



Chatham County

As an intern on the Chatham County Community Engagement team, I have been lucky to be a part of a team filled with constant excitement and excellent collaboration. As someone who has been involved in a variety of research projects in the past, I was impressed with the entire SMART Sea Level team's commitment to engaging and focusing the community members that are most affected by the central issue of the project: rising sea levels. Dr. Kim Cobb and Dr. Russ Clark from Georgia Tech deserve to be commended for their roles in defying the status quo and leading a team determined to make a difference in the quality of life of the citizens of Savannah rather than only treating them as test subjects.

The primary focus of my work has been organizing and strengthening the relationships between the primary partners involved in our new team: Harambee House, an environmental justice group, Open Savannah, a Code for America group focused on making data easily available and digestible for community members, and the City of Savannah. Together, we have chosen to focus on Hudson Hill, a West Savannah community, to identify and record best community engagement practices that can be replicated throughout other vulnerable communities in the area. Our primary goal has been to deliver tangibles, including an Emergency Preparedness Plan and a community vulnerability profile, to a community that has been exhausted by researchers and groups collecting data they would never see. My work has focused on engaging Hudson Hill community members throughout the Emergency Plan completion process, organizing meetings with community members and future partners, and organizing data outlining environmental, social, health, transportation, and housing vulnerabilities in the Hudson Hill community into a single, comprehensive report. We are also working to expand the educational programs implemented by CEISMIC to the West Savannah area that give local students the opportunity to understand the effect of rising sea levels and to get involved in the creation of the sea level sensors.

I have been very grateful for the mentorship and guidance of the entire SMART Sea Level Sensor team, who have allowed me to implement and share my own ideas. Most importantly, I have learned essential community engagement practices that I plan to implement in future projects, including the importance of forming relationships with organizations that already hold trust within the target community as well as being aware of vulnerable communities' general mistrust of scientists and government officials and their tendencies to "parachute" in and "parachute" out.

-Kate Ferencsik
Smart Community Corps, 2019