



MARY ANN SWETLAND
CENTER FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

ANNUAL REPORT

2021

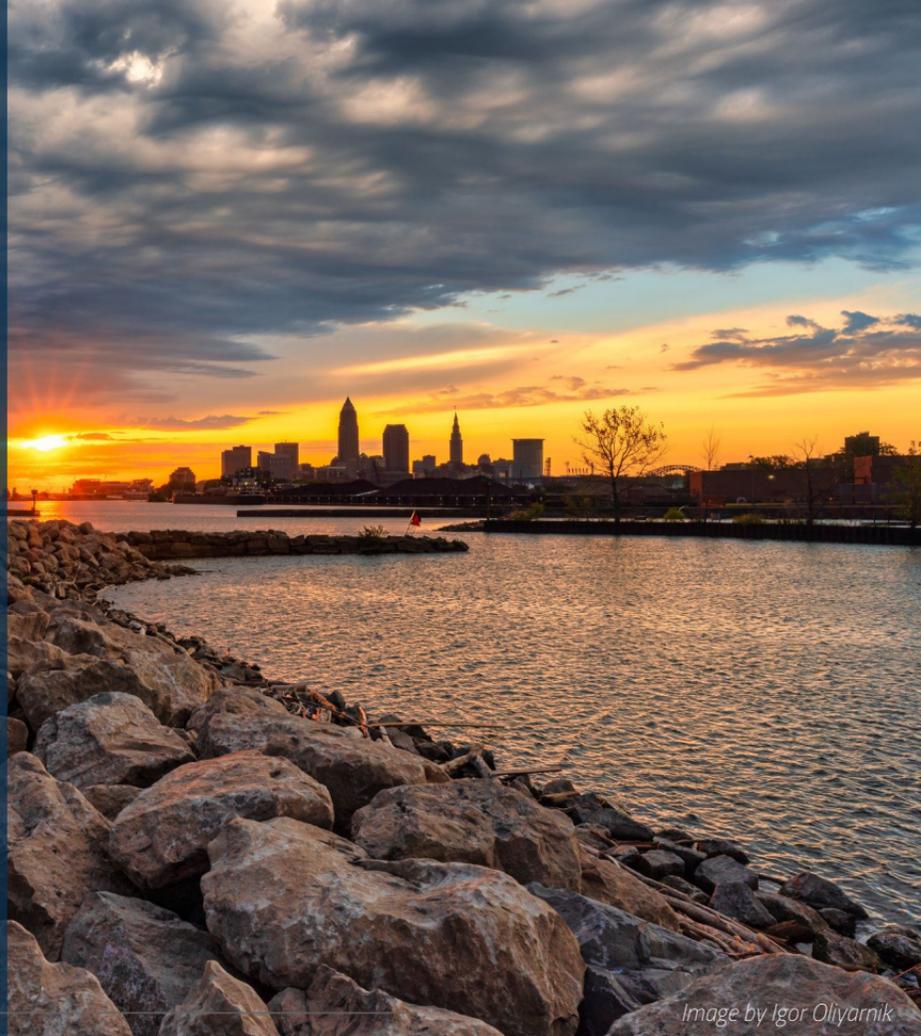


Image by Igor Oliyarnik

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Darcy Freedman, PhD, MPH

DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Partners,

The Swetland Center was busy in 2021! We grew as a team adding three full-time staff and four part-time community researchers all while leaning into a hybrid work environment. We embraced community feedback to translate food system insights from our modeling research into community action by launching the Food Systems Change Fellowship. We continued to respond to emergent needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic with three rapid response studies focused on food insecurity locally and nationally. We also took time to examine, with staff and partners, how the center actualizes its commitment to disrupting racialized structures in our broader effort to promote environmental health equity. This resulted in an updated mission and vision statement to more explicitly assert the center's commitment to community-engaged research that addresses structural racism. This process included refinement of the values underpinning work and processes within the Center. In so doing, we are reminded of the forward thinking of the Swetland Family for establishing the Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health that uniquely positions us to embrace and enact transformative environmental health research, training, and community engagement for racial justice.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darcy Freedman', written in a cursive style.



MISSION AND VISION

The **mission** of the Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health is to study the complex interplay between environmental determinants and population health outcomes. The center places special emphasis on community-engaged approaches that address the role of structural racism in creating and sustaining environmental health inequities. We seek to translate these findings into policies, practices, and relationships that promote community and population health equity. The strategic **vision** of the Swetland Center is to leverage diverse skills and experiences through transformative research, training and community engagement in order to achieve environmental health equity by:

- **Advancing** applied and community-engaged environmental health research.
- **Integrating** environmental health and community systems science into medical and graduate education.
- **Engaging** the community in research translation to inform changes in policy and practice.



