Engaging Chicago’s Diverse Communities in the Chicago Climate Action Plan

COMMUNITY #3: THE POLISH COMMUNITY

Research Report

Submitted by: Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), a Division of Science at The Field Museum

To: The City of Chicago Department of Environment
# Table of Contents

- **PROJECT OVERVIEW** 1
- **COMMUNITY OVERVIEW** 3
- **STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING** 6
- **AWARENESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTEREST IN ADDRESSING IT** 9
- **COMMUNITY CONCERNS: SPRINGBOARDS FOR CLIMATE ACTION** 13
- **ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES, VALUES, AND TRADITIONS** 22
- **COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION** 26
- **CREATIVE MODELS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** 28
- **CONCLUSION** 31
- **COMMUNITY ASSETS** 32
- **LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS** 34
- **BIBLIOGRAPHY** 34

---

This research was commissioned by the City of Chicago Department of Environment.

Research was conducted by:
Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), a Division of Science at The Field Museum
with our partners:
City of Chicago Department of Environment
The Polish Museum of America

August 2010

Visit our Web site to download the Executive Summary, a shorter "At-a-Glance" report, Community and Regional Asset Maps, and reports about other communities: [http://fieldmuseum.org/climateaction](http://fieldmuseum.org/climateaction)

Sponsored by [Boeing](https://www.boeing.com/)
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Engaging Chicago Communities in the Chicago Climate Action Plan—Community #3: The Polish Community is the third community study commissioned by the City of Chicago Department of Environment (DOE) to identify strategies for effectively engaging diverse communities throughout the city in the implementation of the Chicago Climate Action Plan (CCAP). It involved fieldwork in three parts of the city with large Polish populations. Our main focus was along the Milwaukee Corridor and the far Northwest Side, extending out to the suburbs. We also did some fieldwork on the Southwest Side around Midway Airport and on the far Southeast Side in Hegewisch.

Our first two studies were geographically focused, on South Chicago—a working class, racially diverse area on Chicago’s far South Side—and North Kenwood-Oakland/Bronzeville, an economically diverse, African-American area of the city situated just three miles south of Chicago’s downtown. This study of the Polish community is the first to focus on an ethnic group. We chose to begin our ethnic community studies with the Polish community because the Chicago area has the largest urban Polish population outside of Poland.

One of our goals in studying ethnic communities is to better understand the ways in which cultural values and traditions might facilitate or hamper participation in climate action strategies. Another is to follow people’s networks of friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances, without being limited by neighborhood boundaries. As a result of following people’s networks, this study, while focused on the city, also extended out to the suburbs, where much of the Polish population has been moving since the 1960s (see map in Community Overview).

Each study is a participatory action research project, conducted by a team including Field Museum anthropologists, staff from the Chicago Department of Environment, and leaders of community-based organizations in the study communities. In the Polish study, our community partner was the Polish Museum of America (PMA), which has been a long time collaborator of The Field Museum. The PMA is one of the oldest and largest ethnic museums in the United States. It opened its doors 75 years ago to preserve and share knowledge of the history and culture of the Polish American community and of Poland. The PMA contains material and artifacts from the first Polish community in America in Texas (1854) as well as artifacts associated with the great Polish maestro, Ignace Jan Paderewski, (1860–1941); the Polish actress Helena Modjeska (Modrzejewska) (1848–1909); and Pope John Paul II (1920–2005). In addition, there are many artifacts from the Polish pavilion at the 1939 World’s Fair, which constitute an integral part of the PMA’s collection. The museum also houses a library and archives that serve as valuable resources for historians, researchers, students, and genealogists.

What does it mean to be “Polish”? For the purposes of this study, we define someone as “Polish” if they or their ancestors emigrated from Poland. However, Poles in Chicago have diverse definitions of what it means to be “Polish” (see Community Overview).
Field research in the Polish community lasted four months. In total, we directly engaged approximately 175 people, including residents, aldermen, businesspeople, and leaders of Polish organizations, through the following methods:

- Participant-observation at 14 community events and meetings that brought together approximately 1200 people (more if the Polish Constitution Day Parade is included);
- 5 focus groups totaling 80 participants;
- 88 interviews;
- Drawing activities with 5 residents; and,
- Informal participant-observation at 15 neighborhood locations (e.g., visiting a church and talking to the attendant, eating at a Polish restaurant and talking with the owners).

Our goal was to talk to a diverse population of Poles in terms of neighborhood, gender, age, education, income, homeownership, occupation, and immigration history (native to the U.S. or immigrant; plus for immigrants, diversity in number of years in the U.S.). Overall we were successful. However, rapid research always has its limitations, and it is important to keep in mind the biases in the final demographic makeup of our research participants, as follows (all percentages are approximate):

- Gender: 64% female;
- Rate of homeownership: 78%;
- Age: 75% age 40 or over;
- Immigration history: the majority have lived in the U.S. 15 or more years;
- Education: the majority hold college or graduate degrees.

Despite these limitations, by relying on our existing network connections and doing research in public places, we reached a diverse cross-section of the community. The report reveals a myriad of connections among individual, household, and community priorities and the priorities of the CCAP. Each section concludes with recommendations for translating findings into engagement programs that will help community leaders take ownership of climate action. Communities that feel invested in the CCAP will not only implement its strategies, but also mobilize residents to devise their own creative solutions for achieving a sustainable region.

The research employed ethnographic methods. Ethnography—the hallmark method of Anthropology—aims to gain an in-depth understanding of people’s behaviors and attitudes by studying them in the context of their everyday lives. In addition to relying on the standard research methods—participant-observation, interviews, and focus groups—we also deploy a variety of creative methods to elicit stories from respondents about the relationship between climate change, the environment, and their lives, such as drawing, photographic documentation, and using objects and photos to prompt discussion.
An organized Polish community in Chicago first appeared in the late 1860s with the establishment of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish. With this event, Chicago’s Polish community began to display a distinct identity apart from other Roman Catholic immigrant communities. The following research findings describe key patterns in Chicago’s diverse Polish community.

1. Poles have emigrated to Chicago in four distinct waves (see diagram), and our research revealed some of the ways in which their diverse immigration experiences shape how they understand their place in the U.S. and their connection to Poland. To understand their perspectives on climate change and the natural environment, it is particularly important to appreciate their connections to an agrarian heritage—even among urban Poles—and their experiences with communism and other regimes that compelled them to live creatively with scarce resources (see Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions).

2. The majority of Chicago’s Polish residents live in three distinct areas. Research participants linked settlement patterns within Chicago to the regions in Poland from which people emigrated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHICAGO AREA</th>
<th>WHICH POLES LIVE THERE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee Corridor/</td>
<td>From both rural and urban regions of Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far Northwest Side</td>
<td>“Highlanders” from the rural southern mountain region of Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Side near</td>
<td>Descendants of earlier waves of immigrants, who typically emigrated from rural regions of Poland and found work in the steel mills—and generally self-identify as Americans of Polish descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midway Airport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegewisch on the far</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Side</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Milwaukee Corridor and the far Northwest Side is the most common area for Polish immigrants to settle. In 2000, of all Chicago community areas, Portage Park had the largest number of people of Polish ancestry, some 20,854 persons (Paral).
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

3. Chicago’s Polish community is addressing the challenge of maintaining its identity in the face of suburban out-migration. Two-thirds of the population now live in the suburbs. This disconnect is evidenced by weaker political influence and Polish institutions that are struggling to keep suburban Poles socially and financially invested in their programs. Nonetheless, many suburban Poles maintain a connection to the city through work, worship, membership in cultural institutions, and participation in important community events (see Stakeholders, Partnerships, and Relationship-building).

