



**UCLA** Luskin Center  
for Innovation

Actionable  
Research  
for a  
Sustainable  
Future

2022 IMPACT REPORT



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# UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

2022 IMPACT REPORT

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## LETTER FROM THE Executive Team

Dear friends,

It has been a year of change. The climate crisis accelerated with devastating local impacts – unprecedented drought, record heat and catastrophic wildfire followed by flooding, to name a few.

It's also been a year of unprecedented progress. The largest ever federal investments in climate action, water infrastructure and clean energy. An initiative to ensure those investments benefit the most underserved. In California, the most ambitious anti-plastic pollution law and scaling of the most holistic community-driven climate program in the country.

The Luskin Center for Innovation team is proud of our contributions to these critical policies – **through actionable research, we're informing environmental solutions.**

Partners like you make our work possible. In collaboration with impacted communities, policymakers and other civic collaborators, we're working toward a more equitable and sustainable future.

But we're just getting started. We must overcome barriers by further understanding the conditions necessary for change at the local, state and federal levels.

This is why we are delighted to welcome Megan Mullin, a nationally renowned expert on environmental politics, as the endowed faculty director of the Luskin Center for Innovation. She will add the power of political analysis to our existing strengths in crafting just and feasible environmental solutions.

We are excited for our next era of impact with you, our partners. In the pages that follow we will introduce you to Megan, summarize the center's recent progress to be leveraged forward, and invite you to join us on that journey.

Onward and in solidarity,

**Colleen Callahan, Gregory Pierce and V. Kelly Turner**





## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to equitably solve environmental challenges through actionable research with impacted communities and policymakers.

## OUR PROGRAM AREAS

### Climate

Informing public policy to address global warming

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### Energy

Spurring energy efficiency and renewable energy innovation

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### Environmental Equity

Ensuring environmental benefits for all

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### Transportation

Accelerating the transition to zero-emission transportation

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### Urban Greening

Creating active, healthy and sustainable public spaces

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### Water

Advancing solutions for sustainable water systems



# Environmental politics scholar joins leadership team as faculty director

Megan Mullin — an award-winning scholar of American political institutions and behavior who focuses on environmental politics — has been appointed to two endowed positions within the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

In early 2023, Megan became the endowed faculty director of the Luskin Center for Innovation. She also joined the faculty of UCLA Public Policy as the Meyer and Renee Luskin Endowed Professor of Innovation and Sustainability. The Luskins recently endowed both the professorship and faculty director roles.

“Megan Mullin is a unique scholar whose work, at the intersection of environmental protection and the policy process, is perfectly suited to take the Center for Innovation to the next level,” said Gary Segura, outgoing dean of the Luskin School.

Mullin’s appointment comes at a time when urgent climate change challenges face California and the country. The path to solutions is steeped in politics — from local communities to the nation’s capital.

“I explore environmental policies that are just, effective and environmentally sustainable. Governance research can help ensure that policies are successfully implemented,” Mullin said.



Mullin’s areas of research include the governance and finance of urban water services, public opinion about climate change and the local politics of climate adaptation. As faculty director, Mullin plans to build upon the center’s work solving environmental challenges through collaborative, actionable research.

***“I’m delighted to help advance the Luskins’ vision of bringing UCLA’s expertise to confront our biggest public challenges.”***

**- MEGAN MULLIN, FACULTY DIRECTOR**

“The center is bringing that vision to life by collaborating with decision-makers and community members to make an on-the-ground impact in environmental policy,” Mullin said. “I look forward to joining that important work and furthering it.”



## By the Numbers

19

new reports and policy briefs

\$1.5 million

in contracts, grants and gifts

35

faculty and staff researchers

45

students directly supported

100+

partners and civic collaborators

15

policies and programs  
influenced through our research

120

media mentions including:

**abc** NEWS

New initiative helping White House fulfill environmental justice promise in marginalized communities

**Forbes**

Can President Biden get the clean energy standard across the goal line?

**UNIVISION**

Latinx communities are among the most vulnerable to extreme heat. Here's how we can prepare.

**The New York Times**

Can you solve drought by piping water across the country?

**Los Angeles Times**

Op-Ed: Can the L.A. River be rejuvenated without displacing low-income communities?

