

Equity in Climate Planning



Broad Themes

What role does equity play in local government climate plans?

Overview

Climate action planning provides an opportunity for local governments to consider historic and existing inequities and to invest resources into mitigating climate change, adapting to climate impacts, and improving equitable outcomes for people. ICLEI analyzed 16 climate action plans from around the country that include equity considerations. The resulting report assesses the trends and practices for integrating equity into climate plans.

Findings

The broad themes from ICLEI's report offer an overview of how 16 local governments chose to embed equity within their climate planning, and how much equity concerns informed outcomes of the plan. These plans offer a few models for how equity can be incorporated into a planning process.

Key Areas for Incorporating Equity:



Community Engagement



Core Actions



Data and Metrics

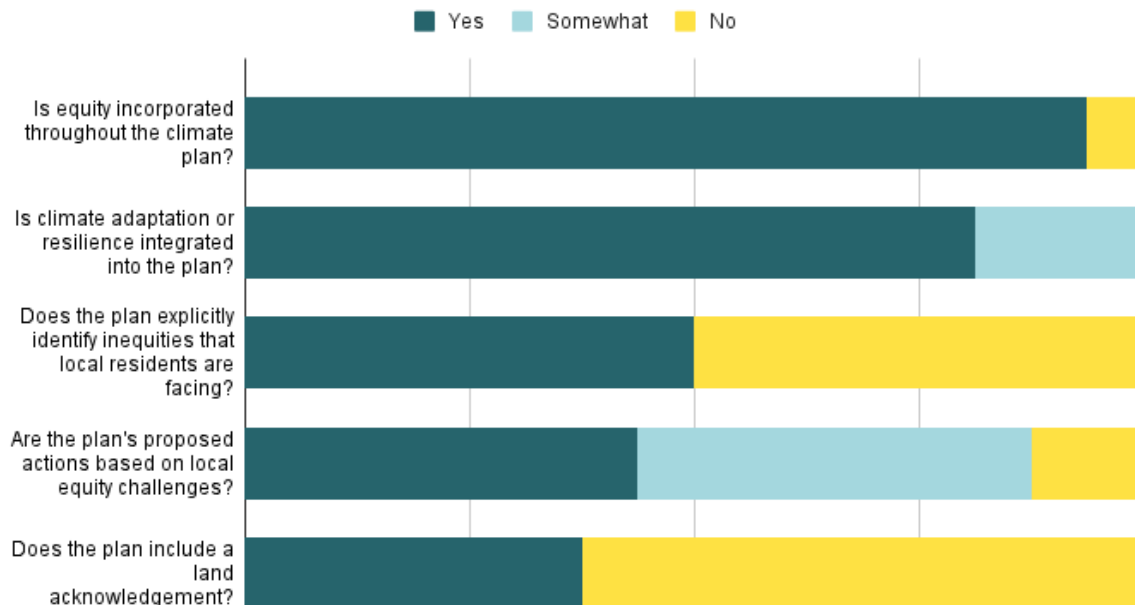


Funding and Partnerships



New Resource: Resilience

ICLEI USA's *Adaptation in Climate Planning: Recommendations for U.S. Local Governments* provides a process for resilience planning that includes equity considerations at every step.



Number of climate plans in our review that met criteria for questions related to broad themes of equity in climate planning.

Takeaways

Consider equity in every planning and programmatic phase.

Plans that strive to create beneficial equity outcomes generally include thorough community outreach; a thorough examination of locally-specific equity data; priorities and actions that address local equity challenges raised by the community; metrics that track equity-related impacts; and partnerships or funding efforts that lean on existing local institutions.



Many plans included resilience hubs as a strategy for supporting residents during climate-induced extreme weather events. The City of Ann Arbor, MI centered equity outcomes by placing its first resilience hubs in underserved neighborhoods, like the Bryant Community Center and Resilience Hub. Credit: [Missy Stults/Second Wave Media](#)

There are many ways to incorporate equity.

There are many models for making equity central to a planning process. Equity can be included throughout a plan as a “lens” or “pillar”, or included as a consideration in each subsection.

Land acknowledgements can be a starting point.

Local governments should make an effort to engage local Indigenous communities in planning, whether that is through a land acknowledgement process or otherwise in community engagement efforts.

Resilience and equity are closely linked.