4. The community is diverse in its view of Polish identity and the degree to which people assimilate to the broader American culture. Research participants self-identified variously as “Polish,” “Polish immigrants,” “Polish-American,” or “of Polish descent,” often based on how much or little they speak Polish or participate in distinctly Polish practices in their daily lives. However, big public events and activities, such as the annual Polish Constitution Day Parade, regularly put a unified Polish identity on full display (see box).

“Suburban Poles view Chicago like an immigrant views Poland. It is the motherland. It is where they came from and had their childhood, or where their parents or grandparents came from. But they don’t go now. I invite people to come down to the museum and they say, ‘It is hard to get around in the city.’ They think of it as a foreign place.” —Staff member, Polish Museum of America

WHERE DO POLES LIVE IN THE CHICAGO REGION?

Population Changes Over 10 Years

Death of a President On April 10, 2010, 97 Polish dignitaries including President Lech Kacynski and his wife were killed in a plane crash en route to Katyn Woods, where Soviet forces had massacred thousands of Polish officers during WWII. Local Chicago artist Wojciech Seweryn, who created a sculpture in Niles to honor his father and the others killed at Katyn, also was killed in the crash. Spontaneous public memorials quickly materialized throughout the Chicago area in the form of Polish flags with black ribbons. Memorial activities were incorporated into the Polish Constitution Day Parade (pictured above) and the opening of an exhibit at the Polish Museum of America. Possibly the largest event was a somber procession of reportedly a couple thousand Poles who walked from the mother churches of Holy Trinity and St. Stanislaus Kostka to Holy Name Cathedral for a memorial service.
5. Poles in Chicago work in a wide range of professions but are strongly represented in the construction trades, domestic work (cleaning services and daycare), and the health fields. Research participants explained that Polish immigrants in the trades often arrive with valuable skills acquired in Poland. Additionally, the allocation of visas specifically for Poles in the health professions has made it easier for people with this training to emigrate. But many with limited English language skills end up doing domestic work, in part because it can be challenging for Polish immigrants to work in the areas for which they have trained. In addition to language barriers, they often find it difficult to transfer college credits and degrees from Poland and meet U.S. licensing and credential requirements.

"[The degree] does not transfer over. So even though she has gone to school, she's highly educated, she's got skills that she wants to use here, and our country won't let her. So what they do is they find a job doing something else that pays a lot less." — Polish-American architect referring to a deli clerk who holds a Masters of Social Work from Poland

**Recommendation:**

In developing programs and messaging, recognize that varying immigration experiences, generational differences, and regional differences have produced a diverse Polish community in Chicago with a variety of views and aspirations.
**STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING**

Polish community life is built upon three interconnected sectors: business, church, and civic life. The Polish business sector serves the Chicago region in general, has businesses that target Polish consumers, and is making a coordinated effort to build commercial ties to Poland. Polish churches serve Polish parishioners while working to be the churches of their local and increasingly diverse neighborhoods. The Polish civic sector is extensive with organizations and institutions that address concerns of education, heritage preservation, social and professional networking, commercial development, charity, social services, and community mobilization. This sector grew and persists out of serving the assimilation and economic needs of different waves of immigrants, as well as meeting their interest in supporting and remaining connected to Poland. Stakeholders in the Polish community can be best understood in light of the following key characteristics of these three sectors and their relationship to one another:

1. Polish civic life is closely intertwined with the Polish business community. Fraternal associations sell insurance and use the proceeds to support community activities and organizations. Polish businesses also have formed organizations for networking and to build the business capacity of members. Examples include the Polish American Chamber of Commerce, the Polish American Engineers Association, and the Polish American Contractors and Builders Association (PACBA). These groups support the wider Polish community, often through academic scholarship programs, and even have responded to crises in Poland, such as the flooding in the early 1990s and more recently in 2010.

2. The role that Catholic churches play in the Polish community has evolved over the decades. Due to the dispersal of the Polish community into the northern and southwest suburbs, a few major churches that used to be located in the center of Polish communities now function as “commuter churches.” One example is Holy Trinity Polish Mission near Division and Milwaukee in the old Polish Downtown, where 70% of their 2000 parishioners commute from the suburbs. Consequently, they are no longer the geographic and social centers of Polish neighborhoods that they once were. However, the churches continue to play a key role in perpetuating Polish culture, spirituality, and community.

3. Polish civic organizations face different challenges largely based on differences in when they were founded. Older organizations, established from the late 1800s through WWII, are struggling to bring in younger leadership. Newer organizations, founded since 1980, lack stable funding sources and the social standing that older organizations enjoy. Some organizations have been trying to address these challenges in part by working to bridge this generational divide. However, this brings its own challenges because the organizations tend to operate in different languages (older in English, newer in Polish) and address different concerns. For example, a third generation community and business leader was invited to participate in a newer business association but found that the membership was primarily interested in expanding business ties to Poland—something that had little to do with his interests.

4. Women in the Polish community have a tradition of creating new civic organizations to address contemporary concerns, either in response to an unmet need or because they have been excluded from power or status in existing organizations. The Polish Women’s Alliance was formed in the 1890s and allowed women to sign their own insurance policies. The Legion of Young Polish Women was founded in September 1939 to raise money to support Poland and perform philanthropy in the Polish community. By the 1960s and 70s, women had started groups like the Coalition of Polish American Women which, for a time, became a required speaking stop on the political circuit each election cycle in Chicago. More recently, a radio host who is a cancer survivor founded Zdrowie Plus (Health Plus) to address health care and language barriers faced by immigrant women fighting severe illnesses, such as breast cancer.
5. Despite all of the activity in the Polish community, its political influence in Chicago has been in decline for the last three decades, even as its economic impact through successful business ventures continues to grow. Loss of political power is evident in the decline in the number of recognized Poles holding government positions, while the community’s concern over the issue is manifest in admonitions to get out and vote that have become a standard part of annual heritage events. Declining institutional influence is evident in the marked difference between two campaigns. In the late 1950s, Polish civic organizations successfully worked with the Archdiocese of Chicago to get the Kennedy Expressway routed around the “mother church” of St. Stanislaus Kostka. However, in the late 1980s the community found itself at odds with the Archdiocese and had to conduct parish-by-parish fights just to be allowed to raise money to prevent parish closures. This decline is in large part the result of out-migration to the suburbs. Declining numbers in the city left the community vulnerable to political redistricting, particularly in neighborhoods with growing Latino populations. Many research participants also cited as significant causes lack of community unity and lower rates of voting by newer immigrants.

The Polish community’s political power has declined in the city of Chicago as a significant percentage of the population has moved to the suburbs. However, the Polish civic sector has remained active largely due to the support of new immigrants and suburban Poles who have stayed engaged in the city’s Polish organizations focused on issues ranging from heritage and education to business development and social services.
**CHURCHES: THEN AND NOW**

**Then:** Historically, Catholic parishes in Polish neighborhoods played multiple roles: operating schools, providing economic and social services to parishioners (including banking), working closely with neighborhood organizations and local leaders, and providing spaces for social gatherings. One such space was the basement of St. John Cantius Catholic Church at the south end of the old Polish Downtown. The mural shown here was uncovered on the basement wall during church renovations and depicts a wedding in Poland with the couple wearing traditional Cracovian outfits. Research participants explained that this cafeteria was once a bar or music club, and an older woman reported having come during the 1950s to dance and listen to jazz.

**Now:** Students of Holy Trinity Polish Saturday School assemble in the social hall for a commemorative presentation on Pope John Paul II, held on the anniversary of his death. Today, “Polish” Catholic churches in Chicago are not as involved in peoples’ day-to-day secular concerns, but still offer variously: Polish Saturday school, Polish language mass, other rituals celebrated in traditional Polish ways (e.g. the blessing of Easter Baskets), the commemoration of important Polish events and people, and social events. Many remain relevant to their surrounding communities—which are no longer majority Polish—by offering similar rituals and events tailored for other ethnic communities and providing space for ethnically unmarked schools, social service activities, and entertainment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING**

1. Since the Polish community is dispersed throughout the Chicago region yet still well connected, the City should work with surrounding municipalities to develop programs and messaging that are consistent across geographic boundaries, to better facilitate understanding and information sharing.

