kids playing outside."



## **Link Climate Change to Health and Safety.**

"With all the wildfire smoke we've been having, I've started worrying about air quality here. It can't be good for anyone with breathing issues. It seems like these fires are happening more and more...which makes our air quality even worse."



## **Frame as a Community Economic Opportunity.**

"I was reading about how other cities are creating jobs in clean energy, like solar panel installations. I think our community could really benefit from more options like that, especially as utility costs keep rising. Imagine how many people could benefit from more affordable energy."



## **Emphasize Shared Values and Community Solutions.**

"You know, I think we all want a healthy future for our kids and a safe community. Things like community gardens or energy-saving upgrades could be a great way to improve West Denver for everyone, make it greener, and even save money in the long run. I think it would make a difference for our kids and future generations."







# Action Today: Policy & Practice

for the West Denver Community



# Engaging Your Networks



## **Mobilize Through Connections.**

Start by reaching out to friends, family, colleagues, and local organizations who care about community well-being. Share relevant climate information, inspire conversations, and encourage them to get involved in climate action initiatives.



## **Host & Connect.**

Organize community gatherings, workshops, or climate action events. These can be informational sessions, neighborhood cleanups, tree-planting days, or discussion panels to connect people around shared climate goals.



## **Form Partnerships.**

Collaborate with local businesses, schools, nonprofits, or civic groups to create joint projects or events that expand your impact and reach a larger audience.



“

**We’ve survived racism, redlining, displacement, colonization, genocide, sterilization, exclusion, and stereotypes... that our resiliency can lead the charge in whatever challenges or changes come our way.**

”





### **Use Social Platforms to Amplify Your Message.**

Share climate content, events, and action steps on social media. Encourage others to spread the word by resharing, tagging local leaders, or using community-specific hashtags.



### **Leverage Skills for Collective Impact:**

Maximize the resources within West Denver.



#### **Education:**

Community members with teaching or public speaking skills can host educational events or contribute to local newsletters.



#### **Advocacy:**

Engage those with a passion for policy to connect with local officials, write letters, or speak at public hearings.



#### **Volunteer Opportunities**

Encourage volunteers to support local initiatives like park cleanups, food waste reduction programs, or climate-friendly neighborhood projects.



# Influencing Policy

Understanding how to influence local and regional policies is key to effective advocacy. **Some advocacy strategies include:**



## Public Comment Sessions.

Participate in city and regional hearings to voice your concerns and support for climate-friendly policies. Prepare brief, impactful statements to share your perspective on climate actions. [Learn more](#) about how to participate in a local hearing.



## Write Letters and Emails.

A well-crafted letter or email to your representatives can make a difference. Use personal stories, highlight local impacts, and emphasize the urgency of climate action to make your message compelling. [Learn how](#) to write a letter to your local leaders.



## Meet with Decision-Makers

Schedule meetings with local officials to discuss your climate priorities directly. Go with a clear message, supporting data, and suggestions for action to make a lasting impression. [Learn more](#) about how to communicate with policymakers.





# Contact Your Government Officials

Level	Contact Info		
Local Government	Look up your local government officials at <a href="http://www.usa.gov/local-governments">www.usa.gov/local-governments</a>		
State Legislature	Look-up contact information for your state legislators at <a href="http://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites">www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites</a>		
Governor	Look-up contact information at <a href="http://www.usa.gov/state-governor">www.usa.gov/state-governor</a>		
Level	Writing	Calling	Emailing
Congress	Find your US Senator or Representative <a href="http://www.house.gov">www.house.gov</a> <a href="http://www.senate.gov">www.senate.gov</a>	Call Capitol Switchboard to be transferred to your US Senator or Representative 202-224-3121	Find your US Senator or Representative <a href="http://www.house.gov">www.house.gov</a> <a href="http://www.senate.gov">www.senate.gov</a>
White House	The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20500	Call Comment Line, 202-456-1111	<a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact">www.whitehouse.gov/contact</a>

# Encouraging Action

By taking some simple steps, setting personal goals, and connecting with others, **you can make a lasting impact** and help build a more sustainable community.



