The Bard Community Sciences Lab: Using Science as a Tool for Social Change



¹Bard College Biology Program ²Bard College Environmental and Urban Studies Program ³Bard College Center for Environmental Sciences and Humanities ⁴Bard College Physics Program

Overview

The Bard College Community Sciences Lab (CSL) is developing novel methods for conducting cutting-edge water and air quality research while immediately addressing community needs for science in the face of a rapidly changing environment. We use "sciences" to emphasize our dedication to using a broad definition of science, one that includes common sense/science, indigenous science, and other equally concrete and important ways of knowing. We believe that, by centering and elevating the human experience of environment, we can effectively address all environmental challenges – if we collectively are working to protect each others' rights to clean air and water, we are also working to protect the same for our non-human community members (animals, plants, earth). Our community science partners include watershed groups, city governments, libraries, emergency food kitchens, riverkeepers, universities, research institutions, air quality coalitions, and land trusts.

The CSL in its current form is only 3 years old, but many of our community partnerships were developed for over 5 years before the CSL existed. With our team of faculty, students, and staff, we are learning every day how to be better community members and therefore better scientists. For instance, we are just now in the process of developing a meaningful partnership with the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans, upon whose unceded land we have been conducting our work these past 8 years. Also, although we have always known that community needs requiring scientific support are pressing (sometimes truly lifethreatening) and happening in real-time, we have struggled mightily with the fact that dimant science research approaches often cannot provide real-time solutions. We have only recently addressed this by providing air purifiers for indoor air issues, and water filters for drinking water issues, while using samples gained from these immediate (albeit short-term) solutions for scientific analysis to support longer-term social change efforts.

What's with the "s"?

In order to truly make science a community-building tool, we realized we must expand our idea of what science is. All humans think scientifically to make sense of the world around us -- we can't help it. We use "sciences" to make it clear that there are many ways of knowing and of thinking scientifically, and we welcome all of these ways into the lab.

What is "environment"?

We have learned through community science building that environment cannot be allowed to just describe the outdoor, "pristine" world. Environment is everywhere -- it is human, rock, peanut, water flea, carpet, drywall, mold spore. This means that humans are just as important to conserve as the water, air, and land we protect. Humans are not separate from the environment. We are the environment. This is why we connect air quality with water quality issues, and indoor mold issues with outdoor deisel exhaust issues.

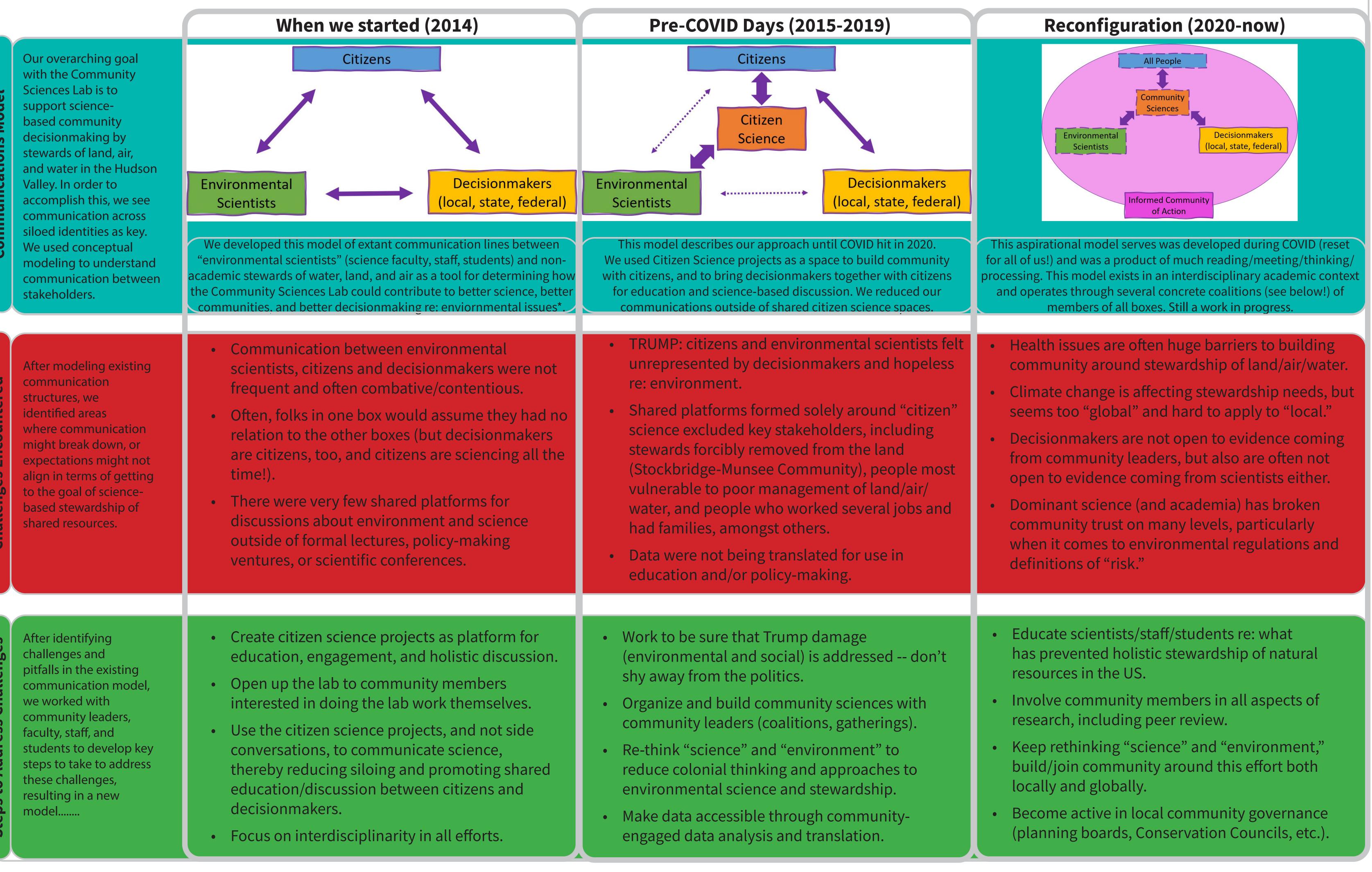
Who is "community"?