**The Guardian**

California to decide fate of controversial desalination plant amid brutal drought

20 community events



Internationally renowned environmental leader Mary Nichols (photo center) in conversation with our co-executive director Colleen Callahan (right) and professor Tierra Bills (left) of the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.  
Mary Braswell/UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

# Research in action: Example policy impacts



Informed passage of the most comprehensive law in the nation to address the plastic waste crisis.  
(**California SB 54**)



Advancing access to clean mobility options for low-income Californians.  
(Such as the **Clean Cars 4 All Program**)



Supporting California's transition to clean trucks.  
(**California Air Resources Board's Clean Fleets Rule**)



Helping to maximize the equity and effectiveness of stormwater capture and greening projects.  
(Implementation of **Measure W** funding in L.A. County)



Supporting the City of L.A.'s transition to 100% renewable energy while minimizing ratepayer impacts for low-income households and businesses.  
(Design of **LA Equity 100 Strategies**)



Influencing state and local utility discussions to protect low-income ratepayers through bill assistance and shut-off moratoriums.  
(Including **L.A. Department of Water and Power's decision to end shut-offs** for low-income customers in default)



Advising on the first-ever strategic plan to address extreme heat in Los Angeles.  
(Collaborating with the city's Climate Emergency Mobilization Office on an **Extreme Heat Action Plan**)



## Our new Human Right to Water Solutions Lab expands research on drinking water nationally

Since 2012, Californians have had a legal right to clean water (per AB 685). Yet safe, affordable water is not always easily accessible throughout the state.

Issues like high water bills, contaminated water sources and outdated infrastructure complicate water access, especially in frontline communities — all against a backdrop of chronic drought in some of our most water-limited regions. Researchers are working to find solutions that make water access more just, including at a new research lab housed in the Luskin Center for Innovation.

Our new UCLA Human Right to Water Solutions Lab is led by our co-director Gregory Pierce and is advised by collaborators from across the nation.

The research team has helped to guide the California State Water Resources Control Board's efforts to provide safe drinking water for all residents, as well as develop a plan for the first statewide Low-income Water Rate Assistance Program in the nation. Now, the new lab is expanding its work across the country to support policy, advocacy and civic leadership solutions to improve water access, quality and affordability — the three key pillars of the human right to water.

***“As lab director, I hope to cultivate a space to collectively improve access to clean water.”***

**- GREGORY PIERCE, CO-DIRECTOR**

The lab builds on the Luskin Center for Innovation's broader goals to collaborate with community leaders and policymakers who can use our research to advance environmental equity.



## Who is making decisions about your tap water?

Our new Los Angeles County Water Governance Mapping Tool illustrates the lab's dedication to making data more accessible and useful for the public. Developed in collaboration with community-based organizations and the Water Foundation, this interactive visualization tool provides information about Los Angeles County's complex network of 200+ water systems, each managed by a separate set of decision-makers and policies.

The information can help Angelenos understand where their water comes from and who is managing it. It can also help hold water system leaders accountable to provide clean and affordable drinking water.



## Advancing a path to safe, clean drinking water



We contributed to the first comprehensive analysis of California's diverse array of water systems. As the first such effort by any state, the study estimated how much it would actually cost to deliver safe water to every resident. The immediate impact was to motivate an additional state allocation of \$800 million to address drinking water quality needs.

Other states have similar needs, but lack the data to fully catalyze investments. That's why we're embarking on a national assessment to support drinking water infrastructure improvements. The project is in collaboration with the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, as part of a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency network.

***"This work is too important to limit to just one state. We're excited to kickstart a nationwide study of drinking water quality problems and solutions."***

- GREGORY PIERCE, CO-DIRECTOR

### POLICY IMPACT

Advancing the Human Right to Water  
(implementation of California's 2012 law **AB 685**)

## HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER SOLUTIONS LAB Approach



Advance fundamental research in water affordability, quality and accessibility



Provide practical support and amplify the efforts of community, scholarly and policy partners



Ensure data and training resources generated through our research are publicly available, usable and relevant



# Heat waves are here to stay. Here's how we can prepare.

Our research takes a multi-pronged approach that emphasizes equitable solutions to extreme heat

With more frequent and intense heat waves on the horizon, states and cities need to prepare for the challenge. That's why our associate director V. Kelly Turner leads our urban heat research, focused on how we can address the looming crisis.