2. Work with women leaders, who have a track record of organizing responses to emerging community threats, to create climate action programs that also address contemporary challenges that have been of greatest concern to them, including health, heritage preservation, and business opportunities.
Most study participants are aware of climate change as both a political and environmental issue. Their views of climate change are diverse and include a range of beliefs about natural vs. human causality and widespread suspicion of the motives of government, business, and individuals that promote climate action. A majority of participants accept that humans probably have a significant impact on the climate and tend to view climate change as a global threat that has or will have local impact. Alongside their specific views on climate change, many participants conveyed strong beliefs in environmental stewardship and commitments to healthy living that serve as the basis of a willingness to respond to the new threat of climate change even if they do not fully understand or believe in it. This seemingly contradictory picture can be clarified by looking more closely at Poles’ understandings of climate change as a social, environmental, political, and scientific issue:

1. Participants often discussed climate change as a global issue that will eventually have a significant impact on Chicago. While participants did at times see local evidence of climate change in warm winters or cool summers, unlike in previous studies we have conducted, only a handful of people mentioned non-weather evidence like falling lake levels and more insects as current local effects of climate change. More often, when pressed for local indicators, respondents cited their neighborhoods’ environmentally-friendly practices, presumably as indicators of local concerned action, or else said they did not know of any local impacts. However, participants realized that climate change will be a major issue in Chicago’s future, and cited more heat, flooding, drought, food shortages, and even water wars.

2. The most pervasive form of climate change skepticism is not aimed directly at the question of whether climate change is happening or if it is human-caused, but rather at the motives of governments, corporations, and individuals who are promoting climate action or “going green.” For instance, people are suspicious that Al Gore is making a fortune promoting climate action, in particular by hawking his new book. In another instance, a focus group participant asked, “What is a carbon credit anyway?” and added that the guy selling them is probably driving an SUV.

3. The idea that natural systems are enormous and complex is an important element in many participants’ views on climate change. It makes people variously: dismissive of the science (climate science is “bunk” because weather is too complicated to sort out), uncertain and overwhelmed in deciding what action is actually called for (“Environment is not my expertise; I can’t do anything because I don’t know enough about it”), or convinced that the degree of human impact on climate must really be minor (“…one volcanic eruption releases more CO2 than the whole history of human economy”).

4. Despite the diversity of outlooks on climate change, a majority of participants expressed a willingness or desire to engage in climate action. Many participants, including some who are skeptical or uncertain of climate science, described being moved by an environmental sensibility independent of science. They view much of climate action as necessary for the environment or nature, not the climate per se. Individuals specifically cited an ethic of stewardship, a desire to live in accord with nature, or a responsibility to conserve limited resources so everyone can have a share.
An immigrant college student explained very directly how her motivation is a matter of responsibility that is not strongly connected to climate science: “I don’t think about climate change as scientists do. I think about it in terms of environmental responsibility: to ensure that, in future generations, there will be earth, grass, water. Also, climate change is one of those phrases I don’t understand fully.”

5. People’s relationship to communism also shapes their views of climate change. A few conservative, older Poles were among those suspicious of climate action and “going green” as self-serving or liberal agendas, an outlook that a couple key informants attributed to older people equating “liberal” with “communist.” However, a number of recent immigrants equated taking care of nature with the end of communism, explaining that the communists abused nature in Poland, and more recent government and EU policies to protect and restore it have been both welcome and effective. Finally, there were those who gave limited credit to the communists, acknowledging that under communism they were either taught to appreciate the limited supply of natural resources, through activities like tree planting in school, or learned to value and conserve resources simply as a function of their scarcity. They still see these as valuable lessons that they learned, that proudly set them apart from the wastefulness of American consumer culture.

This illustration, drawn by an artist on our research team, depicts one interviewee’s response to the question, “What does climate change mean to you?” The response followed a general trend among respondents to conceptualize climate change within their broader notions of protecting the environment, here through wasting less (no plastic bottles), recycling more (recycling bin), and being more in tune with nature (gardening). She shares with other research participants a sense of frugality in which using fewer resources overall is a virtue that taxes nature less, shows proper appreciation for what they have, and leaves others their share of resources. Walking (depicted here) and other resource-saving activities were typically described in terms of these motivations.
WHAT THREE WORDS COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR “CLIMATE CHANGE”?  

Participants were asked this question during our interviews. In this word cloud, more frequently occurring words appear larger. There are significant patterns here:

1. GLOBAL TEMPERATURE CHANGES: Respondents related climate change to changes in the “Weather” (note its large size)—most often to changes in temperature and particularly the earth getting hotter—as reflected also in the large size of “Global Warming” and the easily readable sizes of “Hot,” “Heat,” “Warming,” and “Warmer.”

2. LOCAL VS. GLOBAL: As explained earlier, while a majority of respondents understand climate change to be a serious global problem, there was not a strong sense that it has significantly reached Chicago yet. Words like “Polar Bears,” “Glaciers,” “Ice,” and “Alaska” reflect respondents’ awareness of significant negative impacts in other regions of the world. However, “Warm” did refer to warmer winters in Chicago, and words like “Flooding” and “Lack” reflect concerns expressed over future storms and shortages of food and water. And terms like “Recycling” reflect a tendency to think of local action related to global climate change rather than local climate change impacts.

3. HUMAN CAUSALITY: The size of the word “Pollution” reflects the link many respondents made between climate change and human causality. However, “Uncertainty” and “Uncertain” reflect a degree of confusion and skepticism around climate change and the idea that humans are a significant cause. The word “Volcano,” which referred to the recent volcanic eruption in Iceland, also reflects a perception of human impacts being small or gradual compared to destructive natural phenomena.
RANKING THE CCAP STRATEGIES

Research participants were asked to rank each of these CCAP strategies according to their level of interest:

1. In crafting messages, sidestep climate change as an issue to avoid engendering skepticism and instead appeal to Chicago Poles’ commitment to be good environmental stewards through resource conservation.

2. Identify high profile people with modest lifestyles and highlight them as climate action leaders.

Energy Efficiency and Waste Reduction garnered the greatest interest, consistent with participants’ interest in cost savings, resource conservation, and well-kept surroundings. Regarding transportation, respondents often recognized the impact of transit choices on climate change, but either could not see themselves changing their transit choices or having the option to change them (see Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions). Even in last place, Adaptation got slightly over half the total points that could be assigned to it, so people could tell it has some importance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

**AWARENESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTEREST IN ADDRESSING IT**

1. In crafting messages, sidestep climate change as an issue to avoid engendering skepticism and instead appeal to Chicago Poles’ commitment to be good environmental stewards through resource conservation.

2. Identify high profile people with modest lifestyles and highlight them as climate action leaders.
Our research identified a number of important community concerns in the Polish community that have momentum and could serve as springboards for developing strategies for community involvement in climate action. The issues that we highlight in this section include:

- Home
- Healthy Living
- Cultural Heritage
- Jobs: Trades and Domestic Cleaning Services

These types of concerns are not generally discussed in relation to climate change action plans, but in fact they provide building blocks for creative entry into climate action. Following is an introduction to each as a concern of Chicago’s Polish community.

Many residents and organizations in the Polish community are also interested in three other issues that are highlighted as “co-benefits” of climate action in the CCAP and often discussed in relation to climate action throughout the country. The first is economic development/green jobs, which is discussed in this section primarily under the concern of Jobs: Trades and Domestic Cleaning Services. The second is health, which is discussed in the section on Healthy Living, where it takes a distinctly different twist than usual. The third is cost savings, which is covered in the section on Home. One final issue that is often seen as a co-benefit of climate action—transportation—did not arise as a concern, likely for a number of reasons, which are discussed in the section, Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions.