## Take Simple Steps Today.

Switch to LED bulbs, unplug electronics, and adjust your thermostat to save energy. Support local sustainability by choosing eco-friendly businesses. Stay informed by attending public meetings and climate discussions to make your voice heard.



## Set Goals & Celebrate Successes

Set specific, achievable goals like reducing household waste by 20% or volunteering for a community project. Track your progress over time, and celebrate each milestone to stay motivated. Encourage friends, family, or social media networks to join you in climate-friendly actions by sharing your progress and inspiring others.







## **Stay Connected and Informed.**

Community and knowledge are the strongest assets.



### **Join a Climate Action Group:**

Connect with local organizations that align with your interests, whether it's conservation, renewable energy, or sustainable agriculture.



### **Ongoing Learning:**

Explore educational programs through local universities, libraries, or online platforms that offer workshops and resources on climate action.



### **Government and Nonprofit Resources:**

Visit websites for local government agencies, environmental nonprofits, and public utilities to access tools, incentives, and events focused on sustainability.





# Final Notes

for the West Denver Community



# The Individual's Roadmap

A summary of how individuals can begin making changes to support climate resilience within their home and community.

- ☐ **Get comfortable talking about climate change & action:** Use the talking points in this guide to practice conversing with different members of your own direct network and community.
- ☐ **Practice what you preach:** Implement energy saving initiatives in your own home and support local businesses.
- ☐ **Get involved:** Join a local climate action group and/or initiative that supports reducing climate impacts in West Denver.
- ☐ **Act like a local leader:** You are a leader in climate action. Organize others with similar concerns within your community and communicate these concerns to local government officials.





# The Community Leader's Roadmap

A summary of how a community leader can begin making changes to support climate resilience within their community.

- ☐ **Make a Commitment:** Make a public commitment to support climate resilience initiatives in public comments, and feature a declaration on your website.
- ☐ **Establish Priorities and Develop Plans:** Identify which climate related challenges are occurring within your community and establish a plan to address these challenges.
- ☐ **Engage Your Community:** Utilize your networks, whether businesses, higher education, health care, or faith. Organize community gatherings to bring together leaders from different backgrounds.
- ☐ **Aim for Quick Successes:** Borrow successful ideas from other communities and follow suit. Build upon these successes to incite support for larger projects and initiatives.





# Next Steps for West Denver

## Opportunities to Improve Resilience

- Focus on community-led initiatives, advocating for equitable policies, and strengthening partnerships to support green infrastructure.
- Education, climate change awareness campaigns, and collaboration with existing organizations can increase climate resilience.
- Create plans to provide climate education in schools and explore sustainable infrastructure options like installing solar panels and creating shaded public spaces.

## Current Ways to Get Involved

Connect with local organizations and government initiatives that are building climate resilience in West Denver. [See this resource for current opportunities.](#)



**Climate Resilience:** refers to the ability for communities to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from climate change related adversity, such as extreme weather events, drought, air pollution and/or wildfire

**Health Equity:** a state where historical and current forms of injustice have been addressed so that everyone in a society has equal opportunity to be as healthy as possible

# Resources



## Policy Related

- [Communicating with legislators](#)
- [Guide to participating in public hearings](#)



## Audience Specific

- [Climate Conversation Guide: Turn Your Words into Action](#)
- [Climate solutions for your workplace](#)
- [Moving Forward: A Guide to Building Momentum on Climate Solutions in Your Community](#)
- [Moving Forward: A Guide for Health Professionals to Build Momentum on Climate Action](#)
- [A Guide to Climate Action For Your Congregation and Community](#)



## Conversation Building Activities and Statistics

- [Community Activity and Discussion Guide](#)
- [American Climate Metrics Survey 2024: Guidance for the Climate Movement](#)





# The Mountain West Hub



<https://www.mw-climatehealth.com>



<https://www.mw-climatehealth.com/contact-us>

Based at the [Colorado School of Public Health](#)  
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through the Alliance for Community Engagement for Climate and Health.



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