Frontline communities are often the most vulnerable to climate-related risks. For this reason, resilience and equity planning should go hand-in-hand to ensure equitable outcomes for the most at-risk communities.

Local data is key.

Strong equity plans incorporate local information about inequities and include actions that specifically address local challenges.

For more information:

Contact: ICLEI-USA@iclei.org

Read: [*Equity in Climate Planning: Trends and Best Practices for Local Governments*](#)



Community Engagement

How is community engagement, particularly frontline communities, meaningfully incorporated into the planning process?

Overview

Engaging the community thoughtfully, elevating historically marginalized voices, building trust, and moving toward community ownership are key means of understanding local challenges and are important for shaping climate equity plans. ICLEI analyzed 16 climate action plans from around the country that include equity considerations. The climate plans in ICLEI’s review that had the most thorough community engagement also had the most equity-oriented goals and outcomes.

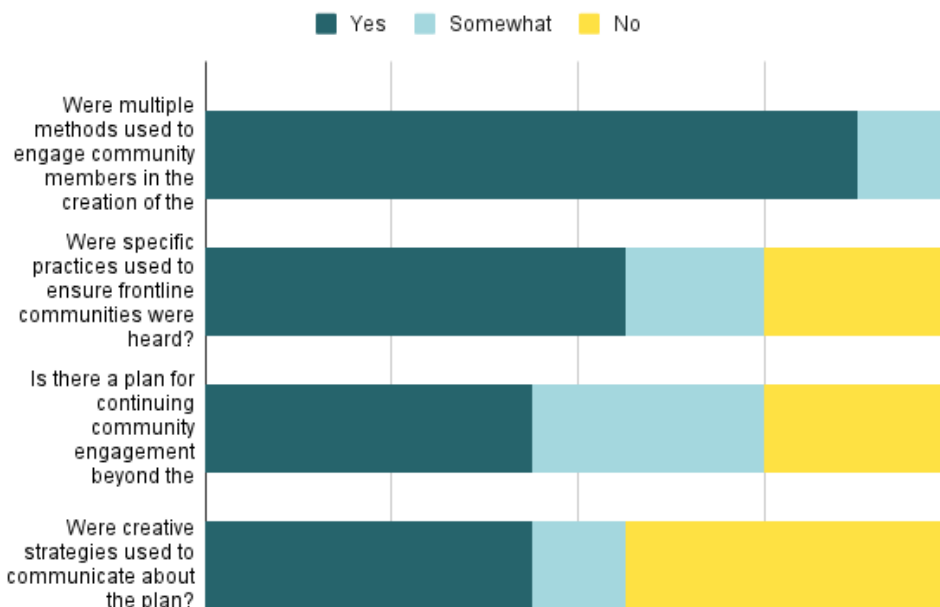
Findings

Community is at the heart of strong plans that advance equity outcomes while mitigating climate change. Involving community members in the planning process helps ensure that more perspectives are taken into account and that the goals identified in the plan rectify past injustices and do not cause further harm to those who have been harmed by past government policies. Conducting



The City of Boston hired a ‘Street Team’ of local residents recruited by community-based organizations to connect with communities whose voices are often underrepresented in planing. Credit: [Boston Climate Action Plan](#)

community engagement should be done thoughtfully, with respect toward local preferences, community needs, repairing or acknowledging past harms, and long-term relationship building. ICLEI’s report includes a list of frequently used community engagement strategies from the plans.



Number of climate plans in our review that met criteria for questions related to community engagement for equity in climate planning.



Oakland conducted its town halls to serve frontline communities by hosting them at recreation centers in East Oakland and Chinatown, providing full meals for participants, and offering childcare and language interpretation services. Credit: Oakland [Equitable Climate Action Plan](#)

Takeaways

Try multiple methods for engagement.

A key means to involve community members is broadening the array of methods used for engagement. Some plans we analyzed discuss five or more community engagement methods, while others offer creative methods specific to their local context.

Build ongoing relationships.

Community engagement is an ongoing process. Once people give their time and energy toward creating a plan, there is the potential to build a relationship with them, including following up later on with progress updates. Seek to create a climate plan that directly responds to community members' challenges, inequities, or ideas.

Design community engagement strategies with equity and inclusion in mind.

Strive to meet community members where they are, support their involvement through compensation or other means, and employ strategies to make engagement welcoming and accessible for all.