CCAP strategies tailored to community concerns will provide springboards for engaging residents in climate action.
HOME

“The best thing about this house is that it provides shade in the summer, there is fresh air, and I can open windows. I was always dreaming about a small house with a big yard.” — Female resident from Hinsdale

Many Poles invest a significant amount of work, time, and money in establishing comfortable, well-organized, clean living spaces in Chicago and suburban neighborhoods. A number of residents connect to their Polish identity through their homes in terms of both the physical structures and their daily practices. They care particularly about:

1. **Home Ownership and Beautification:** Our research respondents reported high rates of homeownership, which matches the demographic data for the Polish community overall. In the city, 16% of the Polish population lives in owner occupied single family homes compared to only 9% of the city’s total population. The vast majority of those interviewed took great pride in demonstrating how they actively maintain and improve the physical structures and aesthetics of their homes. As one woman noted: “Beautifying the landscape is important for its aesthetic quality.”

2. **Cost of Living:** Research participants indicated that there is a fair amount of social pressure among Poles to live within one’s means, as evidenced in the lack of public sympathy for those who are viewed as having overextended themselves in the housing market. Marked frugality is a major strategy of Poles determined to be or remain homeowners while making modest incomes. Many of the cost saving strategies that they adopt to control household expenses have the added benefit of being environmentally friendly (see Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions).

3. **Extended Family:** A number of Polish households include multiple generations of family members. Given the current global fiscal crisis and its impact upon the employment sector, some residents are especially concerned about their ability to adequately care for and support aging relatives.

4. **Gardens and Green Space:** Gardening is described as a longstanding tradition among Poles, many of whom relate the practice to their agrarian heritage. Green space is also a desirable aesthetic feature. Some participants indicated that they moved to the suburbs for larger backyards, and some city dwellers told us that they keep small container gardens.

5. **Community:** While not all study participants live in predominantly Polish neighborhoods, many conveyed a sense of being part of a far-reaching Polish social network and expressed the desire to live near or among other Poles with whom they share particular cultural experiences. Proximity to Polish delis, churches, and cultural organizations are some of the benefits cited by those who have chosen to live in neighborhoods with large Polish populations.
**Springboards for Climate Action**

1. Promote sustainable household activities that draw on Polish heritage traditions and bring together multiple generations, such as gardening and recycling/repurposing to reduce waste and pollution.

2. Continue to promote energy efficiency as a strategy for simultaneously saving costs and helping the environment. (Also applies to Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions.)

3. Build on Chicago Poles’ investments in weatherization and home beautification to involve the community in aesthetically pleasing green infrastructure projects. Incentivize a range of adaptation strategies to facilitate community engagement at various commitment levels. These might include green roof installation, tree planting, installing rain barrels and rain gardens, and creating green alleys. (Also applies to Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions.)

**Recommendations:**

**Home**

Creating a Polish Home

This family moved from Chicago to Morton Grove when the husband’s mother came from Poland to live with them. She grows vegetables in their garden (pictured), babysits, and cooks homemade Polish dishes. The two children attend Polish Saturday school, and the family remains connected to the city’s Polish civic sector through the wife’s father, who heads a coalition of Polish hometown clubs. The husband, a carpenter who lost his job last year, recently renovated their home and incorporated a number of components that he claims help the environment and also improve his family’s home life. These include energy efficient windows, blinds to control temperature, and a built-in recycling bin. His knowledge about these practices comes partly from Poland, as demonstrated by his question to our researcher: “Did you know that in Europe they will only be selling CFLs soon…? I heard this from my sister.”
HEALTHY LIVING

“I think that everything starts with me. If I want to be healthy, I have to live in a clean environment.” —Young Portage Park resident

Many Polish community leaders and residents have strong feelings about foods, habits, and activities that promote a healthy lifestyle and strengthen residents’ relationships with nature. They define “healthy living” as caring for one’s self, home, and environment. This way of living prioritizes wholesome, home-cooked foods and holistic remedies over “fast” or processed foods and costly, invasive medical procedures. Several respondents noted a particular aversion to synthetic materials like polyester and plastic, preferring instead to use glass and natural fibers. Many of these practices draw from longstanding heritage traditions that have recently gained newfound popularity and are being marketed to the Polish community. The main themes that were expressed in this study are:

1. Agrarian Heritage: Some Poles came to Chicago from rural farming villages where livestock was cultivated. Those with more urban experiences also identified home-grown produce and animal husbandry as part of their childhood experience or their national heritage.

2. Natural Foods: A significant number of community members expressed a preference for “natural,” minimally processed foods. Artisanal, organic, locally sourced, and home-grown foods were highly touted for their freshness. Many respondents identified Amish poultry and eggs, berries from Michigan, and pork from Wisconsin as examples of foods that they prefer. Organically grown foods were also popular, but some interviewees confessed that they are confused by or skeptical of organic certification standards and the subsequent high prices.

3. Home-Style Polish Cooking: Natural foods provide the fundamental basis for home-style Polish cooking, which many Poles consider key to healthy living. Skilled cooks imaginatively combine simple, fresh, inexpensive ingredients like cabbage, grains, root vegetables, and herbs to create hearty soups and colorful salads, and meats are roasted or stewed for long periods of time. Many vividly recalled the experience of food shortages, import restrictions, and rations during the communist era, and remain cautious in their spending and dining habits. According to the owner of the Red Apple Restaurant: “This is a challenge in a big community like this to keep everything fresh; when you have a small community it is easier.”

4. Relationship with the Outdoors: A number of respondents noted that they value and spend a fair amount of time outdoors, in parks, forest preserves, or most often their own backyards. Many own vacation homes or regularly vacation in the Wisconsin countryside.

5. Natural Remedies: One interviewee described Poles as people very concerned with illness. Holistic remedies provide an alternative to those seeking to manage chronic pain, high cholesterol, and potentially debilitating illnesses. The confusing nature of the U.S. healthcare system is also an issue for those seeking to manage health and wellness.

6. Natural Cleaning Products: Non-toxic and natural cleaning products such as vinegar were mentioned by some interviewees and discussed in Polish media as alternatives to the harsh and potentially poisonous chemicals in popular home cleaning products.

7. Suspicion and Debate: There is some suspicion in the community over how authentic or healthy some of these practices are. Two participants at one focus group passionately debated whether Amish methods of raising livestock were worth the increased cost. Several community members also indicated that foods like sausage and stews with heavy sauces were best eaten in moderation. One participant who works with a business association noted the need to question whether product claims about health are real or just marketing schemes that position old products in a new guise.
“Gardens are very popular in Poland. Here food is fake; but in Poland it is natural.” —Polish Saturday school volunteer

Eating Fresh, in Poland Many respondents expressed the notion that “everything tastes better in Poland”—and not just as a nostalgic memory of home. A Polish health food store employee explained that she couldn’t eat tomatoes and potatoes when she first came to the United States; something about the taste and texture was different. This woman grew up during the communist era; she rarely if ever purchased fruit or vegetables from a market. Rather, she ate seasonal or home-preserved fruits and vegetables, and the tomatoes that she remembered were vine-ripened. In fact, she said that even families that did not own farmland had opportunities to grow from family gardens on the outskirts of town (called działka). Polish truckers validated her sense that something was “off,” telling her that California tomatoes are picked when they are still green, stored in warehouses, and gassed (by ethylene) to artificially ripen them before they are shipped to Chicago.

**Recommendations:**

1. Tailor programs and messages focused on the co-benefit of public health to the particular type of healthy living popular in the Polish community, which focuses on unprocessed foods, natural products, and connections to the outdoors. (Also applies to Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions.)