***“Protecting people from extreme heat will require a coordinated and well-researched government approach. This is especially crucial for reducing the disproportionate effect heat has on people of color and low-income communities.”***

- V. KELLY TURNER, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Heat, exacerbated by climate change, is the deadliest weather hazard in the nation, accounting for more deaths in a typical year than hurricanes, floods and tornadoes. And our research shows that extreme heat leads to more preterm births, makes it more difficult for students to learn and increases the risk of significant injuries at work. The impacts disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities.

Despite these damaging and wide-ranging effects, governance for heat has historically fallen behind other climate change-related hazards. Turner's research helps inform solutions — like rethinking how we build our cities with cool roof and pavement technologies, and providing more shade.

## POLICY IMPACT

Strengthening state and local  
approaches to extreme heat  
(see following page for examples)



## Guiding an equitable and effective extreme heat strategy

While California is planning for rising temperatures with its new Extreme Heat Action Plan, the state has not historically treated extreme heat as a social equity and public health crisis. Our policy brief series can help inform implementation of the plan and upcoming legislative and budget decisions.

Supported by the Resources Legacy Fund, the briefs highlight policy actions to prepare for more extreme and prolonged heat, with a focus on protections in homes and schools.



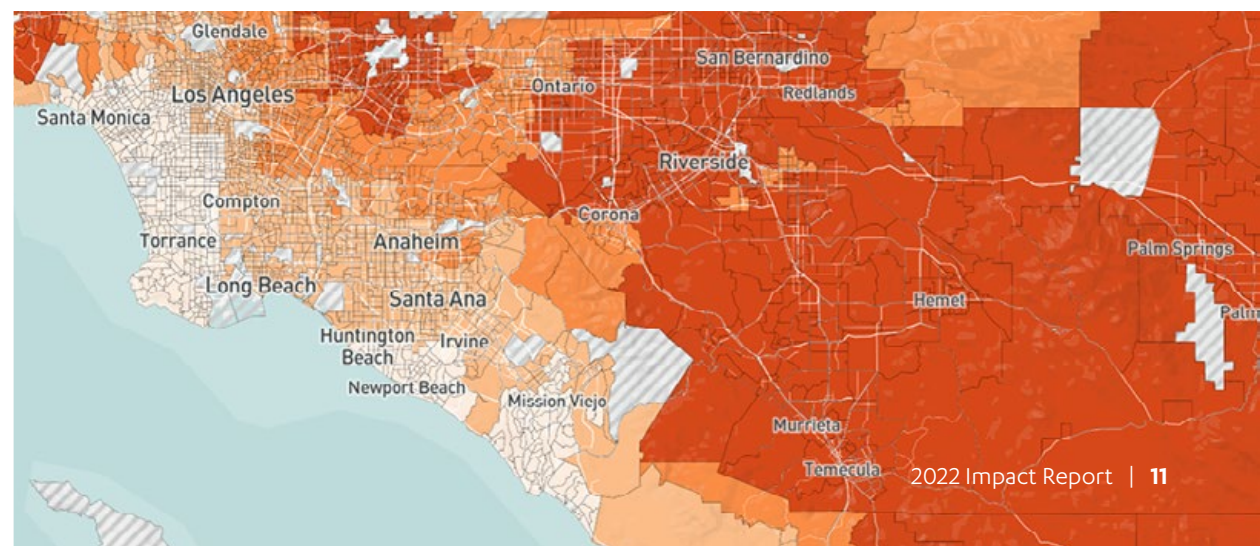
## Keeping transit riders cool with community-led research

A new prototype shade structure in Oasis, California aims to protect transit riders and prevent heat-related illnesses. As part of an interdisciplinary research team, we gathered feedback from community members through the Oasis Leadership Committee. This feedback guided the Kounkuey Design Initiative team as they created a heat-resilient bus shelter (pictured on the left). Resident feedback will help further improve the prototype and explore additional cooling options.

Funded by the California Strategic Growth Council, this project is part of a larger grant led by V. Kelly Turner to guide local solutions to heat mitigation. The grant aims to empower communities to implement cooling solutions and facilitate the increased use of transit and active transportation — both reducing pollution and creating climate-resilient neighborhoods.

