Highlights from the 2026 Columbus Community Organizing Summit



Caption: On October 24th, community leaders and students from across Ohio came together for an empowering and intergenerational day of training, building partnerships, and storytelling around the critical environmental issues facing Ohioans.

The summit, held on Ohio State's campus, featured panelists from The Great Ohio Climate March and speakers from Save Ohio Parks (SAP), and Moms' Clean Air Force.

With students representing six colleges, community members representing seven organizations, and all four major Columbus cities and numerous small towns represented, the summit featured a diverse group of interests and environmental efforts.



Caption: Panelists – from left to right–Mary Beth Naim (Third Act), Melinda Zemper (SAP), and Rachel Kutzley (SAP), speak with students and community members about the logistics, publicity, and lobbying efforts it took to put on The Great Ohio Climate March

The workshops covered topics including data centers' connection to gas turbines, plastic incineration, and how to plan a successful environmental justice campaign. One of the highlights of the day was the discussions that came during Q&A sessions. Students asked questions about the New Albany International Business Park, tips for speaking with state legislators, and the ethics of battery mining for renewable energy.



Caption: Moms' Clean Air Force Ohio Field Organizer Amanda Rowoldt presents on plastic incineration, and Save Ohio Parks founder Cathy Cowan Becker presents on data centers and their connection to increased fossil fuel reliance in Ohio.

Throughout the day, attendees were also invited to participate in tabling and networking sessions, exploring the efforts of the Central Ohio Reuse Coalition, Sierra Club at OSU, Moms' Clean Air Force, and Solar United Neighbors.

Community Action Works intern Audrey Symon emceed the day's programming, ending the summit with a workshop on campaign planning. The workshop guided attendees through Community Action Works' campaign planning workbook. Attendees left the summit with their own copies, and were encouraged to seek 1-on-1 mentorship from Community Action Works to support their campaigns.



Caption: Community Organizing intern Audrey Symon takes a show of hands during the campaign planning workshop.

The energy of the 2026 Columbus Community Organizing Summit was electric. The connections and ideas formed throughout the day will carry forward into the community organizing work growing across the state of Ohio. Whether it's calling for a moratorium on a new data center proposal, petitioning to stop the rollback of regulations on the Ohio River Valley plastic industry, or planning a climate change benefit concert, attendees will reflect on the skills and network they built at Saturday's summit.

Although this may have been the first Community Organizing Summit set in Ohio, it was certainly not the last. The 2026 Columbus Community Organizing Summit is just

the beginning of what is sure to be a lasting network of community organizers working to make Ohio a safe, sustainable, and healthy state for all.

Acknowledgements

This summit would not have been possible without the support, collaboration, and funding of the incredible organizations and people that shaped it.

Community Action Works would like to extend a thank you to Leah Fetters and Amelia Sheetz from the Ohio State Office of Student Life. A special thank you to Amanda Rowoldt, Cathy Cowan Becker, Mary Beth Naim, Melinda Zemper, and Rachel Kutzley for filling the room with your expertise and guidance. Of course, we'd also like to give a huge thank you to all of our student volunteers who helped to manage the set-up, check-in, catering, clean-up, and so much more. This event would not have been possible without you.

If you would like to ensure future summits like these can exist and Community Action Works's ongoing work to support communities facing critical environmental issues, make a donation! Any amount helps to ensure that our programming can continue and expand in communities across Ohio and beyond.

Thank You to Our Sponsors!