



PE2 Action: Community Climate Action Plan

16 Points



BRONZE PRIORITY



SILVER PRIORITY

A. Why is this action important?

A climate action plan (CAP) is a strategy document that sets goals and outlines a set of initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Using a GHG emissions inventory as the foundation, a CAP defines GHG reduction targets and identifies priority actions. By providing a framework for achieving the GHG targets, the CAP facilitates coordination between broader community engagement and local government leadership. In addition, the CAP supports effective action over time because it establishes methods for assessing progress and adjusting the local strategy if GHG targets are surpassed or not fulfilled. Development of the CAP and monitoring progress provide a focusing mechanism for the local Climate Smart Communities (CSC) task force. (See [PE1 Action: CSC Task Force](#)).

Local governments are encouraged to incorporate climate adaptation strategies into their CAPs. However, under the CSC Certification program, points for climate adaptation planning are awarded under Pledge Element 7: Enhance community resilience to climate change.

B. How to implement this action

For detailed guidance on implementation, download the [CSC Climate Action Planning Guide](#). The information below provides an overview of the process and key components.

The CAP must include the results of a community GHG inventory. See [PE2 Action: Community GHG Inventory](#) for details on how to complete this prerequisite. Emissions forecasts (often included in the GHG inventory process) are also useful during climate action planning, because such forecasts anticipate shifts in emissions caused by population change, technological developments, or economic impacts.

The CAP must include at least one GHG reduction target. Some communities find it valuable to set more than one target; they often establish short- and long-term targets. The short-term targets help to ensure that action is taken in the near term, whereas long-term targets can set the stage for major planning initiatives and investments designed to dramatically reduce energy use and emissions. New York State's targets for reducing GHG emissions are 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050 (below 1990 levels). Local governments are encouraged to align their targets with state goals.

The basic steps to create a local climate action plan (CAP) are as follows:

1. Determine leadership and CAP framework.
2. Develop communication and engagement strategy. (This CSC action requires public review of the draft community CAP.)
3. Complete and analyze baseline assessments.
4. Identify goals and GHG reduction targets.
5. Identify existing and potential initiatives.
6. Prioritize initiatives.
7. Create a plan for implementing the chosen initiatives.
8. Establish metrics.
9. Write the CAP, adopt it, and make it publicly available.

C. Time frame, project costs, and resource needs

Crafting a community CAP takes about six to 12 months, depending on staff capacity, availability of data, and level of public engagement. Project costs include staff time and possibly consultants to support the development of the plan.

D. Which local governments implement this action? Which departments within the local government are most likely to have responsibility for this?

This action is applicable to all types of local governments. Planning departments or offices that lead climate and/or sustainability efforts are often responsible for managing climate action planning processes. Cross-department involvement and support are recommended. Local staff with expertise in facilitating stakeholder engagement, like public relations officers or communications staff, are important in coordinating the public outreach component of the community climate action planning process. The local CSC coordinator and CSC task force should play key roles in the creation of the community CAP and in monitoring implementation of the CAP.

E. How to obtain points for this action

A community CAP that is consistent with the requirements described here is eligible for a total of 16 points.

F. What to submit

Submit a community CAP that was completed within 10 years of the application date. At minimum, the CAP must include the results of the community GHG inventory, at least one community-wide GHG reduction target, and a set of prioritized initiatives for reducing GHG emissions from the community as a whole. The community CAP can be a standalone document, or it can be integrated into another plan, such as a comprehensive plan, clean energy plan, or sustainability plan.

Provide documentation that the final CAP was officially adopted by the local government and released to the public. For example, the CAP could be posted on a government website or made available for review at a local library.

For public outreach, provide documentation that, at minimum, a draft of the CAP was made available for review and comment by the public. Documentation of other outreach efforts such as public meetings is encouraged. Such documentation can be submitted either as part of the plan or as separate records.

All CSC action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submittals should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

G. Links to additional resources or best practices

- CSC [Climate Action Planning Guide](#): This 28-page guide introduces the concepts behind climate action planning and provides a framework for developing a plan to reduce GHG emissions. It includes information on creating plans for government operations and for the community.
- DEC CSC Develop a Local Climate Action Plan
- [ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability USA, Inc.](#): ICLEI has a comprehensive GHG tool called [ClearPath](#) for conducting GHG inventories, forecasts, monitoring, and climate action planning at the community or government operations scale. Membership in ICLEI involves an annual fee based on municipal size and includes access to ClearPath.
- [Science Based Targets Initiative](#): This initiative provides guidance on setting GHG targets that are science-based, meaning they are aligned with the GHG reductions required to keep global temperature increase below 2°C compared to preindustrial temperatures. The initiative is focused on private companies but the methods are applicable to local governments who want detailed methods for setting science-based GHG targets.

H. Recertification requirements

Submit a community climate action plan that was developed or updated within 10 years of the application date and that meets the requirements described above. Updated plans must include evidence of implementation of the prior CAP, regular monitoring of progress toward meeting the GHG targets, and re-evaluation of targets and strategies against current technologies and state policies.