## Informing where investments in heat resilience are most needed

Our California Healthy Places Index: Extreme Heat Edition helps the state ramp up its efforts to prepare for rising temperatures — visualizing where and who will be most affected in the coming decades. The mapping tool was developed in collaboration with the Public Health Alliance of Southern California and was funded by a grant from the Strategic Growth Council's Climate Change Research Program.







## Supporting big, hyperlocal investments to fight climate change

Our research is tracking hundreds of millions of dollars invested in local climate action — funds that empower historically underserved communities to realize their visions for community health, well-being and prosperity.

For instance, in Watts, Los Angeles last year, 300 residents received energy efficiency upgrades, like smart thermostats and LED lighting, to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions and reduce energy bills. Volunteers delivered 261 thousand pounds of fresh food to residents, reducing both food insecurity and waste. The community also started planting 2,250 trees, which will cool down streets and sequester carbon.

These projects in Watts are part of the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) program. Administered by California's Strategic Growth Council, TCC funds multimillion dollar grants for holistic climate action and community benefits. Partnerships between local government, residents and organizations drive the program.

Our research is documenting the progress of TCC-supported action in five communities across California: Fresno, Ontario, Stockton and the Los

Angeles neighborhoods of Northeast San Fernando Valley and Watts. These annual reports are part of the ongoing evaluation that we are conducting in collaboration with TCC grantees.

***“Learning from these pilots is important. As one of the most comprehensive community-scale climate programs in the world, lessons from TCC can support equitable climate action elsewhere.”***

- JASON KARPMAN, PROJECT DIRECTOR

TCC is now part of the national dialogue around making federal climate investments more equitable, and federal agencies are looking at TCC as a model. Our research is helping to inform these federal investments, like President Biden's Justice40 Initiative, described on the next page.

### POLICY IMPACT

Helping implement **California's Transformative Climate Communities Program (AB 722)**





# Advancing President Biden's Justice40 Initiative

One week after his inauguration, President Biden ordered federal agencies to direct 40% of government investments in climate and clean infrastructure to benefit people in disadvantaged communities.

Since the announcement of this Justice40 Initiative, unprecedented levels of funding for clean energy, water infrastructure and other climate-oriented investments have been authorized. But implementing this Justice40 Initiative will not be simple. Our research, advised by environmental justice leaders, provides a framework that federal officials can use to maximize Justice40's impact.

***“One initiative alone can’t erase systemic racial and environmental injustices, but setting a strong, equity-centered framework for Justice40 is a first step in the right direction.”***

- COLLEEN CALLAHAN, CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our research analyzes state-level policies and programs seeking to address environmental justice through investments in clean energy and climate change action, and identifies lessons learned that could help inform the implementation of Biden's plan.

The authors set forth three primary areas of emphasis for the initiative:

- **Resources.** Focus investments on the people who need it most, by providing funding to under-resourced communities.
- **Empowerment.** Pursue a ground-up approach by enabling those who live in under-resourced communities to drive local investment decisions.
- **Accountability.** Include guardrails to ensure that all government agencies and groups involved further the goals of environmental, racial, economic and health justice.

The research was funded in part by the Heising-Simons Foundation, the Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund and the Hewlett Foundation.

## POLICY IMPACT

Informing implementation of federal environmental justice initiatives via the **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law** and the **Inflation Reduction Act**

# Uplifting student leaders

Each year, we employ and support about **45 students** to conduct cutting-edge environmental policy research, work with community organizations and further their professional development.

Check out ways we collaborate with these emerging environmental leaders, and some examples of their current projects.

## Research positions

Our student researchers conduct high-impact studies with Luskin Center faculty and staff, focused on advancing equitable environmental policies.

For example, **Hayat Rasul's** (pictured on right) research is helping to inform solutions for stormwater management and water system consolidation, with a focus on prioritizing benefits in underserved communities. Hayat is in her second year in the master of urban planning program.



## Environmental justice fellowships

While interning with environmental justice organizations, our fellows collaborate with minority and low-income communities to realize their goals for a more equitable, prosperous and livable environment.

One of our fellows, **Juan Flores**, (pictured on right) is working with Better World Group, conducting research on zero-emission transportation policies in collaboration with a coalition of community-based organizations and other environmental equity advocates. Juan is an undergraduate student in the final year of his public affairs major and public health minor. He is passionate about bridging these two fields to create systemic solutions for healthy communities.



