



Midwest Climate Asset Map

Sharing resources and connections for climate action

Project Report & Update
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Produced by the **Midwest Climate Collaborative**

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Thank you and we look forward to advancing collaboration through this tool and the Midwest Climate Collaborative!



*Minnesota Department
of Natural Resources,
Minnesota's Lake Superior
Coastal Program*

Section 1

Introduction: Creating a Midwest Tool for Connections & Resources

Across the Midwest, people are working on policy, action, education, and research to understand the regionally specific impact and mitigation opportunities related to the climate crisis. While the impact of climate change is as critical in Midwest forests, watersheds, and cities as it is in areas prone to hurricanes, sea level rise, and forest fires, the expertise and examples most relevant to this region can be more difficult to find.

This presents a challenge and an opportunity to inspire new connections and work. Responding to feedback from the initial Midwest Climate Summit, the **Midwest Climate Collaborative** formed the Climate Asset Map working group. With the support of the **Midwest Big Data Innovation Hub** and examples of other asset maps, such as the Illinois Early Childhood Asset map, the

“I need] more localized/regional information. There is a lot of great stuff for trends in larger areas across the US, but it’s always helpful to have a specific report or set of data developed by scientists within that specific region.”

working group launched a needs assessment and began exploring opportunities to gather, share, and expose people across the region to climate resources and work. The development of this tool, known as the **Midwest Climate Asset Map**, aligns with MCC’s mission to develop a coherent

“I’d search to identify local entities that had implemented solutions we were considering locally - so as a connector to other initiatives in the Midwest.”

Midwestern response to the climate crisis, specifically supporting convening of knowledge and leaders across sectors.

This report outlines the initial research, vision, and current prototype for the Midwest Climate Asset Map. With the support and engagement of people across the Midwest, this tool can grow to fill a critical need across the region.

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Section 2

Learning from Future Users

Research Process

Working with Public Design Bureau, the working group distributed a survey widely to people working on issues related to climate across the Midwest, including practitioners, researchers, and educators, exploring accessibility needs, content needs, and experiences of searching for information (survey available in the appendix).

Seventy respondents shared valuable contributions through the survey. Of these, 69 have a geographic focus on the Midwest, with 11 also focusing elsewhere in the United States. All Midwestern states were represented. Most respondents had been working in climate-related work for some time, with their primary work focused on Education, followed by Mitigation and Adaptation.

In addition, three virtual interviews were conducted. Included people in the private sector, non-profits, and University settings. Interview participants responded to more detailed questions, including what makes information feel up-to-date and how they search and filter.

Based on the initial research, it is clear that the Midwest Climate Asset Map could serve a wide range of people.

Users come from a variety of sectors and have a range of roles.

Enthusiastic response for the Asset Map came from the nonprofit sector, academia, and the public sector. There was slightly less response from the private sector, with some representatives of companies responded pointing to specific uses.

The majority of respondents are:

- educating or developing learning opportunities
- gathering and sharing information
- organizing and collaborating with others
- advising or providing expert guidance

A smaller number of respondents are conducting research, drafting policy, engaging in civic action, providing services, or funding projects. Most respondents are focused on education, mitigation, or adaptation, with a smaller number engaged in monitoring or advocacy.

“I would use it to discover factual and up-to-date information about climate issues and education in my state. I would use that information to better express the urgency of action right here where we live.”

The range of sectors and roles complements a range of length and depth of experience, with respondents to the survey skewing towards more experienced. These folks want information that goes into greater depth and details connected to their specific work, beyond what can be found through a Google search

Users have existing go-to resources, but they value a Midwest-specific supplement.

Users are currently frustrated by the volume of low quality information that they can find, and particularly how that information is not specific to the Midwest. Yet, they want something that will supplement rather than replace their current approaches to finding information, including existing sites, Google searches, and experts.

Users are focused on the Midwest, across different categories of place.

Users are looking for information that goes beyond cities and into a range of different Midwestern places, including smaller towns, rural areas, and entire regions. They are also interested in finding information about specific ecosystems, such as the Great Lakes.

Section 3

Vision for the Midwest Climate Asset Map: Function & Content

The Midwest Climate Asset Map has the opportunity to serve as a platform to support connections, exposure, and relationships across the Midwest. As the Asset Map moves beyond prototype, it will:

Be accessible, with fast access and intuitive interfaces, on both mobile and desktop sites.

In addition to basic web accessibility, users want a resource that is available in commonly used languages in the Midwest (beyond English), to people who are colorblind, and with flexible options for viewing like large text or dark mode. People want answers quickly, with less frustration, so the tool should not add complexity. Users have concerns about bandwidth and load-times.

Ensure credible sources, and reinforce validity of sources throughout the interface.

Users prize information from credible sources, and prioritize sources that they can trust as being backed by science and research. Sources must be credible and emphasize where the sources are pulling from. Including links to other resources that allow users to understand the source of materials is also desired.

Make everyone (from grassroots activists to data experts) feel welcome, through language, arrival, and search.

Given the mix of potential users, and the desire to bring even more people along on climate efforts, content on the Asset Map will use plain language and avoid jargon, acronyms, and complicated shorthand. This language must be

carefully balanced with a need for the information to be credible, such as by connecting to MCC or another recognizable brand for credible climate information in citing sources. The sources that people are looking at now do not feel approachable, so there's an opportunity to bridge an emotional gap by making people feel that this content can be found and accessed no matter their training.

