



MAKING AN IMPACT



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[Tara DePorte](#) has been thinking about how to engage people in environmental action for a long time. Since fourth grade, in fact, when she wrote her Northern Virginia congressman, urging him, with the clarity that only an elementary schooler can pull off, to help save the planet. She might have been young, but that didn't mean she couldn't see something big was happening—and it was time to bring people together and do something about it. Then the encouraging response came from her congressman, and she knew could help. The only question was how.

Fast forward a few decades and having earned a master's degree in climate and society from Columbia University and trained as a [Climate Reality Leader](#) with former U.S. Vice President Gore, she launched the Human Impacts Institute as a vehicle for rebranding action on climate change. Through her work at Columbia, she'd seen what was happening in the scientific and policy communities to tackle the crisis. But she'd also seen how the experts in these worlds were frequently struggling to break through and translate knowledge about climate change into action to solve it. They understood the science and the programs. But they didn't always understand people.

After training as a Climate Reality Leader, Tara decided to take a different approach, starting not with the science, but with the people it touches. Which means looking for what speaks to people on an individual level and listening as much as talking. "I want to be the person who can walk into any room and find a way to sit down at the table with someone and connect in a human way. For this, it means growing as a listener and also being okay with disagreement."

Creating connections is, for Tara, the first step to making climate change personal in a way that inspires audiences to do something about it. After all, when most people see what the issue means for their own lives and the people, places, and things that matter

most, simply standing by becomes a lot harder. Taking this insight, Tara works with the Human Impacts Institute to connect with audiences through arts and culture, hands-on experiences that encourage first-person understanding, and actions keyed to the specific values and interests that define particular communities.

It's work that comes without a tried-and-true roadmap, of course, and it means embracing experimentation and acting as a true social entrepreneur. "I am willing to take risks to fail, to have bad ideas," she says, "And if there are a couple of those initiatives that really work and inspire people to join us, then I consider that a great win." Along with these wins, have also come challenges, most notably building long-lasting coalitions. As she says, "It's easy to get people excited by an event or a program, but it's hard to develop opportunities that support long-term, beyond one-click actions."

It's also work that opens doors and brings together some unlikely allies. In a recent Human Impacts Salon in Atlanta on the role of faith in climate action, Tara was working with one of the original founders of the Tea Party movement. As she says, "I found myself being a bit nervous about speaking with her. I was concerned about my stereotypes or biases and whether we'd be able to find common ground. As it stands, I find her one of the more inspiring people to talk with about climate change." The experience taught her a great deal about how to talk about climate in ways that touched on the core values of U.S. conservatives. This bridge-building didn't end in Atlanta and in the months ahead, Tara and the Human Impacts Institute are partnering with Germany's to hold *Creative Climate* salons in eight U.S. cities and Berlin. The salons bring together creative visionaries with community leaders, environmental experts, and activists in events using live performance, arts, and discussion to explore new ways to engage audiences in climate solutions.

The organization is also partnering with StoryCorps to tell the story of these salons and the unlikely allies they bring together across the nation. So far, Tara's collected over 20 hours of interviews with men and women working in many different areas of climate action, from an environmental justice activist in Atlanta to an Episcopalian minister organizing her congregation for stewardship of the planet and from an environmentally conscious hip-hop artist to a Tea Party activist supporting renewable energy. Human Impacts will edit these interviews to be archived in the Library of Congress and aims to release them as podcasts in the future.

These are just some of the creative initiatives Tara is working on to make climate personal in communities around the U.S. with the [Human Impacts Institute](#). Want to step and learn how you can make the climate crisis personal for your own community? Apply to become a [Climate Reality Leader](#) like Tara and join former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and others at our [Brazil Training in Rio de Janeiro, November 4—6](#). The deadline for applications is October 10, so [apply today](#).



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