



District of Columbia Department of Energy and the Environment

**Final evaluation of the
Equity Advisory Group**

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Date: August 21, 2018

I. METHODOLOGY

This final evaluation of the DC Department of Energy and the Environment’s (DOEE) first ever Equity Advisory Group (EAG) began in September with the initial outreach and planning for the EAG. As an independent evaluator, my role was to observe and provide feedback at the midpoint of the project or as needed throughout the project. Through quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools, this final report provides an overview of the EAG implementation and tells the story of this inaugural effort by DOEE to engage the community like never before.

The evaluation below also provides select findings from a mid-project evaluation survey on March 31, 2018, which was completed by 9 of the 13 members, and a final project survey on July 6, 2018, completed by 12 of the 13 members. I also spoke with 10 of the members on two separate occasions – at the mid-project and final project point – and sat in during 4 of the 6 EAG monthly meetings. Finally, I participated in 6 planning or debriefing calls before or following meetings in order to review agendas and the inclusion process.

This report will refer to members of the “project team” throughout, which includes DOEE; Georgetown Climate Center (GCC), which acted as the university/non-profit partner managing the project; and a private consulting firm which was hired as the equity consultant to manage EAG recruiting and facilitate meetings.

Evaluation goals

Goal of the project as stated in the RFP:

1. Empower residents to make informed decisions about how to respond to climate risks
2. Advance racial equity rather than perpetuating existing inequities or contributing to new inequities
3. Inform and create a community engagement model that the District can replicate and refine in future planning and implementation initiatives

Goal of the evaluation as stated in RFP:

1. Evaluate the EAG process to assess whether the model created during the project enables the District to successfully implement a model for equitable



- and authentic community engagement. Assess role of intergovernmental agencies (Office of African American, Asian American, Human Rights etc.)
2. Evaluate the Project Team's communication and accountability

Additional evaluation goals:

1. Assess whether the creation of the EAG is community centered– meaning that voices, perspectives, needs and strengths will be heard and integrated.
2. Evaluate whether the implementation of the EAG process was community powered and was directed by the “comfort” and “control” of the participants, particularly people of color. This would mean that decision-making power is shared by those that are most impacted by racism, classism, and disenfranchisement so that the resulting recommendations and actions that the DC government acts on are centered on their priorities and concerns.

II. OUTREACH AND EAG MAKEUP

The mid-project evaluation found that outreach process was slow to start and required important streamlining and adjustments throughout. As expected, the EAG formation process was new and many lessons were learned along the way. Many of the challenges that arose with this process centered around the need for pre-existing relationships or collaboration with a trusted community liaison. Because the relationships had to be formed *during* the creation of the EAG, there was an inherent trust handicap built in to the process. This is an example of the pitfalls in embarking on community engagement with a reliance on an outside consultant. Unless the consultant has a deep history in the specific community that the project hopes to reach with pre-existing, trusted relationships that they can share, then the agency should expect to be closely involved in building its own relationships. This challenge was not insurmountable, but the project required significant time investment and initiative in trust-building activities during the outreach phase.

The outreach tactics employed for this project include:

- Suggestions from a local community leader on 12 potential members and organizations to reach out to for initial conversations
 - Of the 12 suggested candidates, the consultant reached out to 5 by phone
- Suggestions from phone conversations about others to speak with
- Attendance at community meetings by GCC



- Outreach to Advisory Neighborhood Council reps by DOEE
- Flyering posted at popular community venues by GCC
- Email blast to local list serves by GCC
- Word of mouth by DOEE
 - This included seizing on opportunities by DOEE representatives upon meeting a potential EAG participant
- Informational session with potential candidates on December 11, 2017. Seven attendees at the informational session went on to join the EAG officially

It was the individual efforts of a couple of team members that already knew the community or took significant time to go to community meetings that resulted in a well-rounded EAG, but that personality-driven approach is difficult to replicate without concerted efforts or luck. For example, having a staff member who lives in the community was tremendously valuable for outreach, and that personal interest resulted in them actively looking for opportunities for outreach. This staff member's work and recommendations resulted in the successful recruitment of at least two members. In some ways that success was fortuitous, but once that staff person leaves, it is not easily replicated and that trust and relationships may go with them.

In future processes, there is a need for more direct action by the agency in recruiting EAG members. EAG members suggested an increased presence at high schools or community centers during free periods or lunch periods. This is a tactic employed by other community groups to engage youth, and it is an expected form of outreach. There was also no use of social media during the outreach, and both Facebook and Nextdoor are well-known tools for organizing of this kind with great potential for success. Lastly, Ward 7 is said to have many civic associations, so participation in these meetings is critical for tapping into the community- in addition to leveraging the community libraries for this purpose.