For more information:

Contact: ICLEI-USA@iclei.org

Read: [*Equity in Climate Planning: Trends and Best Practices for Local Governments*](#)

Equity in Climate Planning



Core Actions

How are the actions in the plan connected to equity-focused outcomes?

Overview

The core of climate action plans are the actions (alternatively called strategies, pathways, initiatives, programs, solutions, big moves, or big ideas) that a local government plans to implement to reach their goals. ICLEI's analysis reviews general categories of climate actions that incorporate equity, provides examples for how equity can show up in each of those categories, and discusses evaluation tools that local governments used to determine whether potential strategies will or will not advance equity.

Findings

Ten categories were common areas in which local governments designed core actions to address equity. Plans used a variety of methods to ensure that equity was incorporated into each action or category of actions. These methods helped elevate equity to be a key focus of the plan's actions, beyond simply stating a commitment to equity.

Action Categories that can Incorporate Equity:

- Energy
- Buildings, Housing and Energy Efficiency
- Local Government Operations
- Materials and Waste
- Transportation (including transit and electric vehicles)
- Natural Systems
- Water
- Food/Community Health
- Community Resilience/Emergency Preparedness
- Workforce Development

NEXT MOVES	INVESTMENT	EQUITY
Continue and expand home and business efficiency programs	\$\$\$	●
Expand programs for electrification of space and water heating	\$	●
Provide focused energy efficiency and indoor air quality incentives for historically under-served households	\$	●

● = HIGH ● = MED ● = LOW

An example of a visual indicator to ensure equity is part of each proposed action. Credit: [Our Climate Future, Fort Collins, CO](#)

Takeaways

Incorporate community feedback and local data into actions.

It is crucial to take community engagement feedback and use local data to identify the biggest equity needs in your community, and to consider meeting those needs a central goal of the plan's actions.



A core action in Austin requires that new sidewalks and trails prioritize areas that have been systematically excluded and zip codes with higher rates of chronic illness or disability status using lived experience and ground-truthed City data.
Credit: [Climate Equity Plan, Austin, TX](#)

Strategic methods can ensure equity is part of every action.

To embed equity into a climate action plan, it must be incorporated into the actions that the plan recommends. This can be done through several methods:

- Putting all proposed actions through an equity filter or tool can ensure that all actions include equity outcomes and do not cause further harm. These tools should be built from community engagement.
- A visual indicator can demonstrate how equity is part of each action. These indicators can compare equity impacts by predetermined criteria to show the scale or field of impact.
- A designated section within each action area of the plan can be a place to discuss current inequities and potential equity impacts of action.

For more information:

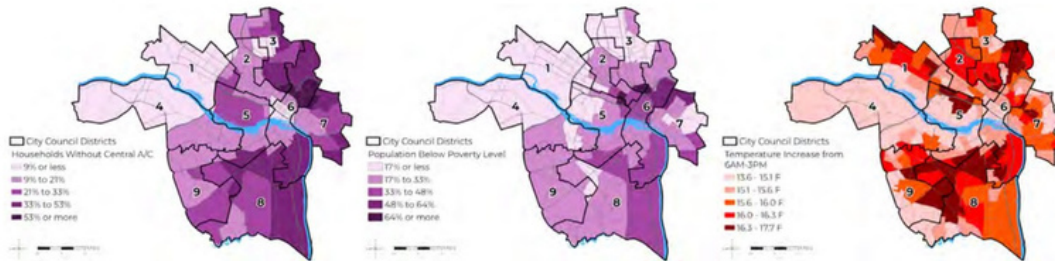
Contact: ICLEI-USA@iclei.org

Read: [Equity in Climate Planning: Trends and Best Practices for Local Governments](#)



Data and Metrics

Does the plan include local data about inequities and metrics for evaluating equity outcomes?



