



Civic Science Fellowship 2026-28

Are you passionate about using science to positively impact society? Are you motivated to find innovative ways to conduct science in partnership with communities? Do you want to join a network of individuals and organizations who are committed to advancing science and society through meaningful collaboration between scientists and community members? With support from the Rita Allen Foundation, we're recruiting a Postdoctoral Fellow who will serve as a 2026-2028 Civic Science Fellow and develop civically oriented research projects focused on topics like climate and health communication, civic engagement and climate action, and social connection and resilience. This Fellow will primarily be based at the [Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) of the University of Pennsylvania (APPC), working with APPC's Climate Communication Division and with the University's [Netter Center for Community Partnerships](#). This appointment is expected to last two years, from August 2026 to July 2028.

We envision that a Civic Science Fellow would become a leader catalyzing change rooted in science by learning civic science practices and applying them in the context of their own research. We imagine that the Fellow would develop a project that takes a translational, community-engaged approach to study topics such as climate and health communication, civic engagement and action, and/or social connection and resilience in combination with experimental, survey, neuroimaging, geolocation, or other methods of interest to the fellow. A civic science approach to these topics could include, for example, conducting Youth Participatory Action Research, forming and consulting with a community advisory board, and/or working with policymakers to design research that can inform climate and health-related policies. Example projects based on our ongoing and planned research in these topic areas include:

Climate and health communication: How do the places people go and environments with which they interact influence their health behaviors? In recent work, we found that exposure to tobacco retail environments (measured through geolocation tracking) increases cigarette cravings and smoking (measured through real-time surveys). Building on this extensive dataset, a Fellow could explore how climate-related factors like heat and air pollution, and sociodemographic factors like neighborhood poverty, affect smoking and well-being. Potential areas of focus for this work include: (1) communication of results to policymakers, aiming to change policies for tobacco retail to reduce the visibility of marketing; (2) in consultation with the Netter Center, work with a community advisory board to design health messaging interventions, which would offer multiple actionable strategies for individuals to improve their well-being and emphasize individual agency within systemic constraints (like fixed commutes); and/or (3) work with a community advisory board to select environmental risk factors of particular interest to the community for further investigation in this rich dataset.

Climate interventions co-designed with youth: Climate change is a health equity crisis that disproportionately harms communities of color, low-income populations, and youth—who will bear the greatest burden long-term—yet communication strategies meant to mobilize climate-health action are often designed by researchers with limited input from affected communities. How might we develop more effective communication strategies by co-designing large-scale message testing experiments (“intervention tournaments”) that systematically compare many messaging strategies head-to-head in collaboration with youth? We envision that a Fellow could build on our team’s initial findings and work together with youth co-researchers from climate-impacted communities in West Philadelphia to collaboratively design and test messaging interventions. As a team, the Fellow and youth co-researchers would work together to interpret findings and disseminate them by creating practical toolkits and sharing results with both academic and community audiences, ensuring that outcomes remain aligned with community priorities and are openly accessible.

Civic engagement and action: Many young people are disillusioned with the political process in the United States and choose not to engage in crucial democratic practices such as voting. What motivates young people to vote, and how can we support them to overcome structural and psychological barriers to voting? In ongoing community-engaged research, we are collaborating with the student-led nonpartisan civic engagement organization on Penn’s campus—Penn Leads the Vote—and other national youth-focused voting organizations to conduct formative research on voting beliefs and design and test communication interventions targeting specific beliefs to motivate and support young people to vote. This project employs a Youth Participatory Action Research approach to co-design and co-conduct the research in partnership with young people, which can simultaneously support youth civic identity development and the creation of effective, evidence-based, and scientifically evaluated voting interventions. The Fellow could lead extensions of this work or develop new lines of related work in the context of the 2026 midterm election and the subsequent mayoral election in Philadelphia in 2027.

Social connection and resilience: Young people face unprecedented challenges that will shape the trajectory of their lives—from climate change to democratic backsliding. How might we support youth to be well amidst these crises and help them realize their individual and collective power to make change? Key factors that buffer individuals against such stressors and strengthen their ability to act include having (1) a clear understanding of oneself, including one’s goals, values, and purpose, and (2) strong, supportive relationships with others. Therefore, helping young people understand themselves and build connections with others are important targets to support youth well-being and catalyze and sustain action. Ongoing research investigates the neuropsychological mechanisms of self-clarity, loneliness, and social connection and tests interventions to increase self-clarity and social connection through expressive reflection and emotion regulation. The Fellow could apply a civic science approach to engage young people to tailor existing interventions or design new interventions.