2. Encourage residents to maintain and expand their healthy living practices by providing information on and incentives for visiting farmers’ markets, garden businesses, and retail food establishments that support a sustainable lifestyle.

3. Enlist local businesses that already promote healthy living to disseminate CCAP information, particularly when it reinforces the practices that they already promote, e.g. eating unprocessed foods. (Also applies to Communication and Dissemination.)
CULTURAL HERITAGE

“We want our youth to be proud of Polish heritage, to have fun, keep heritage alive through dance and tradition and Polish language school.”
—Community leader, Polish Roman Catholic Union of America (PRCUA)

A wide variety of organizations within the Polish community are active in maintaining and promoting Polish practices, traditions, and values. Much of this effort is directed at preserving activities that overtly display ethnic identity and can be a source of pride when interacting with other groups. There is also a concerted effort among some of these organizations to figure out how to remain relevant to the changing needs of a diverse Polish-heritage community (see Stakeholders, Partnerships, and Relationship-building). Polish cultural heritage is most commonly conveyed through:

1. Fine and Folk Arts: Chicago Poles participate in and promote their fine arts heritage through concerts, art scholarships and competitions, the Polish Film Festival, public sculpture, and museum installations (e.g. the Paderewski Room at the Polish Museum of America). They also name organizations after famous artists (e.g. Joseph Conrad Yacht Club, Chopin Theater). Folkloric arts groups are organized and funded by fraternal organizations like the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America and regional Polish clubs like the Highlanders Alliance. These groups provide members of the community with opportunities to connect to regional traditions through expressive folk arts, regalia, music, dance, crafts, and food.

2. Language and Traditions: There are more than 30 Polish Saturday schools in Chicago and its suburbs. Their primary function is to teach children of Polish descent the language of their heritage. School-aged children and teens also learn Polish history, literature, geography, and other cultural practices and values. Dedicated groups of teachers, administrators, and parent volunteers are the mobilizing forces behind Polish schools. A few respondents expressed concern that these schools might not be able to survive in the future, as the next generation might not be as concerned with passing on the Polish language.

3. Commemorative Events: Festive occasions such as the annual Pulaski Day celebration provide opportunities for the community to connect to contemporary Poland and its European history in a public forum. Memorial activities around somber occasions such as the death of Pope John Paul II and the recent tragic plane crash that took the lives of Polish dignitaries also highlight the strong relationship that Chicago’s Polish community maintains with contemporary Poland (see Community Overview).

Making Butter Lambs with the WICI Children’s Song and Dance Company Two young women teach a small group of children ages 5-9 traditional Polish folk dancing every Monday evening at White Eagle Banquets in Niles. One fondly recalled making butter lambs with her father as a precursor to the Easter holiday and decided to introduce the activity to her dance class.

To read more about heritage-based activities and events, see:

- Community Overview—Death of a President
- Stakeholders, Partnerships, and Relationship-building—Churches: Then and Now
- Creative Models for Engagement—Linking Polish Identity with Mainstream Concerns
Provide support for cultural organizations that are focusing on environmental issues, such as the Polish Scouts and the Polish Museum of America, to develop and promote climate action programs and activities that link to Polish cultural traditions. These programs would draw on Poles’ environmental sensibilities—including a strong sense of connection to nature and commitment to resource conservation—to support individual and group-led climate action. (Also applies to Creative Models for Community Engagement.)
JOBS: TRADES AND DOMESTIC CLEANING SERVICES

“Polish people arrive here in the U.S., work hard, three and four jobs... You can see in the church parking lot Polish people with nice car[s], pretty clean homes—all from hard work.” —Midway area store employee

Significant numbers of Poles are involved in the construction trades and domestic cleaning services, as both trades people and contractors. These industries experienced tremendous growth during the housing boom and thus have been especially hard hit by the current housing crisis. New home construction has all but stalled, leaving many in construction without steady work or clients. Likewise, the demand for cleaning services has diminished as people have lost their jobs and lenders have foreclosed on their homes. Two significant areas of concern are:

Shifting Employment: Some Poles who have been displaced in the workforce by the recession have retrained themselves and taken work in other industries. Others take piecemeal jobs waiting for the economy to improve, and they sometimes make their own piece work—such as an underemployed carpenter who reported starting to sort and haul more of the scrap from worksites for its cash value.

Green Business Opportunities: There is some momentum building around efforts to incorporate environmentally-friendly components into new or existing business ventures, in part to respond to increasing public awareness of “green” products and services (see Creative Models for Community Engagement).

Green Design and Construction: The firm Cooperative Design Works was founded in 2010 by three architects who have known each other since high school. The partner who initiated the collaboration did so when he was laid off from a larger firm. Two of the three are LEED-accredited professionals. The firm intends to do building assessments that would give homeowners comprehensive recommendations for home improvements, repairs, and maintenance, as well as some green and energy efficient solutions. The founding partner drew this detailed floor plan as a case study for his coop to use when discussing potential solutions with clients. Using his own home as the model, he highlighted modern and traditional energy efficiency measures such as a water conserving toilet and curtains to control temperature; classic architectural design solutions like an open layout that allows for good airflow through the house; and traditional practices such as turning off lights when not in use, growing vegetables, and hanging clothes out to dry.
“I know that [the] climate has changed . . . I know that we are smart enough to stop that . . . I heard a lot of it on [the] Oprah show . . . so I am up to date with everything . . . I changed my cleaning supplies to green ones.”
—Owner, Huk Cleaning Crew and Chicago Dog Academy: America’s First Polish Dog Academy

Green House Cleaning and Dog Training A mother-daughter team owns and operates Huk Cleaning Crew, which the mother began as a modest operation during the 1990s. Suburban American homeowners comprise their primary customer base. The daughter took over business operations in 2000 when her mother began to care for her aging grandmother full time. When gas prices escalated, the company switched to more fuel-efficient vehicles to carry workers to and between sites. As the daughter’s awareness of climate change increased, she had the cleaners switch to environmentally-friendly cleaning products. At the peak of the business, they employed fifteen women; currently they employ six. When the economy began to decline in 2008, the daughter completed an animal behavior certification course at a local college and opened Chicago Dog Academy, “the first Polish dog academy” at her home, serving a primarily Polish clientele. She sells all natural dog food and grooming products and promotes an active and healthy lifestyle. Images: Graphic of Huk Cleaning service website, Chicago Dog Academy: America’s First Polish Dog Academy.

RECOMMENDATION:
JOBS: TRADES AND DOMESTIC CLEANING SERVICES

Provide support for Polish trades people, contractors, and their professional organizations to access industry-specific green business development resources by:

a. Creating opportunities for them to interact with green building professionals both locally and internationally. DOE could support existing and new initiatives of these organizations to link to the extensive green building movement in Europe and Poland.

b. Providing information about green incentives offered by the City or other entities; and,

c. Sharing assessment tools that they can use with customers to demonstrate cost-savings for green construction and residential retrofits, covering the gamut from basics like spray foam insulation to more experimental technologies involving renewable energy. (Also applies to Environmentally-friendly Practices, Values, and Traditions.)

Also see recommendations in Creative Models for Community Engagement.
ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY
PRACTICES, VALUES, AND TRADITIONS

“In Poland people plant every square with trees, flowers, and vegetables. It is their heritage.” —Young Jefferson Park resident

Respondents in the Polish community appear to engage in environmentally-friendly practices to a greater extent than respondents in other communities we have studied. The increase we found may partially be due to a shift in our methodology; however, it is pronounced enough to represent an actual difference in lifestyle and is undoubtedly influenced by key values and outlooks.

