



Climate and Energy Resources for State, Local and Tribal Governments

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Resources

Developing a State Climate Change Action Plan

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What is a Climate Change Action Plan?

A state climate change action plan lays out the institutional and policy structure, including specific policy proposals or planning processes, that a state will use to develop and implement a climate change mitigation strategy. A climate action plan typically addresses the following:

- Regional and local climate risks and vulnerabilities
- Baseline greenhouse gas emissions
- Goals and targets
- Alternative policy options
- Identification and screening of mitigation actions
- Forecast impacts of mitigation actions

State Activities

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- Recommendations and strategy for implementation

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Why Should a State Create an Action Plan?

On both a total and per capita basis, many U.S. states emit greenhouse gases (GHGs) in amounts comparable to some of the highest emitting countries in the world. Moreover, although climate change is a global issue, many critical actions to address GHG emissions can be initiated at the state level. State governments have the power to alter GHG emission patterns significantly through their influence and authority over utilities, land use, building codes, transportation, taxation, environmental programs, and other relevant policy areas.

In addition, many climate change mitigation measures generate broader non-climate related benefits. For example, energy efficiency programs lower costs while reducing GHG emissions. Increasing carpools and public transportation reduces pollution and traffic congestion in addition to reducing GHG emissions. Reforestation and urban tree programs not only sequester carbon, but also can reduce the amount of energy used for cooling and provide aesthetic improvement.

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What Is the Process for Developing an Action Plan?

There are several steps states have found that can facilitate the successful implementation of a climate change action plan once completed:

Developing a Climate Change Action Plan

Collaborate with Stakeholders	Collaboration across state agencies, as well as with the public, businesses, and industry ensures that the strategy reflects a cross-section of perspectives that support it.
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<p>Understand the scope of GHG emissions and identify opportunities for reductions</p>	<p>Understanding the scope of GHG emissions is key to identifying trends, sources of increase, and sectors to target. EPA provides methods and tools to assist states in Developing a GHG Inventory.</p>	
<p>Understand vulnerabilities to climate change</p>	<p>States should consider impacts and adaptation in existing planning and approval processes, especially large infrastructural projects that would be costly to adapt later. For detailed information about the potential impacts of climate change, visit the U.S. Global Change Research Program website.</p>	
<p>Set goals</p>	<p>Quantitative goals provide structure and facilitate the evaluation of progress. Goals should include a specific timeframe, and can be stated in terms of emissions reductions, energy savings, or cost savings. Goals can be sector-specific or more general.</p>	
<p>Establish priorities for strategy and evaluation criteria for options</p>	<p>States may consider the following criteria when establishing priorities:</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeframe of focus • Effectiveness in reducing GHGs • Private sector costs and savings • Public sector costs • Economic gains • Social Equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing institutional capacity or programs • Political feasibility • Existing legal constraints • Enforceability • Measurability • Co-benefits
<p>Identify options</p>	<p>States may consider options that affect the entire state or key sectors, depending upon the GHG inventory, goals, and priorities. EPA provides methods and tools to assist states in identifying policy options.</p>	

<p><u>Evaluate and select options</u></p>	<p>In evaluating policy options, states should determine each option's quantitative impacts on GHGs, the economy, energy supply, air pollution, etc. based on state goals and priorities. This allows states to rank policy options and facilitates comparison. EPA provides methods and tools to assist states in <u>evaluating policy options</u>.</p>
<p><u>Establish administrative process for implementation</u></p>	<p>States should identify mechanisms - including <u>financing mechanisms</u> - and actors for implementing individual options within the strategy, and establish progress reporting mechanisms and time frames for implementation.</p>

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What Should a State Do After Creating an Action Plan?

Design and Implement Policies

After determining the actions they will pursue through an action plan, it is important for states to design specific policies and establish implementation pathways. EPA provides guidance for states on [Designing and Implementing Programs](#).

Measure and Evaluate

It is important for states to evaluate progress toward their goals in order to adjust their strategy and action plan accordingly. Planning for measurement and evaluation should be included in the design of policy implementation. EPA provides methods and tools to assist states in [Determining Results](#).

Communicate

Citizens and stakeholders have important roles in helping mitigate GHGs. Communicating the benefits of programs to mitigate climate change can help gain continued support for state policies and programs. EPA provides information for states on [Engaging Stakeholders](#).

Lessons Learned: Implementing Connecticut's Climate Change Action Plan

Many states have undertaken robust state agency and stakeholder engagement processes to develop climate change action plans for their state. Connecticut is one example of a state that established a process and procedure for developing its plan and implementing it — leveraging the plan's development into a robust and continued commitment from the relevant state agencies. Some lessons learned from Connecticut's experience include:

1. **Have a structure in place before or when you release a climate action plan to carry forward on implementation.** Connecticut has a multi-agency group that meets regularly and is charged with moving the plan forward. Other states might consider one centralized energy/climate agency.
 - Tip: Build a strong staff-level implementation group. This is absolutely necessary to ensure continuity when commissioners change positions and facilitates the work being accomplished in a timely manner.
2. **Establish a priority list of actions to work on each year.** Recognizing that you can't do everything at once, but that progress needs to be made is critical. Connecticut did prioritize its implementation actions in the first year, but would recommend revising the list and setting a new priority implementation list each year if feasible.
 - Tip: Be very specific about the "top 10" items that the governing body agrees is the list for that coming year. Establishing such a system alerts advocates, legislators, etc. to the high priority items for that cycle and also keeps the implementation group focused on the current priorities.
 - Tip: It's much easier for the media and general public to put their arms around a top 10 list than a plan with 50 - 60 actions in it, making a shorter annual list easier to grasp.
3. **Create a mechanism for evolving the plan, ideally before the first version is released.** Given ever limited staff time and agency resources, each state needs some way to efficiently maintain stakeholder involvement and keep new ideas coming that does not involve a staff-intensive stakeholder process with many meetings and plan rewrites. The mechanism should also include: a way to get buy-in from a broad group of stakeholders to validate new ideas, and a process for integrating the new actions and dropping others from the action plan as science, technology, and knowledge evolve.

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