“In studying other Environmental Justice and related online maps, we’ve learned that it is very important to include a splash screen when someone opens up a map, providing upfront some very lay-person friendly language about the very basic functions and buttons of the map/page.”

Search and filter must allow users to get to high-quality specifics.

The questions that people are trying to answer are overlapping and very specific. They prize that very specific information, yet getting to it is like finding a needle in the haystack. Search and filter options will make it possible to narrow, first to a category and then to the specific filters within that category. In addition, there's a need to be able to intersect search terms in a detailed way. People need

to search across multiple categories at the same time. While search and filter should feel robust, the interface should still make content easily accessible, rather than buried in menus or in a depth of pages.

“Layering of search topics/filters. Water AND soil AND corporate; Biodiversity NOT soil; etc.”

Section 3

Be transparent about the limits of the tool to users.

From the initial launch and throughout on-going development, it must be clear that the Asset Map is not exhaustive and that while there is hope for the tool to grow, capacity is limited. The tool must be clear about what is possible, how people can contribute, and what is coming.

In addition to these functions, the Asset Map will contain:

Information that is regionally specific and focused on the Midwest

Many respondents pointed to a gap in information for the Midwest. Many of the reports and case studies are focused in more populated areas across the country. This geographic focus is important for reports and data as well as for policies and actions.

Connections directly to people with knowledge, expertise, and collaboration potential

Right now, many people find the most reliable information by being able to pick up the phone and call a colleague or collaborator. Being able to connect directly with an expert who knows something about your specific question gives the most detailed, applicable information that is available, and can frequently get to a level of depth that isn't otherwise possible. The Asset Map will eventually help connect the people in the Midwest who are in the best position to answer

“[I would want to find] industries with climate goals in the Midwest who could be helpful partners in persuading policymakers to adopt climate-friendly policies”

questions and potentially collaborate in the future. The types of connections people are looking for include:

- Collaboration partners who are focused on the same topic within the Midwest or want to be involved in ongoing initiatives.
- Customers or participants for particular services or in specific programs.
- Professionals or service providers who can provide specific services related to climate work.
- Research partners who want to co-produce knowledge that is credible and relevant.
- Experts who can provide additional information on a given topic.
- Organizations providing resources including funding, employment, and volunteer opportunities.

Information that feels up-to-date and timely

Right now, it can be difficult to find information that is up-to-date, and to be sure that what you're looking at is the most recent version of what's available. There are specific markers that allow people to know that information is recent enough to rely on, like referencing more recent studies or conditions. Up-to-date information adds to

credibility, making a source seem trusted and usable. The Asset Map will help users identify when information is from, whether it is the most recent available, and where additional, older information might be available. The Asset Map will also have a system for regular updates and review, with a clear shelf life for content.

Relevant case studies that give information for replication and adoption

Many users are seeking case studies that go beyond the product (a final policy, a technology, a planting strategy) into the specifics of the process of implementation and the outcomes. For example, users want to see not only the sample policy, but how the policy moved through the political system and how adoption has gone so far. Currently, folks do this through connecting directly with people, but building on existing, thoughtful case studies that are Midwest specific would be valuable for many seeking to take action in their own locations.

“I've stopped looking for policies because I just get newspaper articles that mention a new state law or ordinance, but it's hard to find the actual piece of policy and it's not always clear if it passed.”

“I couldn't find most recent data, not sure if I was looking in the right spot”

Section 4

Prototype Version 1 & Next Steps

Guided by the results of the research process, working group member Daniel Poynter led the development of a prototype. This prototype is designed to continue to elicit feedback from people who would use it directly, gathering their input about content, future directions, and next steps.

Currently, the Asset Map prototype serves as a connector to existing information, linking out to assets housed on organizational websites, library sources, and at research institutions. This linking serves to support connection to the wide variety of information available, while working within MCC's current capacity for ongoing maintenance. As more content is added, the prototype's modular structure allows for expansion of not just the linked content but also the categories of information within the tool. The prototype sorts content by sector as identified by Project Drawdown (such as electricity or transportation) and by geography (state), and currently contains content grouped by organizations, people, and other resources. As more information is added, the sectors could expand, as could the groupings, which might include categories like tools, datasets, and policies.

The creation of the Midwest Climate Asset Map is a collaborative effort, and feedback and support is needed from people across the Midwest, including on whether it should be referred to as an "asset map" or something else that better describes what the tool provides. In the near future, there will be opportunities to gather content, participate in maintenance and updates, and curate information that is regionally specific, up-to-date, and relevant. To fully develop this tool into the working group's vision, the contributions of people across the Midwest are critical. How do you want to be engaged?

Use the link to the feedback form on the site to offer your thoughts!

Interested in partnering with MCC to realize the vision for the Asset Map?

The long-term success of this project will require ongoing maintenance of the site and engagement with users and potential users. The MCC is seeking project sponsors to fully develop the prototype and build capacity to ensure the Climate Asset Map remains a source of timely, accurate, and relevant information. To learn more about supporting this project contact midwestclimatecollaborative@wustl.edu.

Try out the prototype

climate-asset-map.glide.page