Some of the most reported practices are influenced by culturally-specific factors that accompany Poles’ experiences with communism, immigration, and the global depression (see Community Concerns): agrarian heritage, a strong connection to nature, and a sensibility towards conserving resources. One participant who labeled himself as the son of “a farm boy from Poland” explained that many Poles in Chicago come from a strong rural culture and are proud of their heritage and tradition of being “tied in with the earth or soil.” This often emerges through practices such as gardening, opening windows instead of using air conditioning, and living close to open space—and generally valuing green space for more than its monetary value. Additionally, respondents routinely linked a sensibility of resource conservation and frugality to environmentally-friendly practices rooted in their families’ experiences growing up under conditions of scarcity. According to one respondent, these include, “saving and reusing bags, drying laundry on a clothesline, planting vegetable gardens, and conserving water while showering.” Two participants explained that although their older relatives’ behaviors arose from the chronic shortages under communism, they still continue these practices out of habit and to distinguish themselves from “wasteful Americans.”

Do-It-Yourself: Creative Solutions
A strong link exists between Poles in the construction trades and a do-it-yourself culture. To save money on his heating bill, an electrician/carpenter built this solar water heater for his family’s home in Jefferson Park, duplicating what he did at his recreational home in the Polish countryside. This renewable energy system will lower his family’s gas usage and save money on their heating bill. He also replaced their old home heater with one that is certified energy efficient.

Research identified other DIY practices as well. Six years ago, another respondent who lives in Galewood started putting a bucket underneath her home’s second floor window to collect water drops from the air conditioner. The bucket fills up in just two days, and she uses it for her grass, vegetable garden (pictured here), and washing machine.
Our research revealed the following notable community patterns, in relationship to the practices listed in the box to the right:

1. The climate actions most often reported and observed in the Polish community are the first eight listed. They align with major community themes of frugality and agrarian heritage and are also closely related to the CCAP strategies.

2. Some of the least reported practices relate to transportation. Even as research participants acknowledged problems with public transit, most did not see themselves using their cars any less in the future. There are a set of interrelated reasons for this. Wide population dispersal and the consequent long commutes for many are a disincentive to giving up their cars. Additionally, some of the most popular occupations in the Polish community, such as the trades and domestic cleaning services discussed earlier, require use of a car to reach client sites or carry materials.

3. The fact that buying organic appears in the middle of the list points towards the common theme that many in the community are drawn to healthy living but wary of high costs.

4. Even at number fifteen, retrofit measures rank higher than in other communities we have studied. This can likely be attributed to the high rate of homeownership among Poles, many of whom are concerned about rising energy bills and are in the position to weatherize their property. The community also includes many trades people with an ability to offer these services, making a nice fit between supply and demand.

5. A difference in generational mindset characterizes the community, in terms of what it means to be environmentally friendly. Frugality, defined as not being wasteful of resources, resonated more strongly with seniors. The younger generation demonstrated more knowledge and concern about climate change and were more enthusiastic and less skeptical about purchasing and using products to "go green" or participating in formally organized initiatives. This difference is nicely exemplified by one household in which the grandmother uses the recycling bin for storage (a form of recycling itself) whereas the granddaughter uses the bin to recycle, depositing its contents at a local church.
ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES, VALUES, AND TRADITIONS

BARRIERS TO ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

Research revealed a number of barriers that Polish residents face in attempting to engage in environmentally-friendly practices—in addition to those regarding using alternative transportation, discussed above.

Barriers to addressing energy efficiency include:

• Financial constraints (particularly high up-front costs);
• Cynicism among contractors regarding city intentions and equitable treatment;
• Homeowner association regulations that prohibit the attachment of external structures such as solar panels or clotheslines to roofs;
• Wariness of new technologies (e.g., green roofs, solar panels) regarding quality and, among contractors, whether there will actually be increases in consumer demand.

Another significant barrier relates to recycling. Changes and cutbacks in the city’s recycling programs, along with differences in recycling programs within the city and across the metro region, contribute to confusion and skepticism about recycling initiatives.

POLISH TRADITIONS OF FRUGALITY

“[In Poland,] my grandma used to have a container for rain water. We washed our hair in it because it was softer.” —Polish resident from Addison, IL interviewed at the Polish Constitution Day Parade

A Polish resident in the Chicago region recently received this card from her cousin in Poland. The rhyming poem tells a story of a little girl who is proud of her ability to wash her dolls’ clothes outdoors.

Polish culture includes a range of traditional practices aimed at using less, which simultaneously promote environmentally-friendly behaviors and strong connections with the natural world. Respondents excitedly told us about some of these practices, many of which are coming back in style and being reinvented in the Chicago area:

Gardening plots for urban dwellers – dzialka ogrodnicza

Reusable, expandable mesh shopping bags – siatka

Herbal remedies – ziołowa apteka

Cooking from scratch – staropolska kuchnia

Picking mushrooms and seasonal fruits in the countryside – grzybobranie, na jagody

Hanging clothes on a line – wieszanie ubra na lince
**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES, VALUES, AND TRADITIONS**

1. Encourage Polish residents to continue to revitalize traditional practices that tend to decline across generations and reflect a commitment to frugality and environmental stewardship, such as drying laundry on clotheslines, capturing rain water, and opening windows—stressing their compatibility with a modern, urban, environmentally-friendly lifestyle.

2. As part of the CCAP Energy Efficient Buildings strategy, meet with the Polish American Contractors and Builders Association (PACBA) and the Polish American Chamber of Commerce to help them better understand how the City plans to work with contractors, how their organizations can get involved, and what financial structures are being developed for residents to cover costs for retrofits and related efforts such as renewable energy. This should also help begin to dispel some cynicism about government processes often seen as exclusionary.

Also see recommendations in *Community Concerns: Home, Healthy Living, and Jobs: Trades and Domestic Cleaning Services.*

---

**BARRIER AND OPPORTUNITY:**

Moving from Individual to Group Engagement in Environmental Issues

Surprisingly, despite Chicago Poles’ high level of individual engagement in environmentally-friendly practices, there is little group activity or mobilization around ongoing environmental issues or even issues that link environmental and sociocultural concerns, such as healthy eating. This gap between environmental sensibility and interest on the individual level and lack of organizational movement represents a ripe opportunity for encouraging group-based climate action (see *Creative Models for Community Engagement*).
COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Chicago Poles access a wide range of information from a variety of sources, many of them specific to the Polish community. Nonetheless, many sources do not regularly cover climate change, and some participants reported having too little information about the topic or hearing conflicting information. This communication landscape can be best understood in light of the following list and observations about sources and channels of information in the Polish community:

1. There are a number of popular local media sources—TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, bilingual Web sites, including Polish and English-language—specifically aimed at a Polish audience.

2. Local radio stations broadcast local and national news and news from Poland as well as cover special events in the Polish community. Call-in and interview programs are popular and tend to have more cursory news coverage than other talk formats. Some radio hosts have particular popularity and respect in the Polish community. Among them some cater to and express distinct political perspectives. There is some difference in what radio stations people listen to based on differences in age and when their families immigrated to Chicago.

3. Catholic television and radio, both in English and Polish, were mentioned by a number of participants as important for connecting to the global Catholic community through broadcast Sunday mass, faith teaching, and Catholic Church news. A number of Catholic Poles also find both sources an important resource for obtaining information related to Poland.

4. Polish language radio has a number of shows and advertisements focused on particular topics that might provide linkage points for climate action strategies: health/healthy eating, employment, and current events in Poland (e.g. the recent flooding).

5. Respondents most often reported getting their information specifically about climate change from mass media sources including TV news, English-language television documentaries (on PBS and the Discovery and History Channels), Polish television, Al Gore, Oprah Winfrey, radio (Polish- and English-language, including NPR), and periodicals. The internet also was widely reported as a source, particularly by those who want more detailed information than available in the mass media.

