

FREE PUBLIC WORKSHOP

Overcoming Tensions in Climate and Sustainability Governance

A Workshop on Participatory Tools for Improving Local Democratic Processes for Sustainability

 DATE

Friday, April 24, 2026

 TIME

9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

 LOCATION

Lifelong Learning Center
3 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, NJ

Why This Workshop Matters

Communities across New Jersey are on the front lines of climate and environmental change — from coastal flooding and extreme heat to decisions about where renewable energy gets built and how land is managed for future resilience. These problems are increasingly complex, drawing on the best available science. Yet all too often, the people most affected by these decisions face challenges in learning about and participating in solving the problems.

This workshop brings together researchers, practitioners, state and local officials, and communities to tackle a practical question: ***How do we make sustainability governance more participatory, equitable, and effective?***

You will hear from experts who have wrestled with these challenges in real communities — and spend the afternoon learning hands-on tools you can bring back to your own work.

- Hear from practitioners and researchers about why communities are shut out of sustainability decisions — and what changes that.
- Learn proven participatory tools being used in communities nationwide, presented by specialists who use them.
- Discuss how these approaches could be applied to pressing challenges in New Jersey.
- Connect with a network of planners, advocates, and academics working on these issues across the region.

Workshop Schedule

MORNING: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

9:00–9:30	Registration, Breakfast & Welcome <i>Coffee, light refreshments, and opening remarks</i>
9:30–10:50	Panel 1: Why Is Governing Sustainability So Hard? <i>Experts from environmental science, public health, environmental justice, and state government discuss why communities struggle to participate in complex sustainability decisions — and what's at stake when they can't.</i>
11:00–12:00	Panel 2: Reimagining Democratic Governance <i>Practitioners share real-world examples of making environmental governance more inclusive, from urban climate adaptation to coastal fisheries management.</i>
12:00–12:45	Networking Lunch

AFTERNOON: HANDS-ON PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

12:50–1:20	Tool 1: Environmental Competency Groups <i>Structured deliberation processes that bring community members up to speed on complex environmental science — and give them real decision-making power.</i>
1:20–1:50	Tool 2: Community-Based Vulnerability Assessments <i>Participatory approaches to mapping climate risks that center community knowledge alongside technical data.</i>
2:00–2:30	Tool 3: Participatory Scenario Planning <i>How communities can co-create visions of their climate futures and evaluate tradeoffs in land use and adaptation strategies.</i>
2:30–3:00	Tool 4: Multistakeholder Dialogues <i>Facilitated dialogue processes that bridge divides between government, industry, and community stakeholders on contested sustainability decisions.</i>
3:00–3:30	Synthesis and Next Steps <i>Identifying opportunities to pilot and apply these tools in New Jersey communities and beyond.</i>

Register Now — Space Is Limited

Registration deadline: April 15, 2026 | Free and open to the public

https://rutgers.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0wAqrKC5b5H3pgg

Part of Rutgers Democracy Lab's Solving Grand Challenges Month, April 2026

Questions? Contact organizers pamela.mcelwee@rutgers.edu and shwomrac@sebs.rutgers.edu