



ClimeTime Case Study: Nurturing Partnership through the Whatcom County Collaborative

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ClimeTime Case Study: Nurturing Partnership through the Whatcom County Collaborative

Background

[ClimeTime](#) is a statewide initiative facilitated by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) through a Washington state legislative proviso. Governor Jay Inslee originally requested an annual \$4 million investment for the proviso in 2018-19, which has continued as a \$3 million investment in 2019-20 and 2020-21. Proviso grant funding flows through all nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) and six community-based organizations (CBOs) in Washington. With this funding, the ESDs and CBOs have launched programs for science teacher training, linking the [Next Generation Science Standards](#) (NGSS) and climate science.

This case study addresses the work of the Whatcom County Collaborative, a group of ClimeTime awardees who are grounded in partnership, common vision, and shared community. Partners noted Whatcom County is saturated with people interested in issues related to conservation and climate change, and the region boasts numerous environmental education programs. Many of the partners worked together in various capacities before receiving support from ClimeTime funding in 2018. An ESD partner explained that the CBOs had “started the work of coordinating before ClimeTime existed because of the county...there’s lots of interest in environmental education opportunities for students.” Figure 1, below, illustrates the members of the Collaborative.

Figure 1: Whatcom County Collaborative Members



Initially, the more formalized partnership began between the [Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association](#) (NSEA) and [Re Sources: Sustainable Schools](#), both dedicated to educating and empowering teachers and students around topics related to climate science. Their partnership formed organically in response to the shared aspects of their missions. One CBO partner elaborated that they have “always paired up... to build on each other’s work and not compete so much, because there’s a minute [amount] of funding in the nonprofit world for the same type of work that we’re all hungry to do.” For the ClimeTime initiative, the existing partners brought in additional partners, including [Wild Whatcom](#) and [Common Threads](#). Both of these CBOs also provide professional development for teachers focused on different issues related to climate science.

“It’s a pretty tight community up here and we are fortunate...to have a lot of folks wanting to sit at the table together and try to figure out how to collaborate more. We’ve called ourselves the Whatcom Environmental Educators Coalition.”

– CBO partner

Since receiving ClimeTime funding, the Collaborative has brought together additional partners, including the [Northwest Educational Service District \(NWESD\)](#), [Lummi Nation](#), and the [Northwest Indian College](#). This funding and the ClimeTime network have supported the collaborative in expanding and deepening relationships with each other and surrounding schools.

This case study is based on interviews with seven partners, each with a unique organizational perspective. It explores the strengths and challenges of working as a collaborative and the influence of the ClimeTime initiative on the CBOs, teachers, and students.

Partnership and Collaboration

While most ClimeTime grantees are standalone CBOs or coordinators at an ESD, the Whatcom County Collaborative brought together six organizations, later transitioning to four CBOs. While each organization has a different content and grade-level focus, they are all passionate about empowering teachers to [take their students outside](#) to learn and explore the environment.

Strengths

Participants listed many strengths of their partnership, including trusting relationships, effective collaboration, and the sharing of unique areas of expertise. Overall, there is a theme of being stronger together. All partners recognize the power of harnessing each other’s strengths and aligning their work to make a larger impact.

- **Trusting relationships:** Across all interviews, participants noted the importance of leaning on and forming strong relationships with each other. Many of the ClimeTime participants worked together in various settings before formalizing their partnership through the ClimeTime grant, which provided them with a foundation to expand and deepen their work. One participant noted the importance of these strong relationships in the face of COVID-19, saying:

“Our relationships were already so strong coming into this year—helped us lean on each other and collaborate really effectively even though it often felt that we didn't have solid ground.” – CBO partner