As was already evidenced in this project, an outside consultant cannot be relied on to do this level of outreach. While a well-connected consultant could make great introductions and recommendations for community engagement, the agency should do the outreach directly.

III. EAG MAKEUP



The project team selected a final EAG roster of 16 members that represented a strong cross section of the community, despite some limitations in that representation. In the end there were actually 13 EAG members since 3 of the original members needed to drop out. This is important to note as it explains the intentionality in creating a representative EAG even when the final group does not match the representative demographics very closely.

The selection process was informed by data but the final decision-making structure and voting criteria for the selection process was subjective and based on general agreement. There was ambiguity on the final decision-maker and clear prioritization of traits set before the selection process. This is likely because there was no pre-existing model for the project- as suggested in the RFP.

The summary below shows the specific key demographic data points:

Key demographics	EAG	Ward 7
Gender identity	Male 70% Female 30%	45% Male 55% Female
Race	Black 92% White 8%	92% Black 3% White 5% Other
Age	Under 25 7% Ages 25-39 54% Ages 40-64 23% Over 65 16%	37% Under 25 29% Ages 25-44 23% Ages 45-64 11% Over 65
Housing*	72% Homeowner 19% Affordable housing 9% Renter	38% Homeownership rate
Longevity*	45% < 5 years 27% more than one generation 27% In between	14 years average residence for homeowners 3.5 years average for renters

*2 EAG members do not live in Ward 7

“Civic ecology is very important and necessary in this process”

The final makeup and synergy within the EAG was a significant highlight of the overall project. The members loved the many experience levels and perspectives and would have loved to have gotten to know each other even more. Many of the members cited a desire to get to know each other on a personal level with social opportunities before or after meetings to continue sharing and debriefing. **This opportunity for relationship building within the EAG does not just provide a break for the group, but also creates the necessary trust and bridges of communication that produces greater collaboration and ideas.**

“I think it is good to involve diverse aspects of the community and civic engagement is arguably not a prerequisite to being able to provide valuable perspectives and influence on community discussions.”

There was resounding unanimity that future EAGs should maintain a representative mix of lay community members and established leaders. When asked how important (from a scale of 1–5) it is that EAG members are experienced and involved in civic groups, all respondents selected a 3, 4 or a 5, and when asked how important it is that they are new or emerging leaders, all but one selected a 3, 4 or a 5. **One way to leverage this diversity of experience would be to match up “mentors” or “buddies” within the EAG, so there is someone to turn to throughout the project when there are difficult questions.**

“Drinking from a water hose”

There was a sense from the group that the work did not really get going until the last couple of meetings. The onboarding at the beginning consisted mostly of large group sessions with speakers presenting on the climate plans, the goals of the EAG and the history of the Ward.

“Not enough education done on the front end period. Why are we starting in the middle?”

Given the complex and high level nature of these subjects, it would be natural that the group have many questions and also delve into deep or difficult discussions. Rather, the EAG members spoke up very little in these first few

¹ Language in quotes refers to direct quotes from EAG members



meetings. This indicates that both the relationship and trust building was slow to come and the format for discussion was not amenable to these conversations.

That being said, the project team was proactive in gathering valuable input from the EAG members that allowed the team to identify issues and make changes to meeting structures and formats. After tracking participation among participants at the second meeting, it was clear that only a couple of people were actively participating and the majority of participants were not speaking up. So by the third meeting, small groups were introduced, guaranteeing more opportunities for all participants to feel comfortable contributing to and engaging with the project team directly. Additionally, members of DOEE were given larger platforms on the agendas to ensure that EAG members were hearing from them directly, which is very important for longer term relationship building.

Moving into small groups at the second half of the meetings made a significant difference in participation. The project team was mindful to balance the need for education with a short time frame, but that amount of information would only be well-received if an environment of comfort and trust was more established with some of the ways suggested in the previous section.

It was also demoralizing to the group to realize the Climate Ready DC and Clean Energy DC plans had already been finalized. Upon hearing that their recommendations are focused on implementation, many of the members became frustrated and disappointed. Due to a pre-existing perception that the DC government is not interested in true community engagement but is more interested in checking a box, this revelation was a setback for some of the participants.