6. Professional organizations like the Polish American Chamber of Commerce and the Polish American Contractors and Builders Association hold regular meetings to network and share information important to members, including information on industry trends and products.

7. Many participants described having conversations about climate change or human-caused environmental problems (particularly the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico) with family, friends, and colleagues. Some parents reported learning about environmental issues from their children who learn about them in school or other educational settings.

Picking Up the News
A number of Polish language newspapers and magazines are available at local Polish storefront businesses, like Kasia’s Deli (pictured). Some are free, and at least five are published locally. They share with Polish language radio a focus on health, employment, and news from Poland. A one-time check of five periodicals also revealed articles about a number of other issues related to CCAP strategies, including the controversy over GMO crops among farmers in Poland, green cleaning, the dirty condition of CTA buses, and hybrid cars.
RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

1. Use local mass media sources to promote greater climate action. Link it to related concerns such as health, wholesome food, jobs, and natural disasters that already receive significant coverage.

2. Pitch media stories about Chicago's climate action work to media outlets that broadcast in Poland, since respondents seem to take pride in seeing Chicago represented in their homeland.

3. Use a broad enough sample of media personalities and outlets popular in the Polish community to reach a diverse audience.

Also see recommendations in Community Concerns: Healthy Living.

From Home to Homeland and Back Again

Cable, satellite, and on-demand TV from Poland and Europe is widely accessible, allowing people to have access to Polish language news and entertainment 24 hours a day. Options include a local commercial station (Polvision), public broadcasting from Poland (Telewizja Polska), and a commercial station from Poland (Telewizja Polsat). TVPolonia—a channel of Telewizja Polska about emigrant Poles—covers important events in Chicago's Polish community like the Pulaski Day commemoration at the Polish Museum of America (pictured here). Participants talked with bemusement and pride about being involved in creating shows filmed here for broadcast in Poland and around the world.
CREATIVE MODELS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our research identified several models that organizations and residents use or have the potential to develop to engage the community or address key challenges. They are important to highlight as a means of understanding how various sectors of the Polish community attend to community concerns.

Model 1: GREEN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Some entrepreneurs are engaging the Polish community in green practices through contracting, remodeling, green cleaning services, and using organic, local, and unprocessed foods. In the midst of the current recession, design firms, developers, and contractors are trying to market a variety of products and services, including green home improvements. Cleaning businesses promote their use of “nontoxic,” “healthy,” “natural,” or “green” cleaning products as a value-added service that is closely aligned with traditional Polish practices of healthy living. Delicatessens, restaurants, local farmers, and other specialty food purveyors appeal to Polish and wider consumer preferences for “natural,” “unprocessed,” “pure,” or “healthy” food. Some also employ environmentally-friendly waste management strategies such as composting and, in one notable instance, feeding spent brewer’s mash to chickens.

We also found a few professional organizations that support green business practices, in particular by promoting cross-cultural learning with Poland. For instance, the Polish American Chamber of Commerce is scheduled to take a delegation of contractors to Poland next year to learn about green building practices. In addition, the Polish Greenbuild Council of Boston and the Green Building Council of Poland will be hosting a banquet at the Polish Museum of America in November coinciding with the national Greenbuild conference at McCormick Place.

“I see myself working for the good of the community. If we conserve our resources, that will benefit us all—not only as individuals. I see the bigger picture.” —Owner, Delightful Pastries

Delightful Pastries: “Natural, Sustainable, Local” This small business is owned and operated by a woman who sees the benefits of running a green business and providing service to the community. She assures customers who regularly ask where berries and other ingredients originate that all of her ingredients are “natural, sustainable, and local.” Baked goods are sold at her Portage Park storefront as well as area farmers’ markets. She networks both within and across the boundaries of Chicago’s Polish community, establishing fruitful relationships with other businesses and nonprofit organizations. Growing Power, Inc., a not-for-profit organization that helps to develop sustainable community food systems, picks up their eggshells and coffee filters for composting. Recently, the bakery owner co-founded the Women 4Business Network, a professional networking group for Polish women. She also makes charitable donations to St. Hyacinth’s, a historic Polish church.
Model 2: LINKING POLISH IDENTITY WITH MAINSTREAM CONCERNS

Chicago's Polish community has a long history of establishing organizations that link Polish heritage, language, and values with mainstream issues, such as the need for group insurance and professional networking (see Stakeholders, Partnerships, and Relationship-building). For example, the Polish American Police Association promotes Polish and Slavic heritage while attending to a number of its members' practical interests. In addition to their professional services, the Polish American Medical Association, the International Polish Nurses Association, and a number of other professional organizations actively promote charitable giving and education. However, except for the Polish Scouts (see box), our research identified no Polish organizations that have as their mission addressing environmental issues or even issues that clearly link environmental and social concerns, such as healthy eating, active lifestyles, or air pollution. This model for linking Polish heritage with mainstream concerns could be expanded to link heritage to group-led climate action.

Model 3: MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS CRISES

A third model for engagement involves mobilizing in times of crisis. Since WWII, Chicago's Polish community has developed the institutional capacity and spirit of service to respond to threats to its people, institutions, and homeland. Most visibly, the Polish American Congress (PAC) was founded in 1944 to highlight the community's patriotic commitment to the U.S. WWII effort and to advocate for U.S. support of Poland. Between 1980 and 1990, the PAC Charitable Foundation helped to distribute more than $200 million in medical goods and other supplies to Poles suffering under the near collapse of the Polish economy. The PAC also led an effort to raise money for victims of the floods that devastated parts of southern Poland in 1997 and again in 2010. Similarly, one research participant recalled travelling multiple times to Poland in the mid-90s with the Polish American Contractors and Builders Association (PACBA), at his own expense, to rebuild homes that had collapsed from the floods. This model may be applicable to climate change if the issue is framed as more of an immediate crisis or threat to community survival. This is somewhat antithetical to the tendency to try to promote climate action in terms of co-benefits, but in this community a crisis framework may well be effective and not overly alarming.

Connecting Heritage to Environment and Climate Action

The Polish Scouting Organization of Illinois is the only Polish organization in the Chicago area that we found with a mission directly related to the environment. It aims to inculcate youth into Polish culture by teaching them heritage traditions, particularly those related to the stewardship of nature, community service, and martial traditions. Presently, there are more than 500 Polish Scout troops in the Chicago area.

The Polish Museum of America (PMA) (bottom image) is the only other organization identified by our research that is currently addressing environmental issues—specifically climate change. PMA became involved in this research project as part of a broader initiative led by the Chicago Cultural Alliance (CCA) to increase and diversify the membership of Chicago's ethnic museums by using heritage to address contemporary issues that community members care about (see Stakeholders, Partnerships, and Relationship-building).
CREATIVE MODELS

RECOMMENDATIONS: CREATING MODELS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1. Offer small business assistance to green businesses focused on green cleaning and healthy food—two areas of increasing interest among both Polish entrepreneurs and residents. Areas of assistance might include:
   a. Helping them to identify steps they can take to further green their businesses including accessing financial and logistical resources and green suppliers;
   b. Linking them to related businesses and business organizations to share information, advice, and opportunities; and,
   c. Working with entrepreneurs to identify common barriers to success in green business development and then craft strategies for overcoming them.

2. Build upon the Polish civic sector’s extensive experience mobilizing the community to respond to crises to address climate change as an impending global crisis that will impact both Poland and Chicago. Use the recent floods in Poland as a springboard to engaging Chicago’s Polish community in climate action, particularly focused on adaptation strategies for stormwater management.

Also see recommendations in Community Concerns: Cultural Heritage
CONCLUSION

More than 20 years removed from the end of the Cold War and just a few years since the end of the last significant wave of Polish immigration, this is an important and precarious moment for Chicago’s Polish community. Both older and newer organizations are currently faced with the challenge of redefining their missions and expanding their memberships. By linking their work to climate action and the CCAP, Polish organizations can address shared concerns and core values, from healthy natural living to maintaining Polish heritage in a changing world with a globally connected Polish community.