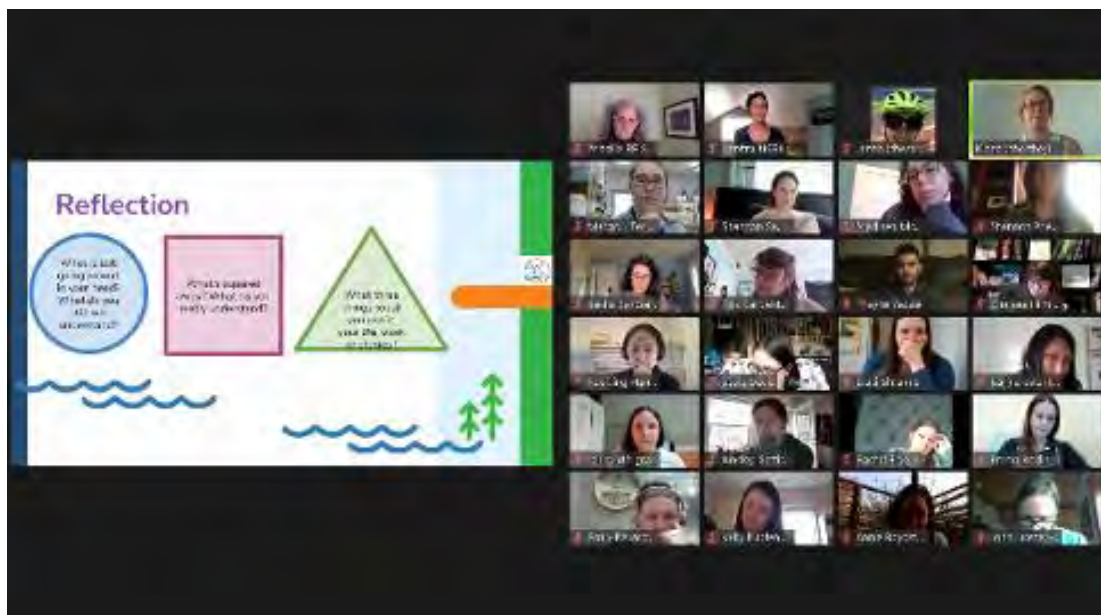
- **Effective collaboration:** Participants noted that partners shared the workload of the collaborative, which often requires additional work in their day-to-day programming. Partnership members stepped up to handle extra work, depending on their capacity. One participated noted:

“We have a group [who] not only gets along really well, but one where everyone is willing to raise their hand and take on tasks...We do a really good job of sharing the load.” – CBO partner

- **Unique areas of expertise:** Participants reported that by working together, each organization could focus on deepening their area knowledge, both in content and grade level. This capacity encourages organizations to become experts in certain aspects of climate science professional learning, both increasing the reach across grade levels and minimizing duplicative efforts in the region.

“We each have our niche and our grade-level focus, where we can focus our efforts and be great at that...What brings us together in these collaborative efforts over and over again is that we stick to our lane and be great at it. And our reach can be so much greater because we can approach a school district and say, ‘We can meet all of your students, not just our [grades] of expertise.’” – CBO partner

Figure 2: Whatcom County Collaborative Zoom Session



Spotlight: Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing through Collaboration

As the collaborative embarked on their work with ClimeTime, the CBO partners knew they wanted to [center and integrate Indigenous ways of knowing](#) in their professional learning experiences. However, they were humbled by the endeavor.

“I remember year one, just feeling so lost and helpless in the Indigenous ways of knowing piece... [and] we definitely didn’t want to utilize the [ClimeTime] funding just to throw money at tribal participation and check off a box. We wanted it to be integrated and authentic...and that really does take time, trust, and relationship building.” – CBO partner

To expand the partnership in a meaningful way through network and relationships, the CBO partners reached out to [Lummi Nation](#) and the [Northwest Indian College](#) to join the partnership. CBO leaders leveraged existing relationships formed by meeting at previous local events and through other grant work. In 2019, Lummi Nation and the Northwest Indian College began to regularly facilitate components of the ClimeTime professional development.

CBO leaders and a participating teacher noted how the sessions led by Lummi Nation and the Northwest Indian College staff are among the most meaningful and engaging for participants. The participating teacher noted that they were sparked to continue learning about the history of the Coast Salish. One CBO leader shared:

“It’s been wonderful to watch [Lummi Nation staff] grow and become more comfortable. That comfort level has brought so much value to our project...It was hands down the favorite part of the professional development that we just led last month.” – CBO partner

Challenges

Across the interviews, partners described a few barriers affecting their work and collaboration. One CBO leader noted the challenge of being a participating organization but not the formal grant holder. Another participant spoke to challenges associated with staff turnover, a common occurrence for small CBOs and non-profit organizations in general. Since the work is grounded in relationships, turnover can disrupt the shared workload, as explained by one partner: “Other teams are fabulous, but they’re newer and so folks are greener...I want to make sure that [they] can do the same amount of work, and the same level of work, that we’re putting in.” Additionally, two participants mentioned the challenge of scheduling time to meet with each other.

Influence on Community-Based Organization Practice

Participants spoke to the value of the ClimeTime initiative in building individual and organizational capacity around culturally responsive professional development, NGSS, and assessment. Additionally, they reported that the ClimeTime network increased their visibility in the community.

- **Building capacity:** CBO partners shared their appreciation for ClimeTime, particularly their partnership with NWESD and the [University of Washington Institute for Science + Math Education](#), in building their own organizational capacity.