Many of these challenges are not unique to the EAG process, but would be applicable whenever embarking on project where an entirely new group of people need to collaborate on an entirely new subject matter within a strict timeframe and ambitious grant goals. People will need time to get comfortable and the project leads will need to

“When a program, like EAG, looks for input from local community members on a process that will impact them and their community directly, the community members must be included as early as possible in the process if their input is truly valued. This can start with an initial small group who can be included in the planning and goal setting activities. The group can be expanded to the full EAG closer to the last six month phase.”



be flexible to the group’s needs. **So a great way to address this intrinsic challenge is to add more lead time; more meetings are needed to allow for socializing and true onboarding with the necessary substantive information.** Further, members stated it was very difficult to process the large amounts of data and information at the outset. By the end, some EAG members noted that if they had a clearer vision of the end product, they would have been able to better focus and respond to the information presented at the beginning. **Now that the DC government has gone through one round of an EAG process, the next iteration of the group can include a visioning of the end product more easily.**

IV. EAG PARTICIPATION AND COMFORT

Evaluation Measure: Meeting preferences

A compelling measure of the EAG’s success in creating circumstances that work for the participants is with attendance and participation. All of the project team’s efforts to make sure the EAG members’ needs were met and their participation enhanced proved successful. Five of the 13 members attended all 6 EAG meetings, 4 missed just one, and the final 4 missed 2 meetings. The full attendance chart is below:

Meeting Date	January 29	February 26	March 26	April 23	May 7	June 19
# of attendees	12 of 13	12 of 13	10 of 13	13 of 13	11 of 13	8 of 13

Specifically, the location and food were most important, while the stipends and the time period did not factor as greatly (**there was a good idea from an EAG member to alternate locations within the neighborhood for meetings to enhance engagement throughout the community**). Though as noted in the graph below, all of the options were appreciated and received a majority of “must maintain” votes in the final survey.

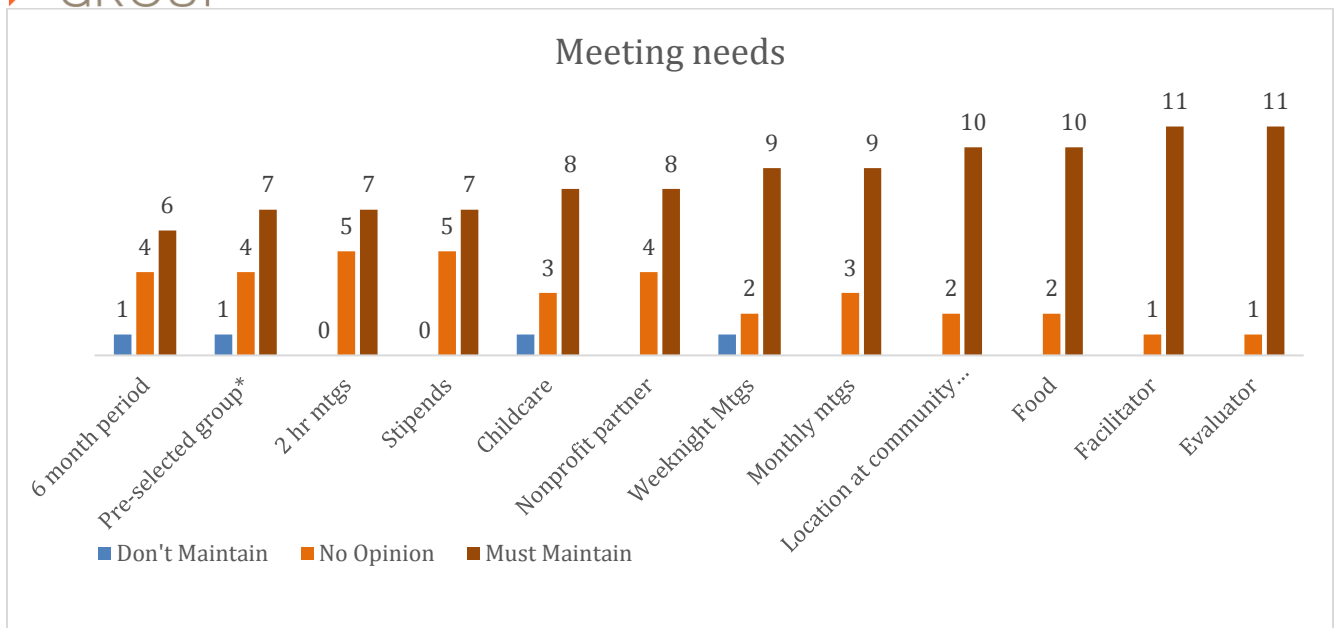


Figure 1 "Pre-selected group" refers to having one pre-set, unchanging group of people meeting consistently