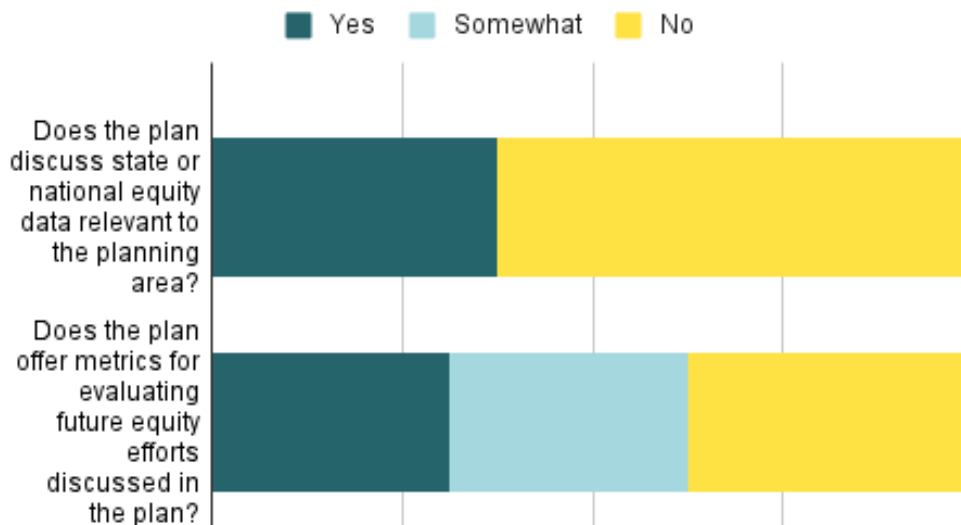
An online mapping tool that shows demographic, health, and other factors affecting neighborhoods' vulnerability to climate change from The City of Richmond's [Climate Equity Action Plan](#)

Data

can help understand the landscape of inequity in your community. It can provide a starting point for understanding trends and dynamics for different neighborhoods or populations. Yet, data can be faulty and does not tell the whole story. Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data can expand the scope of what is covered. Data analysis is most effective when accompanied by community outreach to understand lived experiences and to address subjects or areas that may be overlooked in large data sets.

Metrics

are a crucial part of climate plans, used to measure and demonstrate impact toward desired outcomes. Stating equity values is an empty exercise if the measures of success do not reflect specific equity-related outcomes. It's important to not only discuss what actions were completed and how successful their implementation was, but whether actions made a difference in the community. A thorough plan goes beyond measuring the activities of the local government and aims to measure the actual outcomes and impacts.



Number of climate plans in our review that met criteria for questions related to data and metrics for equity in climate planning.

Takeaways

Establish a baseline.

Choose metrics or indicators that represent equity, collect data at the beginning of the process for a baseline, and track change over time to measure progress.

Accompany data with community input to understand people's lived experiences.

Data from a variety of sources can provide an overview of what inequities exist, how populations and resources are geographically distributed, and what historical trends influence this. However, data analysis must be accompanied by community input and stories to understand people's lived experiences.

Prioritize local data.

While national trends can be relevant for local communities, it is important to consider the stories in your community at the most granular level possible. National or global trends can be a starting point for identifying inequities, but local information is needed to make sure these are priorities in your community.

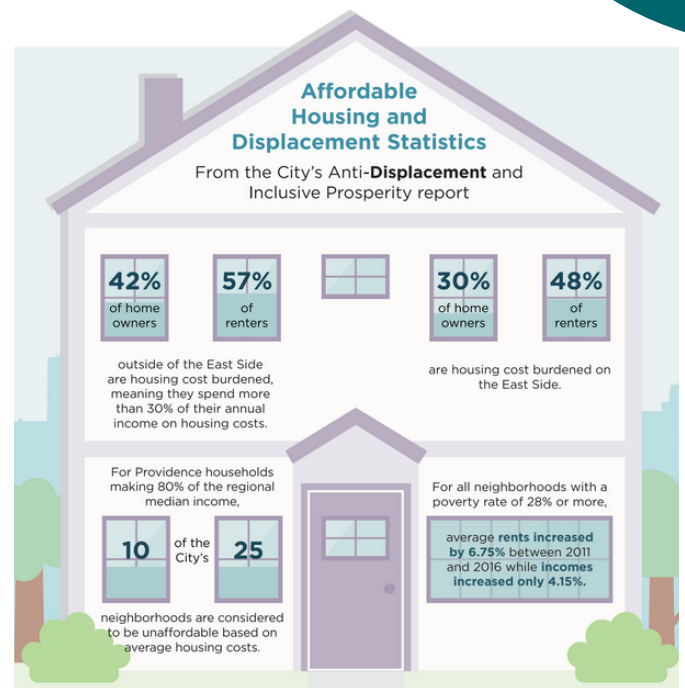
What gets measured gets done.