Innovative

We believe that honoring differences is foundational to cultivating a culture of innovation and changing the status quo.



Community Engaged

We believe that organizational transparency and elevation of community power and voice is essential to building trusting relationships, between research staff and the broader community, to achieve environmental health equity.



OUR VALUES

Racial Justice

We believe in partnering with the community to build sovereignty and promote environmental justice by sharing power, igniting change, and dismantling racist structures.

We seek to enact Research, Community Engagement, Training, and Education that heals historical scars and ongoing trauma of structural racism.



Inclusive

We believe in acknowledging and honoring diverse traditions, learning styles and experiences of individuals and value the dignity of all people. We work to promote an environment that respects the unique experiences and richness of its members.



Collaborative

We believe in the strength of our collective voices, knowledge, and individual experiences as foundational strands woven together to form a tapestry of co-creation.





OUR APPROACH

With many influential contributors, the Mary Ann Swetland Center has pioneered environmental health research over the past three decades and continues to serve local communities. The foundation for the center was built in the 1950's, when David W. Swetland and Mary Ann Swetland addressed the need to educate and empower medical professionals to better understand environmental impacts on human health. Today, the Swetland Center, led by Darcy Freedman, PhD, MPH, focuses on research, training and education and community engagement to build capacity for the next generation of scientists to work alongside community partners to promote healthy places for people to thrive.

RESEARCH

As society responded to environmental injustices accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we sought to address the need for research that can inform holistic and equitable solutions. The center's research focused on the link between food systems and health expanded through national, statewide, and local partnerships aimed at promoting nutrition equity. In 2021, we renewed our commitment to translate scientific insights into community action. These experiences are laying the foundation for future research aimed at nourishing neighborhoods and empowering communities through equitable and sustainable food systems.

TRAINING

Throughout 2021, the center continued to develop a diverse community of environmental health scholars by providing a variety of training and professional development opportunities for students, staff, and community members. We maintained a vibrant yet virtual monthly seminar series, launched the Swetland Readers Book Club, conducted a remote 9-week summer internship program, and hosted more than a dozen trainees from multiple disciplines. In 2021, 50% of our seminar speakers represented Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities. We are committed to providing trainees ongoing opportunities to refine their skills in community-based research.

COMMUNITY

In 2021, we launched the Food Systems Change Fellowship to work with local leaders as they refined visions to disrupt food system inequities. We supported publication of an op-ed calling the newly elected Mayor of Cleveland to center nutrition equity in future environmental justice policies and practices. The center examined more deeply its responsibility to interrupt inequitable systems shaping our work. This collaborative process identified priorities and related actions to hold the center accountable as we work to redress racial injustices within the university and through our community partnerships.

RESEARCH

Modeling The Future of Food in Your Neighborhood Study

The Modeling The Future of Food in Your Neighborhood Study, affectionately known as foodNEST 2.0, sought to mobilize research by making it accessible and useful to the communities we work alongside. For example, the Food Systems Change Vision Board Toolkit is a resource for emergent leaders to refine their vision and enact their transformation proposition. The foodNEST & friends event in December 2021 was another activation opportunity where participants came to learn about foodNEST findings and collectively strategize how to utilize these findings in their roles within the community.

This year, our research also sought to translate data into policy change. This is exemplified by the Food Security and COVID-19 data brief, which highlights suggested actions that policymakers can take and was shared directly with all municipal leaders across Cuyahoga County. The foodNEST 2.0 Collaborative teamed up with the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition to co-host conversations with Cleveland mayoral candidates about addressing the root causes of food insecurity and providing technical assistance for Cleveland's next mayor.