## Graduate student grants

To amplify the impacts of their environmentally focused capstone or thesis, students receive funding, mentorship and communications support.

As an example, public policy graduate students **Lindsey Cain, Lauren Dunlap, Maya Gutierrez, Sonia Zamora** and **Lana Zimmerman** (pictured on right) are working on a project for the California Strategic Growth Council, in collaboration with our center. They are identifying lessons learned from the agency's Transformative Climate Communities program that can inform federal climate investments — and ultimately help ensure programs benefit underserved, pollution-burdened communities nationwide.





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## Core Team

**Colleen Callahan**

Co-Executive Director

**Dan Coffee**

Project Manager

**Ruth Engel**

Project Manager for Environmental Data Science

**Grace Harrison**

Associate Project Manager of Water Equity Research

**Ariana Hernandez**

Associate Project Manager

**Elena Hernandez**

Associate Project Manager

**Jason Karpman**

Project Director

**Bo Liu**

Project Director, Transportation

**Megan Mullin**

Faculty Director

**Gregory Pierce**

Co-Director

**V. Kelly Turner**

Associate Director

**Constance Vance**

Operations Manager

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## Affiliated Scholars

**Alan Barreca**

Associate Professor,  
Institute of the Environment and Sustainability

**Evelyn Blumenberg**

Professor of Urban Planning

**Jon Christensen**

Adjunct Assistant Professor,  
Institute of the Environment and Sustainability

**J.R. DeShazo**

Dean of the LBJ School of Public Affairs  
(The University of Texas at Austin)

**C.J. Gabbe**

Visiting Scholar, Associate Professor  
(Santa Clara University)

**Kian Goh**

Associate Professor of Urban Planning

**Silvia R. González**

Director of Research, Latino Politics & Policy Institute

**Verónica Herrera**

Associate Professor of Urban Planning and Political  
Science

**Sara Hughes**

Visiting Scholar, Associate Professor of Environment  
and Sustainability (University of Michigan)

**Richard Kaner**

Distinguished Professor of Chemistry

**Liz Koslov**

Assistant Professor of Urban Planning

**Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris**

Interim Dean, Luskin School of Public Affairs

**Adam Millard-Ball**

Professor of Urban Planning

**Sanjay K. Mohanty**

Assistant Professor of Civil and Environmental  
Engineering

**Paul Ong**

Professor of Urban Planning, Social Welfare and Asian  
American Studies

**Jisung Park**

Assistant Professor  
(University of Pennsylvania)

**Will Rafey**

Assistant Professor of Economics

**Gaurav Sant**

Professor and Henry Samueli Fellow,  
Civil and Environmental Engineering

**Kirsten Schwarz**

Associate Professor of Urban Planning and  
Environmental Health Sciences

**Brian Taylor**

Professor of Urban Planning and Public Policy

**Bharat Venkat**

Assistant Professor, Department of History and  
Institute for Society & Genetics

**Yifang Zhu**

Professor of Environmental Health Sciences

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Renee and Meyer Luskin founded the Luskin Center for Innovation, which became part of the Luskin School of Public Affairs in 2009.

*"A sustainable, healthy environment is the greatest inheritance one can leave to children, and the most enduring gift to the community and nation."*

– Meyer Luskin



## Advisory Board

**Ruben Aronin**, Senior Vice President,  
Better World Group

**Mitra Best**, Partner, PwC

**Anthony Eggert**, Program Director,  
ClimateWorks Foundation

**Alfredo Gonzalez**, Program Officer,  
Resources Legacy Fund

**Cynthia Hirschhorn**, Founder,  
Civicas.net and Unycyn Civic Arts

**Mary Leslie**, President,  
Los Angeles Business Council

**Meyer Luskin**, President,  
Scope Industries

**Renee Luskin**, Philanthropist

**David Nahai**, President,  
David Nahai Companies

**Sara Nichols**, Former Environmental Attorney

**Jonathan Parfrey**, Executive Director,  
Climate Resolve

### EX OFFICIO ADVISORS

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and Resilience

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**Alvaro Sanchez**, Vice President of Policy,  
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