

Bringing Equity into Municipal Climate Plans and Action

Introduction

1. Climate change impacts, such as extreme heat and cold events, and flooding, are felt unevenly across our communities. Marginalized communities and individuals that face deep-rooted and systemic challenges are at the forefront of climate impacts. Meanwhile, those who are more privileged have access to more resources, greater influence in decision-making, and a higher capacity to protect themselves from these impacts. As the urgency of addressing climate change increases, so does the need for addressing equity challenges.

Equity and Climate Change Vulnerability

2. **Equity** refers to just and fair inclusion, where all individuals and communities have equal access to opportunities and resources to reach their full potential. **Social equity** is the fair distribution of benefits and burdens and the ability for all individuals to participate in the political and cultural life of their community. **Equity-seeking groups** represent persons with disabilities, women, racialized groups, LGBTQ2S communities, low-income individuals, youth, and others.
3. Climate change disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations such as seniors, racialized communities and low-income residents. **Climate change vulnerability** is the degree to which individuals and places are at risk from the impacts of climate change and their ability to cope with those impacts. Addressing the systemic root causes of inequities can help reduce the impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations.

Equity Lens and Co-benefits

4. Applying an **equity lens** to climate plans and actions means considering the impact of climate change on different communities and ensuring that the benefits of climate solutions are distributed fairly. In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, co-benefits of city-scale climate change mitigation efforts can achieve additional objectives and increase the overall effectiveness of municipal climate action plans.
5. Some co-benefits of incorporating equity into municipal climate planning and action include:
 - Improved livelihoods for equity-deserving communities
 - Healthier, safer and more livable communities for all residents
 - Addressing historical oppressions and advancing anti-racism and reconciliation
 - Maximizing participation and engagement opportunities for all residents
 - Engaging stakeholders more effectively
 - Building stronger public support for the implementation of climate actions
 - Maximizing public investments towards multiple policy goals.
6. To advance equity in municipal climate planning and action, Clean Air Partnership has developed an [Equity and Climate Synergies Resource Hub](#). The hub features a collection of climate actions, such as green development standards, active transportation, and housing retrofits, and shares numerous examples of municipalities that are successfully enacting equity and climate action synergies. CAP is holding ongoing crowdsourcing efforts to continually improve and expand the hub and add additional municipal climate actions that advance equity.

Equity and Municipal Climate Action Plans Synergies

7. An ideal opportunity to incorporate climate and equity synergies into municipal climate action plans is during their development. If the climate action plan has already been developed, staff can work with partners to apply an equity lens and identify opportunities to incorporate equity. Municipalities can also have their climate action plans reviewed by an external organization. Below are two examples of incorporating equity in municipal climate plans:

8. **City of Calgary** – [An Equity Review of the City of Calgary's Climate Resilience Strategy](#) was conducted, and the following opportunities to incorporate equity objectives were recommended:

- **Putting people at the centre of the Strategy** – Consider the range of perspectives, identities, and lived experiences when developing equitable climate plans
- **Public transparency, participation, and accessibility** – Conduct transparent, understandable, and accessible opportunities for public engagement
- **Improve the City's relationship with Indigenous peoples** – Deepen engagement with First Nations and Metis communities by acknowledging the place names they use

9. **City of Vancouver** - [An Equity-Focused Review of the City of Vancouver's Draft Climate Emergency Action Plan](#) was conducted, and the following opportunities to incorporate equity objectives were identified:

- **Indigenous peoples:** Acknowledge First Nations communities and their traditional unceded territories; distinguish Indigenous communities from equity-deserving communities to acknowledge their unique experiences and the specific obligations of the City to recognize their needs

- **Centering equity:** Place greater emphasis on the significance of equity throughout the Plan from the very beginning and continue to integrate it throughout
- **Acknowledge the past:** Explicitly acknowledge the harms historically enacted by the City on equity-seeking groups to understand the ongoing impact of systemic oppression and inequality
- **Acknowledge the people:** Rather than using generic terms, name the specific cultural group being described or use language such as “racialized”
- **Translate:** Offer translations of all support tools, advice, services, and incentives to residents, community groups and local businesses
- **Advance benefits and prevent harm:** Go beyond the bare minimum by identifying ways to specifically benefit those groups and advance equity.

Advancing Equity Through Municipal Climate Actions

10. An increasing number of municipalities are successfully integrating equity into climate action. Below are two examples of how municipalities have successfully advanced equity objectives while implementing climate action in their transportation and urban forestry sectors.

11. **City of Kingston High School Transit Pass Program**

The City of Kingston and local school boards implemented the Kingston High School Transit Pass Program in 2016, combining a free bus pass for all high school students with an on-bus orientation, to encourage students to take public transit. The orientation familiarized students with the transit system, environmental benefits of public transit and the cost savings compared to owning and operating a car.

Results of this program:

- Orientation and free passes increased annual ridership of high school students by twenty-fold from 28,000 to 600,000 between September 2016 and August 2017

- The project succeeded in increasing travel independence for youth and allowed them to participate in more activities such as volunteering, work, and sports

12. Weaving Equity into The Region of Peel's Tree Planting Priorities

The Region of Peel applied a social equity lens to its tree planting strategy and developed a tool to prioritize areas for tree planting. A multi-disciplinary project team identified eight overall benefits of tree cover and categorized them under three sustainability themes – environmental, economic, and social.

This information was used to develop an interactive map which became the [Region's Tree Planting Prioritization Tool](#). The tool identifies the areas in Peel that should be prioritized for tree planting by considering a broad range of management goals (e.g. increased habitat for wildlife) and social benefits (e.g. air quality improvement, improved physical and emotional health). This tool is being used by the Region, local municipalities, and the conservation authorities to decide where trees get planted and how funds are allocated.

13. Climate change and equity are inextricably linked. By applying an equity lens to municipal climate plans and actions, local governments can achieve climate goals while simultaneously improving the livelihoods of marginalized communities, building healthier communities for all residents, and advancing anti-racism and reconciliation.

14. In addition to creating a strong climate action plan with clear equity goals, municipalities can take the following steps to further advance equity:

- Creating a Climate and Equity Working Group involving community members and municipal staff, and include individuals of diverse genders, ethnicities, ages, religions, and abilities
- Meeting regularly to solicit input, review data, and provide ongoing feedback on progress and challenges
- Creating a Climate Justice Charter to:
 - Guide staff on climate equity and justice objectives
 - Provide tangible actions for staff to ensure incorporation of equity while creating policy or programs
 - Identify specific measures for ensuring accountability and transparency
 - Provide a methodology to apply an equity lens to climate budget spending
- Prioritizing the following actions to promote transparency:
 - Maintain a comprehensive, public website to share progress on action plan strategies and solicit feedback
 - Convene Climate and Equity Working Group routinely to solicit input, review data, and provide ongoing feedback on progress and challenges
 - Seek opportunities for third-party assessment of your progress and regularly report to key stakeholders, decision-making bodies, and the public
 - Ensure that all educational and informational materials are provided in diverse languages

Additional Resources

15. [Clean Air Partnership's Equity and Climate Synergies Resource Hub](#)
16. [Integrating equity, diversity and inclusion into municipal climate action](#)
17. [Climate Justice Toolkit for Municipalities](#)