13 Journal Publications



10 Public Forums



4 Data Briefs



2 Toolkits



1 Book Chapter



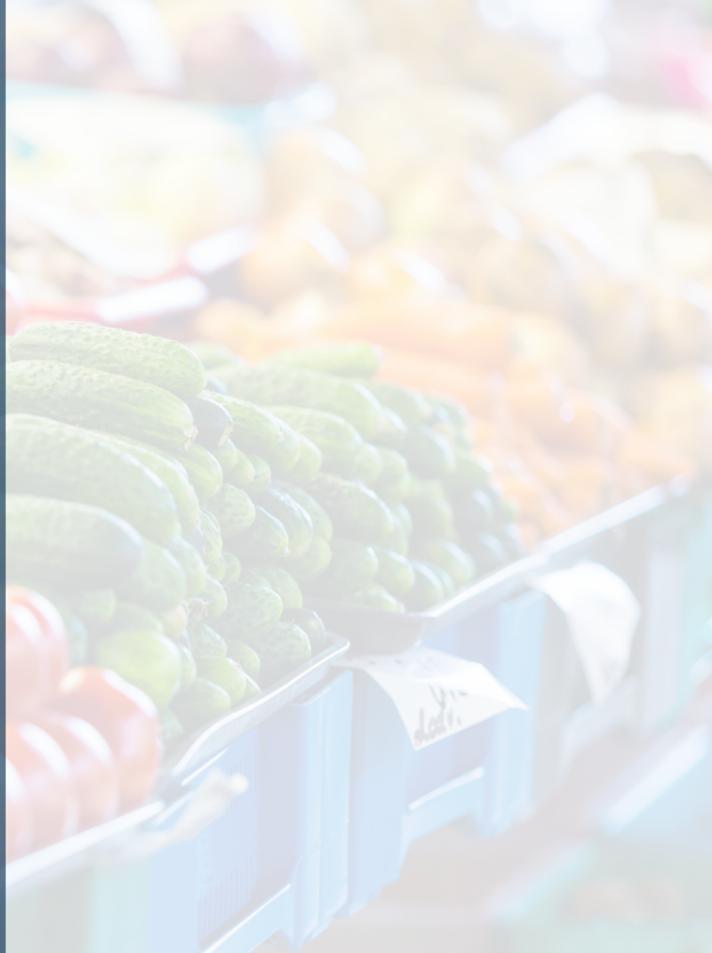
1 published op-ed

RESEARCH

Building Capacity for Obesity Prevention

The Building Capacity for Obesity Prevention (BCOP) project is a partnership between The Ohio State University SNAP-Ed Program and the Swetland Center. In 2019, BCOP celebrated the statewide launch of its web-based tool, the PSE Readiness Assessment and Decision Instrument (READI), for use by SNAP-Ed and public health practitioners to assess readiness and capacity for community nutrition policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) interventions.

In 2021, the BCOP team launched an enhanced version of its website with user-friendly features to successfully expand its reach to a national audience. The PSE READI is part of the USDA's national SNAP-Ed Toolkit and currently provides guidance for four community nutrition PSE areas: farmers' markets, healthy food retail, healthy eating in childcare, and farm to school. Additionally, the BCOP team conducted interviews with Ohio residents and SNAP-Ed practitioners on the interests, needs, and capacity to support healthy eating PSEs in food pantries and K-12 school. Feedback from these meetings will guide the creation of assessments in these two areas that will be added to the PSE READI and available for use by SNAP-Ed and public health practitioners in 2022.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement and Racial Equity Action Planning

In response to 2020's numerous incidents of acute and chronic systemic racism, the Swetland Center sponsored a cohort of team members to participate in the Center for Urban and Racial Equity's "Facilitating Racial Equity Organizational Change" learning collaborative. This experience inspired our center to examine how we can use our privilege and power to disrupt unjust systems as an academic research center. We conducted an internal assessment, engaging 30 stakeholders, to reflect on our equity and community engagement practices. Assessment findings were shared in a retreat with staff and collaborators and collectively we identified strategic priority areas to align our research and operations to more effectively address racial and environmental health equity. We recognize that this commitment is part of an ongoing journey towards justice. We believe the work is required to live out our mission to advance environmental health equity.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Food Systems Change Fellows

The inaugural Food Systems Change Fellowship provided space for local leaders to develop and validate their visions for community-driven food systems change. The Fellowship served as a “test kitchen” for incubating ideas related to leverage points identified in the Menu of Actions, a resource created by researchers and community partners working on the Modeling for Future Food in Your Neighborhood Study.

The five neighborhood champions, residing in the Buckeye-Shaker, Woodhill, and Hough neighborhoods, paired their knowledge of local food access needs with social entrepreneurial resources to share their vision with a broader audience. This opportunity included workshops, mentor relationships, staff support, and brand building. The Fellowship culminated in a pitch and sponsorship sessions during the Showcase of Opportunities on July 28, 2021 at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, which was attended by a hybrid audience of over 140 people.



Kellee Etheridge



Michelle B. Jackson



Antunesia Harris



Marilyn Burns



Lena Boswell

TRAINING AND EDUCATION



2021 Virtual Summer Internship

Our summer internship provides a rich experience for students access the country. We examined the environment's disparate impact on population health and deepening students knowledge of community systems science for environmental health equity. During this year's 9-week virtual experience, the center hosted a diverse cadre of students from Emory University, Colby College, Colorado School of Public Health and Case Western Reserve University.

Daniel Lewis Ravin, MD Awardees

The Daniel Lewis Ravin, MD Award honors a rising fourth-year CWRU medical student who shows promise in occupational or environmental medicine to assist in professional development and research through the Swetland Center. The 2020-21 recipient, Samuel Boas, conducted research focused on multidisciplinary post-traumatic amputation care clinics and environmental determinants of peripheral vascular disease. Stephanie Wottrich, the 2021-22 awardee, intends to research waste management practices and alternative sustainable healthcare materials and implement a study on assessing hospital sustainability practices.