The third party facilitator, independent evaluator, and university partner were also very well received. Involvement from so many third parties in the process provides a sense of accountability and thoroughness on behalf of the District. **In addition to this quantitative feedback, it was noted in the qualitative feedback (as in the mid-project evaluation) that the facilitator and partners really must have direct roots in the community represented by the EAG.**

"Limited connection to DC-specific circumstances was a slight deficiency given that other DC-based facilitators could have offered the opportunity to meaningfully and directly link the implementation considerations of the two plans."

Evaluation measure: Relationship building

Before this process began, there was already a negative view of the DC government in this particular community. Only 44% of respondents in the mid-project survey felt that the DC government wanted to hear from the community. A project like the EAG can directly address this perception, but that perception caused significant impediments that could not be resolved with a single EAG. That being said, there was clear progress resulting from this project. Because of the care and respect the project team showed, EAG members felt the DC government representatives in the project team do genuinely care about community engagement. They noted how the staff was intentional in making sure they did not "take over" the meetings, were not defensive, and truly

listened while also making sure that guests that came into the space followed these same guidelines.

- ❖ 100% of EAG members felt they have a “direct relationship” with DOEE
- ❖ 83% now have a stronger connection to community
- ❖ 75% will look for more ways to get involved in the community

Individual DOEE and GCC staff members were specifically cited as wonderful resources and advocates within the agency. Overall EAG members saw a distinction between building a relationship and trust with the project team and the government overall. While they found supportive individuals within the agency, it did not change their overall concerns about the DC government’s accessibility and intentions.

“It’s great to know that we have [DOEE staff members] there but there are 200 other people in the department. They all have influence too. How do we get that same experience with all of the different agencies?”

Even though they felt that systemic problems remained, EAG members knew that government is made up of its people, and there was a near unanimous positive reception toward the project team and a greater sense of trust was built. **This trust is a building block and entry point for building confidence in the agency at large.**

Resource partners

Bringing in more resource partners (meaning individuals from other DC agencies, the private sector, or non-profit groups that could help brainstorm ideas) from throughout the DC government and other groups successfully enhanced the relationship building and legitimacy of the project. It was very much appreciated that the project team acted upon the EAG’s ideas and suggestions for partners. But the partners’ usefulness varied, and just 66% of members felt that these outside groups were “adequately included.” The main issue was preparation. **A little more preparation and communication with the EAG in advance of the meetings would have gone a long way. For example, the project team could have shared resource partners’ bios or briefed EAG members on what each partner has jurisdiction over so they understood what that resource partner was bringing to the table ensured the time is used effectively.** There were some EAG members with a limited understanding of what the partners could have offered, and

some felt that higher profile officials from those partner organizations would have been more useful.

“Some were helpful but some were not. Some didn’t say much, and we didn’t hear from them. There could have been more strategy to decide which groups were invited and making sure they add value. We needed more prep beforehand, so we can see the connection with the person’s background to what’s on the agenda.”

The EAG is seeking more accountability in the long term. Having these outside groups involved gave the EAG members a sense that the work will not just live within the four walls of the meeting room or within the DOEE staff. Rather, it gave them a sense of greater inclusion in the larger DC government’s ecosystem and enhanced the relationship building overall. While the project made important strides, EAG members were also eager for attention from elected officials. A larger presence from the City Council or the Mayor’s Office would have enhanced the feeling that the work of the EAG has a longer lifespan, even if the individuals from those offices themselves were not likely to inspire or substantively inform the work. Their absence was noted and felt. **A happy medium for bringing in elected officials would be to bring in those councilmembers or their staff that have budget oversight or sit on environmental committees. They may have a little more substance and relevance to counterbalance the preconceived notions EAG members may come in with regarding a politician’s intentions.**

V. EAG OWNERSHIP AND “CONTROL”

Evaluation measure: feedback and decision-making power

The project team was mindful of creating a safe space for soliciting feedback. For example, one of the first meetings had too many DC government representatives taking up physical and verbal space, so for future meetings it was established that only the EAG members would be seated at the main table along with presenters. The project team’s efforts were acknowledged by the EAG members as members generally agreed that their feedback was valued in both the mid project evaluation and the final survey.