“From the simple ways of incorporating land acknowledgments on field trips now, as students, to finding [the] newest, coolest resources that are way above my head but wanting to weave them into programming...I mean [ClimeTime influence], is all over the place.” – CBO partner

Specifically, participants spoke to their increased understanding of NGSS through support from NWESD ClimeTime. One CBO partner shared, “I didn’t really understand NGSS when we started – I’ve been to trainings, but I still didn’t get it. And now I totally get it.” Additionally, the University of Washington supported CBO staff members’ growth in [assessment](#), leading sessions for participating teachers. A CBO partner related, “It’s been fun for me...Being able to tie in [NGSS] to some of these assessments for this group to support and use and adapt has been a good challenge.” Another CBO partner reflected that the interest in assessment forged a path for her to learn and explore formal assessment more closely: “Working through assessment with NGSS in mind...It’s a lot to put together but seeing how [another CBO partner] was able to break it down with some of the resources: that has been a steppingstone for me to attempt to do it as well.”

- **Network and visibility:** Participants shared that the ClimeTime network and name have increased recognition for the CBOs in the region, supporting the spread of their work. Additionally, partners spoke about the ClimeTime summits as spaces to meet with other organizations to learn more about their strengths and challenges for engaging in similar work statewide.

“I just I think overall as an influence is the open doors and all the resources and all the knowledge gain, and the information just bleeds into everything else we do and how we engage with our community and students and teachers and volunteers and how we approach our messaging...It’s really helped me connect more with the district administrative staff and the teachers.” – CBO partner

Influence on Teacher Practice

Partners and a teacher discussed the influence the professional development has had on teachers and their practice. Specifically, professional learning sessions have prompted teachers to act as climate science advocates, shifted teacher mindsets, and inspired curiosity.

- **Climate science advocates:** CBO partners witnessed teachers participate in the training and then go back to their schools and districts and share what they have learned. Further, the trainings provide a forum for CBO partners to offer additional trainings and resources that teachers can pursue and share with their colleagues.

“I see [teachers] as allies at the school, knowing that they’ll be spreading...what they learn to the teaching community. Their confidence is inspiring.... I love that [some of the same] teachers come back. It keeps us motivated to keep upping our game.” – CBO partner

Partners also noticed that teachers who participated in the ClimeTime trainings want to, and begin to, collaborate with each other and other groups and resources related to climate science.

- **Mindset shifts:** CBO partners shared stories of changes in teachers’ beliefs. One partner described a fifth grade teacher who was “terrified” of and “totally not interested” in bringing her students outside. After the teacher participated in a ClimeTime outside workshop, she understood the value and changed her perspective. She came back year after year to continue learning new ways to engage her students outside, sending pictures every time she tried these strategies with her own students. Another CBO partner agreed, saying:

“I have seen more and more teachers not afraid to take kids outside...I’ve seen more and more teachers understand that science isn’t just an experiment.” – CBO partner

Figure 3: Teachers Engage in an [*I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me of* lesson](#)



- **Curiosity and continued learning:** The Collaborative’s partners shared examples of teachers who were so excited about learning or re-learning science concepts that they continued to sign up for professional learning opportunities. This enthusiasm was echoed by the teacher whom the evaluation team interviewed. She explained:

“There was a lot that I did not know, which was delicious to learn. Carbon calculators and water use calculators blew me away; I could not stop calculating my own personal usages. My students really enjoyed that also. What it takes to bring one dinner plate to the table...I did that with my class, and we were just beside ourselves.” – Teacher

Influence on Students

Although the interviews focused on the impacts for teachers, some participants spoke to the intended influence of the professional learning on students. Participants shared stories of students **responding to the climate science curriculum with actions**, including writing to the mayor, changing behaviors at home, and probing for further questions. One teacher explained:

“Kids really do care and really want to make a difference...When one student comes and says, ‘Look at all the trash I collected,’ the next week, five students will come in with the trash they’ve collected.”

Looking Ahead

Partners are eager to continue expanding their reach to as many teachers and students as possible. They hope their trainings will prompt teachers to “utilize the outdoors as a classroom and push beyond those four walls” and equip teachers with the skills and confidence to do so. Additionally, the partners hope to continue working together and to building on each other’s work.

“We, as nonprofits, know that we need and want to stick together to serve the community the best that we can. We can do a lot more together in lots of different ways; in teacher trainings, these organizations, along with some other nonprofits, joined together to put on outdoor learning for some higher needs students in Whatcom County. We work together and we all know and have had the experience and have the trust that when we join together, we can do even greater things than if we forge a path by ourselves.”