Samuel Boas

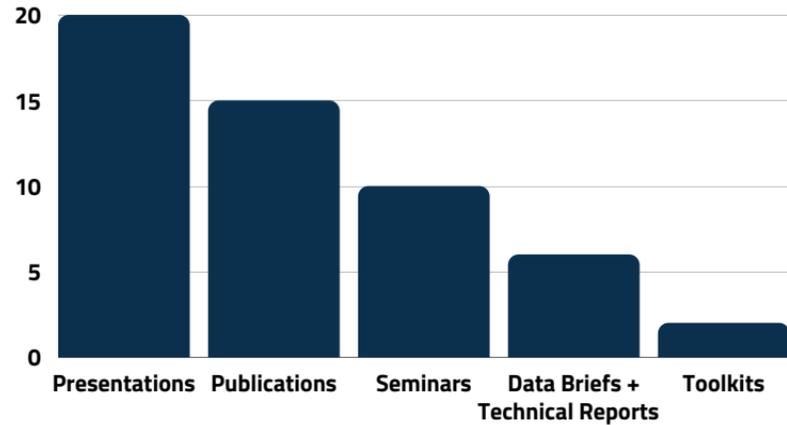


Stephanie Wottrich

BY THE NUMBERS

The Swetland Center is focused on cultivating a diverse set of opportunities to engage students, staff, faculty and lifelong learners.

9	Staff
7	Interns
7	Trainees
3	Core Faculty
19	Faculty Affiliates
5	Graduate Assistants
4	Community Researchers
54	Team Total

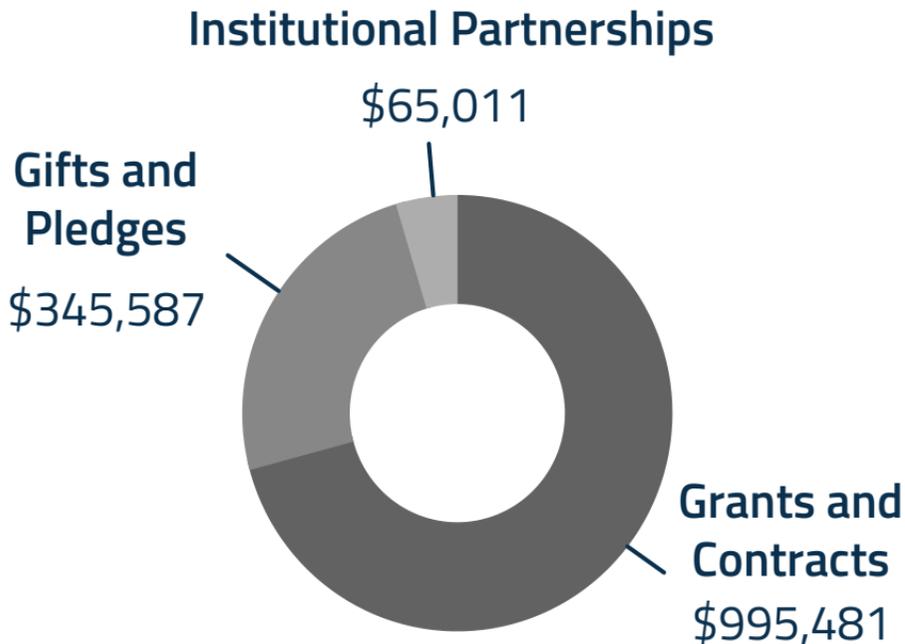


The Swetland Center prioritizes dissemination of our research using diverse modalities to accelerate translation into data-driven policies and practices that advance environmental health equity.

OPERATING BUDGET

The 2021 operating budget of the Swetland Center was \$1.46 million.

Approximately 55% went to support the center's community-engaged research, 20% for training and education and 15% for community engagement.



2021 FUNDERS

- Cleveland Clinical & Translational Science Collaborative (CTSC)
- Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research
- Margaret W. Wong
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
- National Dairy Council
- National Institute on Aging
- National Institute of Drug Abuse
- National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities
- Sears-Swetland Family Foundation
- Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland
- The S. Livingston Mather Charitable Trust
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN)

In 2021, we found safe and innovative ways to stay connected, advance environmental health equity work, and systematically examine opportunities for the center to strategically address historical structures of racism.

In 2022 we plan to:

- 2 • Launch our Community Engagement and Racial Equity Action Plan
- 0 • Diversify training and educational opportunities to enhance engagement of new stakeholders
- 2 • Launch the the Nourishing Neighborhoods, Empowering Communities' study to incubate and catalyze community-driven food systems change to advance nutrition equity
- 2 • Expand opportunities to collaborate with and provide technical assistance to our community partners



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