Identifying and tracking equity-related metrics moves a plan from commitments to action. While it can be difficult to accurately measure and track success related to equity goals, measuring progress is key for long-term and large-scale change.

For more information:

Contact: ICLEI-USA@iclei.org

Read: [*Equity in Climate Planning: Trends and Best Practices for Local Governments*](#)



Local data on affordable housing and displacement visualized in a graphic. Credit: Providence, RI [*Climate Justice Plan*](#)



Funding and Partnerships

Does the plan mention any core partners or creative funding strategies that were integral to the creation of the plan?

Funding

There are many potential funding mechanisms local governments can explore for program and policy implementation work over time. Most plans in our analysis were funded fully from the local government's budget or did not include information on how the planning process was funded. Two plans mentioned grants from private foundations, while two referred to federal funds that supported the planning process.

Partnerships

By working in partnership with others, local governments can increase the scope of what's possible within a climate plan and bring others along to collaboratively implement the plan. While most plans mentioned organizations that contributed to community outreach, funding, facilitation, or other aspects necessary to the development of the plan, three plans discussed a critical partner that was instrumental in leading the planning process. For several plans, working together across jurisdictional boundaries broadened the plan's impact and fostered regional collaboration.



Federal Funding Opportunities

There are many new federal funding opportunities for climate that could help local governments improve their planning and capacity. These federal options prioritize funding for projects that advance environmental justice and equity. *Equity in Climate Planning* includes detailed resources on pursuing federal funding. These opportunities include:

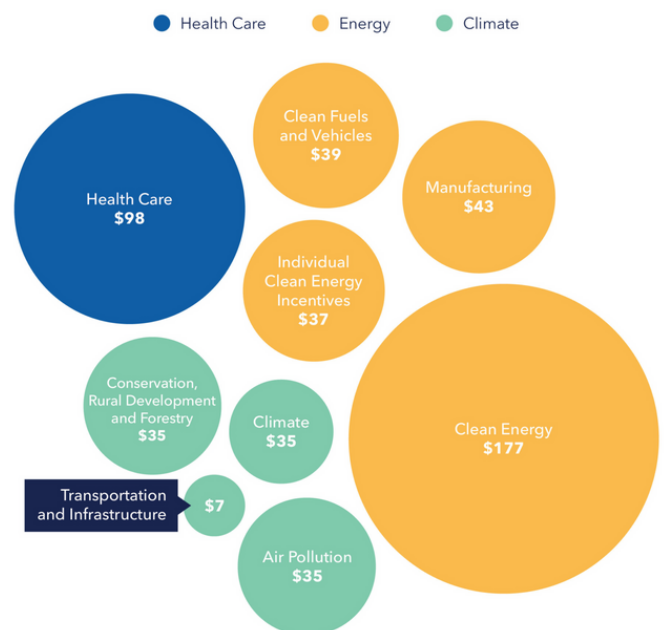
Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

- Direct funding
- Funding for disadvantaged communities
- Clean energy tax credits
- State funding
- Funding for ports

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

Justice 40 Initiative

Partnerships can ensure that new efforts are additive and not duplicative, and that climate action plans take into account lessons learned from previous local projects. This type of collaboration works best when entities share openly and transparently about challenges, lessons learned, and barriers in doing the work.



Spending and tax cuts from the Inflation Reduction Act visualized from 2022-2031. Credit: [Council of State Governments](#)



The cities of Portland, ME and South Portland, ME developed a joint climate action and adaptation plan for the two cities to magnify their impact and create a more regional response to climate change. Credit: [One Climate Future](#)

Takeaways

Seek Federal Funding.

While most local governments create climate action plans through their own city or county budget, there are options for seeking both private or public funding to support the planning process. Currently, big investments from the federal government (IRA & IIJA) can be leveraged at the local level, particularly for equity-related outcomes.

Leverage existing community resources.

Sustainability and climate planning is most effective when it leverages the resources that already exist in a community to strengthen the process. Bolster what already makes your community great, whether it's academic institutions, existing government programs, nonprofit organizations, or other innovative partnerships.

Work together across jurisdictional boundaries.

Look for opportunities to collaborate and share resources with neighboring city governments, county governments, or other regional partnerships. This may help both reduce upfront planning costs to your community and share the benefits of planning actions over a broader population and geographic area.