From a scale of 1–5 (5 being most valued), do you feel your feedback is valued and respected?

	Mid Project Eval	Final Eval
1	0%	0%
2	0%	8%
3	11%	0%
4	11%	42%
5	78%	50%

Additionally, in the final evaluation:

- ❖ 89% agree they were allowed to provide feedback
- ❖ 83% felt they had a decision making power
- ❖ 100% felt their feedback was included in the final recommendations

“More time should have been spent understanding what the project team needs from the EAG. We were tasked with making recommendations that could be implemented large scale, and we should have known going in as much as possible. Then we can sift through the background information and used the time with the resource partners.”

As mentioned previously, the confidence EAG members had in the utility of their feedback would have been greatly enhanced if EAG members had been clearer from the beginning about how their feedback would be used and if the onboarding process including a clearer visioning of the end product.

Inclusion vs. ownership in the process

Towards the beginning of the project, the project team invited EAG members to join in the agenda planning and creation for the next meeting. Additionally, after each meeting, all EAG members were asked to provide written feedback that was used to inform the next meeting’s agenda. That feedback was integral in helping the project team design the agenda. Usually one EAG member joined a planning call before the next meeting where they responded to an agenda created by the consultant. While the effort was genuine, it would be very difficult for an EAG member to truly provide feedback to something that was already strictly structured with specific goals and predetermined agenda items. While EAG members influenced the agendas, they were not co-creators nor did they run portions of the meeting or truly “owned” agenda

items. **For this to be possible, the EAG would have to be included from the very beginning of the planning phase and not limited by strict grant guidelines. While the goals can be predetermined, flexibility in how to achieve those goals would require the project team to allow the EAG into the design phase of the project, which did not happen here.**

In fact, EAG members suggested -- both in the mid-project and final evaluation surveys and in our conversations -- that they could be doing more. They were willing to take more ownership over the work, noting that once they were committed, they wanted to ensure its success. Ideas included more meetings, more homework, and more active work between meetings like conversations with neighbors, talking to NGOs or reaching out to elected officials, etc. For example, when presented with the opportunity to speak about this work on a podcast, the group eagerly volunteered to participate.

“The group should be taken up a notch. What’s required of people should be enhanced like doing more hard work outside of the meeting space! There would be more commitment from people this way and this will enable them to stick around.”

Evaluation measure: Pride in recommendations

When it came time to create the recommendations, the project team found an excellent balance in their approach of providing information and expertise while permitting the EAG members to design the recommendations themselves. The technical capacity the project team provided was critical, and the need to communicate realistic constraints to the EAG was equally necessary. This could have led to a more heavy handed, even adversarial approach by the project team. So the project team is commended for finding a successful balance that resulted in recommendations the EAG is proud of and bought into. **It would be good to replicate this approach in future EAGs.**

- ❖ 92% of respondents selected a 4 or a 5 when asked if they are “proud” of the final recommendations
- ❖ 73% say the community benefit from these recommendations

This is also evidenced in the EAG’s willingness to discuss and share the recommendations and their work in their personal and professional lives. Many EAG members are already planning to use what they have learned and the relationships they made throughout this process to build awareness in their communities. Below is a

listing of some of the ways EAG members have brought this experience into their own lives:

- ❖ “I talked about the model with others outside of the region while I've attended conferences and shared potential iterations of it.”
- ❖ “I’ve reached better resources in my community and have begun to reach out to more organizations involved with the river and its health.”
- ❖ “I’ve been sharing the EAG learnings with local residents.”
- ❖ “I’ve expanded the school's outreach to feeder–middle schools to include exploratory skilled trades and a workforce development inclusion.”
- ❖ “I’m partnering with Water Environmental Federation and UDC to offer green infrastructure content and certifications to our students”
- ❖ “I used a similar meeting structure method when interacting with my staff. I like how the working groups developed and address all of our objectives.”
- ❖ “I presented on climate topics at my civic association meeting.”
- ❖ “I started a class about these issues for our founding students at Whittle School & Studios.”
- ❖ “I’ve improved my community’s understanding of flood and climate risks.”
- ❖ “I’ve discussed impact on marsh land at Kenilworth Gardens during board meetings of Friends of Kenilworth Gardens.”
- ❖ “I will work to get us on the agenda for the next climate change and resilience meeting. With two members from the EAG, we can talk about the top 5 priorities. I want to communicate our work to the volunteer commissioners for the mayor’s message.”

VI. SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

“The trauma and family lineage that we are bringing in.”

