

Adaptation and Equity Guidance for Local Governments



Naomi Hennefeld, George Jutras, Margot Shrift, and Audrey Wheeler

Project Overview

From extreme heat to wildfires, flooding to sea level rise, hazards induced by climate change threaten communities across the United States. On top of these risks and hazards, disadvantaged communities are often the most vulnerable to these consequences due to the history of social, economic, environmental, and political marginalization.

ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of local and regional governments devoted to solving sustainability challenges. ICLEI USA helps solve sustainability challenges including creating and implementing climate and sustainability plans.

The purpose of this project is to help ICLEI USA members incorporate adaptation and equity into their climate planning efforts. We are building out ICLEI USA's Sustainable Communities Suite to include two papers, one on adaptation and one on equity, and a summarized, interactive version of each paper for ICLEI staff and local governments.

Research Methods

We reviewed documents from varied sources:

- 100+ existing guidance documents from non-governmental organizations, government agencies, academic papers, etc.
- 35+ U.S. local government plans related to adaptation and equity

We engaged stakeholders through interviews and presentations:

- ICLEI staff
- 12 interviews with local government staff and officials
- 3 presentations to audiences of ICLEI members
- Experts in the field

ICLEI Pathways



Low-Emissions



Resilient



Equitable & People
Centered



Nature-Based

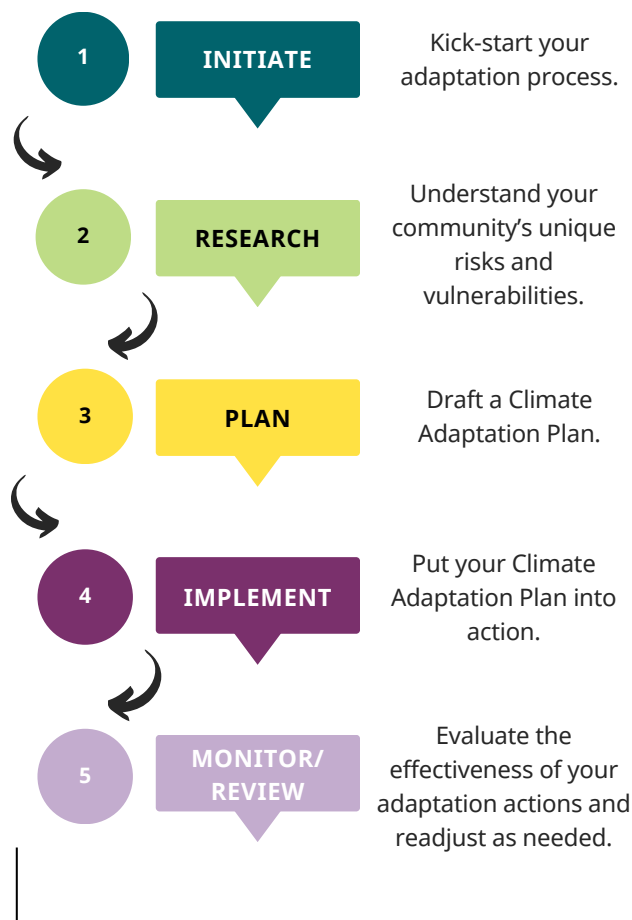


Circular

Adaptation

For many years, mitigation has been the focus of local governments' climate action planning. However, the need for local governments to adapt to a changing climate is becoming more apparent due to the increasing frequency and severity of climate-induced disasters. The public's heightened awareness of climate hazards, combined with the unprecedented levels of funding for climate adaptation, provide a window of opportunity for local governments to act on adaptation in hopes of a more sustainable and resilient future. However, many barriers exist that make it difficult for local governments to act, such as limited staff capacity, difficulty understanding the massive amount of information available, equity gaps, and the need for cross-sector coordination.

We created a Guide to provide local governments with resources to overcome these barriers. The Guide walks communities through the climate change adaptation planning and implementation process using a five-milestone framework.



CENTERING EQUITY THROUGHOUT

Major Takeaways

- When local governments prioritize equity while adapting to climate change, they simultaneously improve community resilience and rectify historical injustices; therefore, it is essential for local governments to center equity throughout their adaptation process.
- Government capacity (e.g., staff time and financial resources) is often a barrier to effective climate change adaptation and planning. By integrating planning and implementation efforts with other departments and existing decision making and budgetary structures, local government staff can more effectively deliver on climate adaptation goals.
- Collaboration across scales (e.g., local, regional, state, federal) and sectors can lead to more effective climate change adaptation.



Equity

Equity in climate planning seeks to center the challenges faced by historically marginalized communities and create strategies that address those challenges while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Explicitly incorporating equity outcomes is a growing field for local governments in the U.S. We created an analysis of 16 climate action plans from around the country that include equity considerations. Our report assesses trends and practices around integrating equity into climate plans and provides an overview of takeaways in five categories.

Broad Themes	Community Engagement	Core Actions	Data and Metrics	Partnerships and Funding
What role does equity play in the climate plan?	What practices were used to specifically ensure the voices of frontline or historically disadvantaged communities were heard?	Which actions in the plan connect directly to equity-focused outcomes?	Does the plan include local data about inequities and offer metrics for evaluating equity outcomes discussed in the plan?	Does the plan mention any core partners or creative funding strategies that were integral to the creation of the plan?

Major Takeaways

- Build climate action plans with equity outcomes, climate mitigation efforts, and climate adaptation as equal central priorities.
- Community engagement efforts should deeply and meaningfully engage community members to understand their perspectives and incorporate their ideas. Strategic efforts should be made to reach people of color and historically marginalized populations.
- Core actions of a climate plan should be reflective of community-identified challenges and work towards concrete equity outcomes within the scope of climate planning.
- Measuring the impacts of equity-focused strategies from a climate action plan is important to ensure the actions address local priorities.
- Leveraging existing resources in a community such as academic institutions, government programs, nonprofit organizations, or other innovative partnerships can bring in more perspectives and help with implementing an equitable climate action plan.