OUR TEAM

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:
Dr. Jennifer Hirsch, Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), The Field Museum
Commissioner Suzanne Malec-McKenna, City of Chicago Department of Environment

PROJECT TEAM:
Dr. Lori Baptista, Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), The Field Museum
Lisa See Kim, Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), The Field Museum
Rich Kujawa, The Polish Museum of America
Mario Longoni, Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), The Field Museum
Jan Lorys, The Polish Museum of America
Troy Peters, Global Philanthropy Partnership
Sarah Sommers, Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), The Field Museum

INTERNS:
Catherine Grace Graham, Izabela Grobelna, Cyrus Hester, Harlem Marino Saavedra,
Hannah Porst, Emily Smith, Johanna Wawro, Dorian Williams, Curtis Witek
This map shows the community assets identified in the research by our ethnographers and Polish research participants, in the primary area we studied.
ADDITIONAL POLISH COMMUNITY ASSETS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE RESEARCH

CHICAGO:

Businesses
- Baltimore Food Store
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Illinois
- Caffe Europa
- Cooperative Design Works
- Farmers Insurance Group
- Sokol Motorcycle Club
- Rozak’s Hair Care
- Shop and Save
- Studio 41 Supply Center
- Szalas Restaurant
- Wegierek Psychology Center
- Women’s Business Development Center

Churches
- Assumption BVM Catholic
- Five Holy Martyrs Catholic
- Good Shepherd Catholic
- Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic
- Saints Peter and Paul Catholic
- St. Adalbert Catholic
- St. Anne Catholic
- St. Bronislava Catholic
- St. Bruno Catholic
- St. Camillus Catholic
- St. Casimir Catholic
- St. Florian Catholic
- St. John of God Roman Catholic
- St. Joseph Catholic
- St. Mary Magdalene Catholic
- St. Michael the Archangel Catholic
- St. Monica Catholic
- St. Pancratius Catholic
- St. Richard Catholic
- St. Roman Catholic
- St. Turibius Catholic

Community Organizations
- Calumet Ecological Park Association
- Chicago Lawn CAPS Meeting
- Hegewisch Community Committee
- Chicago Botanic Garden
- Alden Health Care and Senior Living
- Zdowie Plus
- Monument to Nicolaus Copernicus
- Northwestern University Gate
- Thaddeus Kosciuszko Memorial
- The Agora
- Douglas Park
- Elmwood Central Park
- Restored Wetlands on Torrence

Schools/Universities
- Chicago Historical Society
- City Colleges of Chicago
- DePaul University
- East-West University
- Grissom Elementary
- Henry Clay School
- Illinois Institute of Technology
- Kosciuszko T School of Polish Language
- Marie Curie Cosmetology School
- Moody Bible Institute
- Paderewski Elementary Learning Academy
- Roosevelt University
- St. Florian School
- St. Xavier University
- University of Chicago
- University of Illinois Chicago

CHICAGO SUBURBS:

Businesses
- Grasshopper Health Foods
- Lowell foods
- Polish and Slavic Federal Credit Union
- Polonia Magazine
- Recycling Center
- Rich’s Food and Liquors
- Tuhs, Inc
- WNWI - Polish Radio Station
- WPNA - Polish Radio Station

Churches
- St. John Brebeuf

Community Organizations
- Chicago Roofing Contractors Association
- Friends of Cracow Society
- Fundacja Dar Serca (A Gift From The Heart Foundation)
- Labor Party of Illinois
- Polish Genealogical Society of America Annual Conference
- Southwest Center of Polish Dancing
- Tatry Ski Club

Gardens
- Chicago Botanic Garden
- The Agora

Public Parks/Natural Areas
- Douglas Park
- Elmwood Central Park
- Restored Wetlands on Torrence

Schools/Universities
- Chicago Historical Society
- City Colleges of Chicago
- DePaul University
- East-West University
- Grissom Elementary
- Henry Clay School
- Illinois Institute of Technology
- Kosciuszko T School of Polish Language
- Marie Curie Cosmetology School
- Moody Bible Institute
- Paderewski Elementary Learning Academy
- Roosevelt University
- St. Florian School
- St. Xavier University
- University of Chicago
- University of Illinois Chicago

BEYOND THE CHICAGO REGION:

Other Non-Profit Organizations
- National Education Association
- Polish American Historical Association
- Polish-American Priest Association
- Polish American War Veterans
- The Polish Falcons
- Polish Green Building Council
- Polish Greenbuild Council of Boston

Solidarity
- Schools/Universities
- St. Columba School

Government Agencies
- 9th District Congressional Office
- Park Ridge Library
- Village of Harwood Heights (Harwood Heights Village Hall)

Public Parks/Natural Areas
- Forest Preserve District of Cook County
- “The Golden Hole” Farm in Lemont
- Wildwood Nature Center

Schools/Universities
- Frydryk Chopin Polish School
- Paderewski Polish School
- School District 64 (Park Ridge/Niles)
- St. John Brebeuf School
- Wheeling High School
PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Our research with the Polish community in Chicago involved leaders and residents affiliated with over 40 organizations, which represent a diversity of geographic areas, sectors, and issues. These include:

- 23rd Ward Alderman's Office
- 45th Ward Alderman's Office
- Andy's Deli
- Bishop Abramowicz Seminary Advisory Committee
- Calumet Ecological Park Association
- Casimir Pulaski Polish School
- Chicago Dog Academy
- The Chicago Society of the Polish National Alliance
- Cooperative Design Works
- Delightful Pastries
- "The Golden Hole" Farm in Lemont, IL
- General K Pulaski School
- Grasshopper Health Foods
- Hegewisch Community Committee
- Holy Trinity Polish Mission
- Holy Trinity Polish Saturday School
- Huk Cleaning Service
- Jesuit Millennium Center
- Legion of Young Polish Women
- The Lira Ensemble
- Old Irving Park Association
- Pulaski School of Polish Language
- Polish American Association
- Polish American Chamber of Commerce
- Polish American Congress
- Polish Constitution Day Parade (Committee)
- Polish Genealogy Society of America
- Polish Immigration Association
- Polish Initiative of Chicago
- Polish Museum of America
- Polish National Alliance
- Polish Roman Catholic Union of America
- Polish Scouting Organization of Illinois
- Polish Women's Alliance
- Polish Women's Civic Club, Inc
- Red Apple Restaurant
- Rozak's Hair Care
- Sokol MC
- Southeast Chicago Historical Society
- St. Hyacinth Basilica
- St. Stanislaus Kostka: Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy
- Torch Realtors
- Tuhs, Inc
- Women 4Business Network
- Polish American Chamber of Commerce
- Polish American Congress
- Polish Constitution Day Parade (Committee)
- Polish Genealogy Society of America
- Polish Immigration Association
- Polish Initiative of Chicago
- Polish Museum of America
- Polish National Alliance
- Polish Roman Catholic Union of America
- Polish Scouting Organization of Illinois
- Polish Women's Alliance
- Polish Women's Civic Club, Inc
- Red Apple Restaurant
- Rozak's Hair Care
- Sokol MC
- Southeast Chicago Historical Society
- St. Hyacinth Basilica
- St. Stanislaus Kostka: Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy
- Torch Realtors
- Tuhs, Inc
- Women 4Business Network

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dziennik Zwiazkowy - Polish Daily News [Chicago]. Print.
- Express [Chicago]. Print.
- Monitor [Chicago]. Print.
- Panorama [Chicago]. Print.
- Polonia Magazine LLC. Print.
- Zgoda [Chicago]. Print.

* All image rights reserved. Visit fieldmuseum.org/ccuc for more information.