More about the Civic Science Fellows program:

The [Civic Science Fellows](#) program is building a network of leaders committed to ensuring that all people shape and benefit from science, technology, and innovation. The program brings together scientists, scholars, community leaders, journalists, educators, media producers,

public-interest organizations, and funders to seed new collaborations between science, diverse communities, and civil society. Envisioned as a Civic Science Lab, Fellows and the organizations that host them carry out pioneering work to co-create pilots, partnerships, knowledge, models, and new ways of working. Fellows and partners engage as part of a network of learning and action that spans organizations, disciplines, and communities—a growing effort to catalyze civic science culture change.

More about the Climate Communication Division (CCD):

The CCD at the [Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) (PI Emily Falk) stands at the forefront of interdisciplinary research in climate communication, action, and policy. We explore and influence the complex interplay of media, public beliefs, and policymaking in the face of climate change. We operate on multiple scales: from local initiatives focused on environmental justice in Philadelphia, to national and global media campaigns and policy development for climate action. Our research is unique in its breadth, examining the neural, psychological, and sociological underpinnings that drive belief, attitude, and behavioral shifts toward a more sustainable future. Education and collaboration are at the heart of our approach. We engage with a diverse array of stakeholders – academics, the public, policymakers, and journalists – not only as audiences but as active partners in co-creating meaningful scholarship and effective solutions. From experimental research and surveys to cutting-edge computational methods, neuroimaging, and participatory action research, we strive for innovation in our quest to understand and catalyze climate sustainability and action. CCD collaborates extensively within the Annenberg Public Policy Center and with the Communication Neuroscience Lab (PI Emily Falk), fostering a multidisciplinary approach to tackling the most pressing climate issues of our times.

More about the Netter Center for Community Partnerships:

Founded in 1992, the [Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships](#) is the University's primary vehicle for advancing civic and community engagement at Penn. It brings together the resources and assets of both the University and the wider community to help solve universal problems such as poverty, health inequities, environmental sustainability, and inadequate, unequal education as they are manifested in the University's local geographic area of West Philadelphia and Philadelphia at large. The Netter Center develops and helps implement democratic, mutually transformative, place-based partnerships between Penn and West Philadelphia that advance research, teaching, learning, and service. These partnerships help improve the quality of life on campus and in the community. The Netter Center works with and serves as a model for other higher education institutions across the United States and around the world.

More about the Communication Neuroscience Lab:

The [Communication Neuroscience Lab](#) studies what makes people happy and healthy, and how communication can help people make better decisions. Research in the lab connects neuroscience measures to real-world outcomes, with a focus on health and well-being for individuals and society (e.g., smoking, exercise, alcohol, social connection, mood, climate change, inequality). We believe that our science is better with a diverse team.

Across all of these groups, we embrace and encourage our team's differences in age, color, disability, ethnicity, family or marital status, gender identity or expression, language, national origin, ability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and other characteristics that make our lab members who they are. Alumni from our lab have gone on to successful careers in research, academia, government, nonprofit, and business arenas. Many of them continue to collaborate with us and with one another.

Training Activities

- Develop and lead a civically oriented research project focused on topics like climate and health communication, civic engagement and climate action, and social connection and resilience
- Collaborate with community partners on research projects of mutual interest and benefit
- Collaborate closely with PIs, research directors, graduate students, and research staff to conduct the research to ensure deadlines are met
- Manage the research project and supervise any graduate students and research staff working on the project
- Mentor graduate students and research staff
- Clean, check, and analyze data using reproducible methods
- Lead and co-author research papers
- Present research findings to academic and public audiences

Qualifications

Necessary

- A Ph.D. in communication, psychology, or another relevant field, within the last three years
- Excellent organizational and project management skills
- Demonstrated ability to independently develop research projects
- Demonstrated ability to write research papers

Preferred expertise (in a subset of the following)

- Conducting community-engaged and/or participatory research
- Working with youth and/or young adults
- Using mixed methods approaches
- Employing advanced quantitative methods
- Using R, Python, or other coding languages

The Fellowship is in-residence in Philadelphia, PA. A modest relocation allowance will be made available to defray relocation costs. The position carries a competitive monthly stipend, and Fellows can choose from several university health benefit plans, with co-insurance amounts varying based on the plan selected and number of dependents. The Fellow will also have access to travel funding for presentation of APPC research at scientific meetings. The Fellowship is contingent on external funding.

To apply for this position, please email CivicScience@falklab.org with your CV and a statement of interest (subject line: Civic Science Fellowship Application)! We will begin reviewing applications on June 1, 2026, and priority will be given to applications received before that.