



coolcities

Solving global warming one city at a time



Cool Cities Climate Action Plans

Once your Cool City has committed to reducing its global warming pollution by 7% below 1990 levels—the target of the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement— it’s time to put together a solution plan to meet these goals. Creating a local climate action plan demonstrates your city’s serious commitment to reducing global warming pollution and energy costs. When it comes to meeting the challenge of reducing global warming, a city’s local government can demonstrate leadership through a well designed climate action plan to individuals and businesses as well as state and national government officials.

An effective and practical local climate action plan (CAP) outlines specific smart energy and planning solutions and policies to reduce emissions in government operations and the whole community, as well as the implementation schedule of the necessary steps to complete these actions. A CAP is a dynamic document that should be improved and updated as your city learns lessons, achieves goals, adds new solutions or redesigns approaches to a solution.

FORMING A COOL CITIES COMMITTEE

The first step to putting together a CAP is for your mayor or governing body to convene an official “Cool Cities Committee” or “Green Ribbon Commission” with representatives from city government (mayoral staffer or environmental manager), local businesses (local utility, large employer, Chamber of Commerce), civic institutions (League of Women Voters, NAACP), universities (college president or professor), public health advocates (American Lung Association or asthma specialist), labor (union leader), faith community (local clergy), environmentalists and concerned citizens. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders will lead to a CAP that has strong credibility and public support.

YOUR UNIQUE COOL CITY’S CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

Every city’s CAP will have unique challenges, solutions, and goals, but plans usually consist of five basic sections, based on the milestones laid out by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the non-profit organization ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability. Each section should have specific and measurable goals that take your city one-step closer to reduced emissions. The components for completing each section will vary by city, depending on the size and complexity of a city as well as resources and staff available. Please note that completing these steps is not always linear, and parts of each section may be conducted concurrently.

CAP Sections:

1. Description of GHG emissions baseline inventory and forecast
2. Description of GHG emissions reduction targets and timelines
3. Outline of solutions and policies to reduce emissions
4. Implementation plans for solutions and policies
5. Updates and monitoring of emissions reductions progress periodically and verification of results

EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF “LOW HANGING FRUIT” SOLUTIONS

The Cool Cities Committee should first identify and recommend early implementation solutions (“low hanging fruit” such as replacing your city’s traffic lights with super efficient LED light bulbs or implementing an Energy Star electronic and appliance purchasing policy). We strongly urge cities to take actions now and not wait for the completion of the CAP. These and other cost-effective early implementation actions will earn more support for the city’s medium and long term efforts.

AN INVENTORY, LEARNING FROM OTHERS, AND BUILDING ON CURRENT ACTIONS

Then the committee should decide how they want to complete a local GHG emissions inventory and determine its baseline year. See the Sierra Club’s fact sheet on (see Sierra Club’s “Measuring Your Cool City’s Greenhouse Gas Inventory”) for step-by-step guidance. While the inventory is being completed, most cities look to examples from other cities’ CAPs for solution and implementation ideas (see www.coolcities.us for a directory of CAPs). Another early step is to identify the city’s existing actions and programs that reduce GHG emissions, whether or not they were originally designed to do so. Include existing actions or programs in the CAP and GHG inventory as emissions reducing solutions.

WORKING TOWARD A COOL CITIES SOLUTIONS PLAN

When your emissions inventory is complete, your committee will have the key data points to move your committee working toward a comprehensive CAP. The inventory will provide the committee with the baseline GHG emissions and, given your city’s reduction target, the amount of GHGs that the city needs to reduce by a target year. Then the task is to analyze the sectors where your city is producing GHGs, and craft solutions accordingly. ICLEI’s Clean Air and Climate Protection Software (discussed in our “GHG Inventory” fact sheet) can provide accurate forecasts of GHG reductions from proposed solutions.

It makes sense to organize your city’s global warming solutions into sections that correspond with the emissions source and the type of solution (building efficiency, recycling programs, efficient vehicles, etc.). Common solutions categories include, but are not limited to, Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, Transportation and Land Use, Waste Reduction, and Public Outreach.

Most Cool Cities committees create a work team for each major solutions category. The charge to each sub-committee is to research and propose actions, determine costs, responsibilities, schedules, and funding sources for each solution, as well as to define metrics for measuring progress, and develop a procedure for monitoring and reporting the progress of each solution. Innovative and successful city ordinances, fee structures, public awareness campaigns and other policy solutions should be included in each sub-committees’ set of recommendations. ICLEI’s Clean Air and Climate Protection Software can help your city calculate the impact of anticipated costs, savings, and pay-back periods for individual solutions. Determining and presenting these essential details for each solution will help the committee in making its final solution recommendations to the mayor or governing body.

The CAP is also the place where your city can demonstrate the success of its actions to the public. Regular reporting of progress will serve not only to educate the public about solutions to global warming, but also to build greater demand for ambitious, innovative and local clean energy solutions and smart city planning in the future.

For more information please visit the Cool Cities website at: www.coolcities.us or email Cool Cities at cool.cities@sierraclub.org