While issues of racial justice are inextricably linked to the work of the EAG, there just was not enough time built in to adequately dive in and discuss these issues in the grant period. The subject of environmental justice and historic patterns of racism were introduced in an overview during the second meeting, but the information was presented as more of a historical lecture without active conversation about how these

issues impact the community in their day to day presently. It did not feel relevant to some of the EAG members.

When asked if the EAG had directly and effectively discussed issues of race and justice in the mid-project evaluation (from a scale of 1–5), 33% selected a 3, 33% a 4 and 33% a 5. Because of the deeply personal nature of these issues, trust and communication are essential to adequately addressing the links between historical racism and the current climate threats to the community. **That can only happen with sufficient time and onboarding that includes the chance to make personal connections.**



Increased but not in-depth understanding of climate issues

While much of the group is already inclined to care about environmental issues, the members that are not already working on the issues specifically did not have sufficient onboarding. It felt too quickly brushed over with too many unexplained terms and using a format that is not conducive to asking questions. **Some suggestions for addressing this in the future include** EAG members requested a “cheat sheet” or a glossary with key environmental and policy terms that they can refer to in future meetings, as well as adopting a “mentor” system within the EAG that pairs less experienced members with those with more experience in environment and/or community leadership.

“I now have a deeper understanding of how the climate issues affects my community today. I had no idea about the flood plains and the risk of when a certain type of storm comes. I didn’t know about resilience hubs other than a generic understanding from the news, and now I see that in this community these resources may or may not be here.”

Even though there was not an in depth understanding of climate issues initially, there was certainly an increased awareness and understanding by the EAG members toward the end.

From a scale of 1–5 (5 being greatest understanding), how well do you understand climate issues?

	Mid Project Eval	Final Eval
1	0%	0%
2	0%	0%
3	11%	8%
4	56%	42%
5	33%	50%

- ❖ 100% say they better understand the measures they can take
- ❖ 91% say they better understand flood risks to the Watts Branch tributary

VII. ACCOUNTABILITY

"What is supposed to happen now?"

The majority of the group has a "wait and see" approach to assessing the EAG's success. While many are proud and satisfied with their work, the success of the endeavor and whether or not they want to see it replicated depends on the next phase: implementation. There is a sense that it is possible their recommendations will be implemented, but there is no clarity or confidence to that fact. There is also confusion about their individual roles in implementation.

Many are willing to keep working on the project and implementation, but that could also be because there is no other clear way to ensure the recommendations are implemented. This is evidenced by the significant participation in the planning of the September 8th public meeting which is entirely voluntary at this point. Seven EAG members have participated in the planning calls for the public meeting and are actively designing and deciding the scope and purpose of the meeting. Because the public meeting fell out of the scope of the contract with the consultant, it became a tentative final step. This tentativeness is one significant contributor to the sense of lack of accountability and implementation the EAG felt. **For future iterations of this work, it is important to make sure this final step of accountability is kept in so there is clarity on the final audiences the EAG is responding to and the levers of influence that can be swayed by the work.**

"It's a great first step but I need to see the implementation. Am I supposed to make sure they're implemented, or are they doing it? I worry the recommendations could just sit there."

When asked on a scale of 1 –5 (5 being greatest), did the EAG achieve its purpose?

Final Eval	
1	0%
2	0%
3	25%
4	67%
5	8%

There is a general optimism that came from this process and 83% of respondents say the government should pursue EAGs in other departments. But most respondents add that more accountability needs to be built in, and that lessons learned from this EAG must be applied. Or else “it could just be a very sophisticated survey.”

VIII. CONCLUSION

The EAG produced a set of recommendations they are proud of and feel fully invested in. Participants truly enjoyed the experience, considered it a worthy use of their time, and built direct relationships with DOEE. The project team was able to put together a representative and well-functioning group of community members, and the team leads were as flexible as they could be with meeting structure and agenda setting within their constraints. Importantly, the EAG members increased their understanding and awareness of climate threats to their communities in a substantial way.

“I’m glad I was a part of it and I definitely would participate in any other types of committees that are set up this way for other issues.”

This evaluation outlined significant changes related to trust building, timeline, and accountability that need to be addressed should the DC government decide to embark on a project like this again. These are core to the success of future EAGS, but all of these changes are within reach for the DC government agencies. The successes of this EAG should serve as a foundation for the DC government and, with modifications made based on this evaluation, many elements merit consideration for adoption in future projects, even though this process should not serve as a blanket “model” for future initiatives.