This question is probably the most important of all that the Community Sciences Lab struggles to address. We have learned that we must constantly be defining and refining this term as we use it. Our first step has been to promote the idea that Bard College itself, as an entity, is a community member (steward and owner) in the Saw Kill Watershed, which is part of the Hudson Valley. Our second step, in partnership with the Mellon Foundation funded Rethinking Place: Bard on the Mahicuntuk Initiative, has been to begin the long (and long overdue) process of buiding trust and partnership with the Stockbridge Munsee Community, original and ongoing inhabitants and stewards of the Saw Kill Watershed.

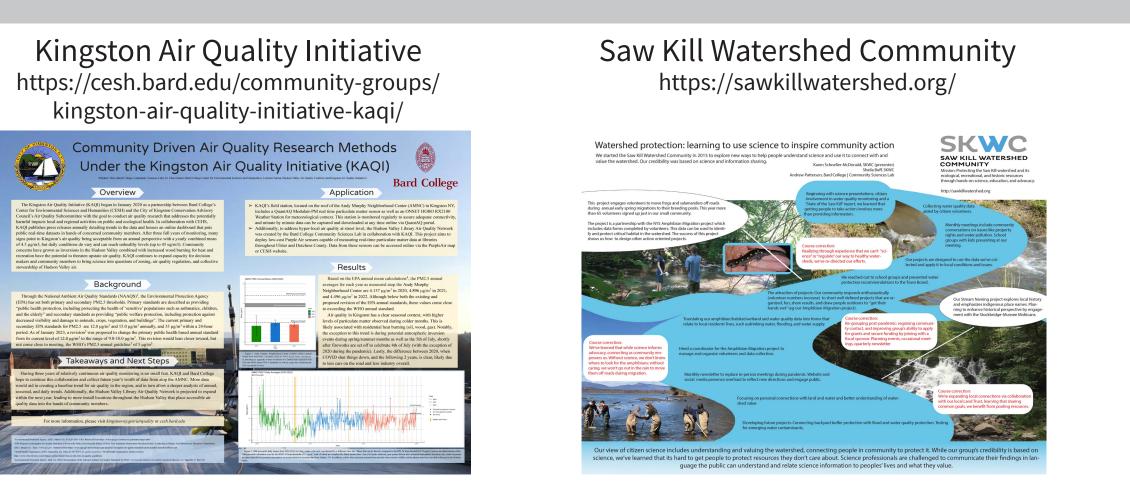
https://rethinkingplace.bard.edu/

M. Elias Dueker^{1,2,3}, Mikala L'Hote^{2,3}, Andrew Patterson³, Beate Liepert^{2,3,4}

Community Sciences Lab: Processing, processing, processing......to provide Science Tools for Social Change



Key CSL Community Partnerships (and some other posters to check out!)



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Hudson Valley Air Quality Coalition https://hvaq.wordpress.com/ mergency Air & Water Filter A Elias M. Dueker, Bard College | Center for Erwironmental Sciences-Andrew Pattanion, Bard College | Community Sciences Lab Modeline Millerick, Bard College

References/Footnotes/Gratitude

* (from above) model was based on a momentous discussion in ~2017 with Kate Meierdiercks (Sienna College) and Robyn Smyth (Bard College) re: how decisions get made about road salt application in the Hudson Valley. ********We are continuing to learn as we build (and rebuild) the Community Sciences Lab, and the following authors/scientists/community leaders have been key to our rethinking of environment and sciences: Gregory Cajete, Kyle Whyte, Max Liboirin, Melissa Nelson, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, Zoltan Grossman, Catherine Coleman Flowers, Karen Schneller-MacDonald, Say:okla Kindness, Tom Goldtooth, Keisha DeFreece Laurence, and many more. Also, if you haven't already, read these books AS SOON AS YOU CAN:

