



# The Essential Climate Action Toolkit

Cuyahoga County, Ohio  
2026



Prepared by



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# Welcome from the County



Planning for climate action can be overwhelming. Especially for communities without resources and staff dedicated to sustainability. This toolkit is designed to meet communities where they are on their sustainability journey, help them understand their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and plan for their priority actions.

The Cuyahoga County Sustainability Department is eager to partner with municipalities and community stakeholders to advance their climate actions. Using interactive, online GHG data from 2010 to 2022, each community can determine what sectors produce the most GHG to focus their climate actions.

The County's Sustainability Strategy and Climate Action Plan are available as a reference to support municipal work. The toolkit then serves as a quick start guide for local governments to take specific actions.

Each community may advance climate action differently. Effective strategies are selected in response to community priorities and data.

Together, our efforts move us toward a more sustainable and resilient Cuyahoga County.

Melanie Knowles  
Sustainability Director,  
Cuyahoga County Department of  
Sustainability

Katharyne Starinsky  
Sustainable Development Program  
Coordinator,  
Cuyahoga County Department of  
Sustainability

# Introduction

Advancing climate action in  
Cuyahoga County communities



***This toolkit is designed to guide local governments and communities through the process of conducting efficient and effective climate action planning activities.***

Climate change presents both urgent risks and opportunities for local leadership. By developing and implementing climate action strategies at the local level, communities can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build resilience to climate hazards, and promote equity and well-being for residents.

**Climate action planning** is a step-by-step process that helps communities identify where emissions come from, set achievable goals, and take coordinated action to reduce climate impacts. **A Climate Action Plan (CAP)** provides a roadmap for how local governments, residents, and partners can work together across sectors including energy, transportation, buildings, waste, and natural systems, to create a healthier and more resilient community. The process typically includes gathering data, setting targets, engaging the community, identifying strategies, and establishing a system to track progress over time.

***However, a community doesn't need to complete a full CAP process to make meaningful progress.*** Many smaller municipalities in Cuyahoga County can start by choosing a few high-impact actions that align with their priorities. This toolkit is designed to help you find the right starting point. Whether your community is ready to develop a comprehensive plan or simply wants to take the first few steps, the guidance, examples, and templates in this toolkit will help you organize local efforts, engage partners, and track results in a way that fits your capacity and resources.

# How to Use This Toolkit

## Advancing climate action in Cuyahoga County communities



This Climate Action Toolkit is designed for communities of all sizes, but especially for those that are new to climate action planning or operating with limited staff capacity, constrained resources, or no dedicated sustainability staff. Whether you are a small village beginning this work for the first time or a mid-sized city looking to strengthen existing efforts, this toolkit provides clear, practical guidance to help you take meaningful action at your own pace.

**The toolkit is organized into six main steps, each representing a key component of effective climate action planning.** Every step includes:

- A plain-language explanation of the purpose and importance of that phase
- Essential actions to get started, even with minimal capacity
- A set of “What to Do Next” activities to deepen your work when ready
- Practical tools and templates that you can download and use immediately
- Deeper-dive resources for communities seeking more technical detail or advanced methods

**Importantly, there is no single right way to use this toolkit.** Climate action planning is not a one-size-fits-all process. Communities differ in size, capacity, geography, priorities, and readiness. You can move through each step in a linear sequence, or you can jump directly to the steps most relevant to your current needs.

Some communities may begin with community engagement; others may start by reviewing their emissions profile or identifying priority strategies. All approaches are valid. What matters most is that your community gets started with one step, one strategy, or one pilot project. The toolkit is built to support progress in any form, from developing a full Climate Action Plan to implementing a handful of high-impact actions. Use the tools, adapt them to your context, and revisit them as your capacity grows. Over time, small steps taken consistently will build the foundation for long-term, meaningful climate action.

# Climate Action At a Glance

- **If you're brand new to climate action:** Start with Step 1 (GHG Emissions) and Step 2 (Existing Progress Review)
- **If you already have plans or climate goals:** Jump to Step 4 (Strategies & Actions)
- **If you're ready to act now:** Go straight to Step 6 (Implementation)

1

## Review Your GHG Emissions

Analyze your community's greenhouse gas inventory to understand major emission sources and opportunities for reduction.

2

## Conduct an Existing Progress Review

Inventory current plans, policies, and initiatives to identify where climate action is already happening and where gaps remain.

3

## Assess Your Climate Risks and Hazards

Evaluate how local hazards such as heat, flooding or severe storms impact people, infrastructure and ecosystems.

4

## Develop Your Strategies And Actions

Identify high-impact, equitable strategies that address both emissions reduction and community resilience.

5

## Document Your Climate Actions

Summarize your goals, data, and strategies in a clear, actionable document to guide implementation and track progress.

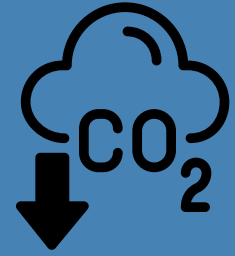
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## Begin Implementation

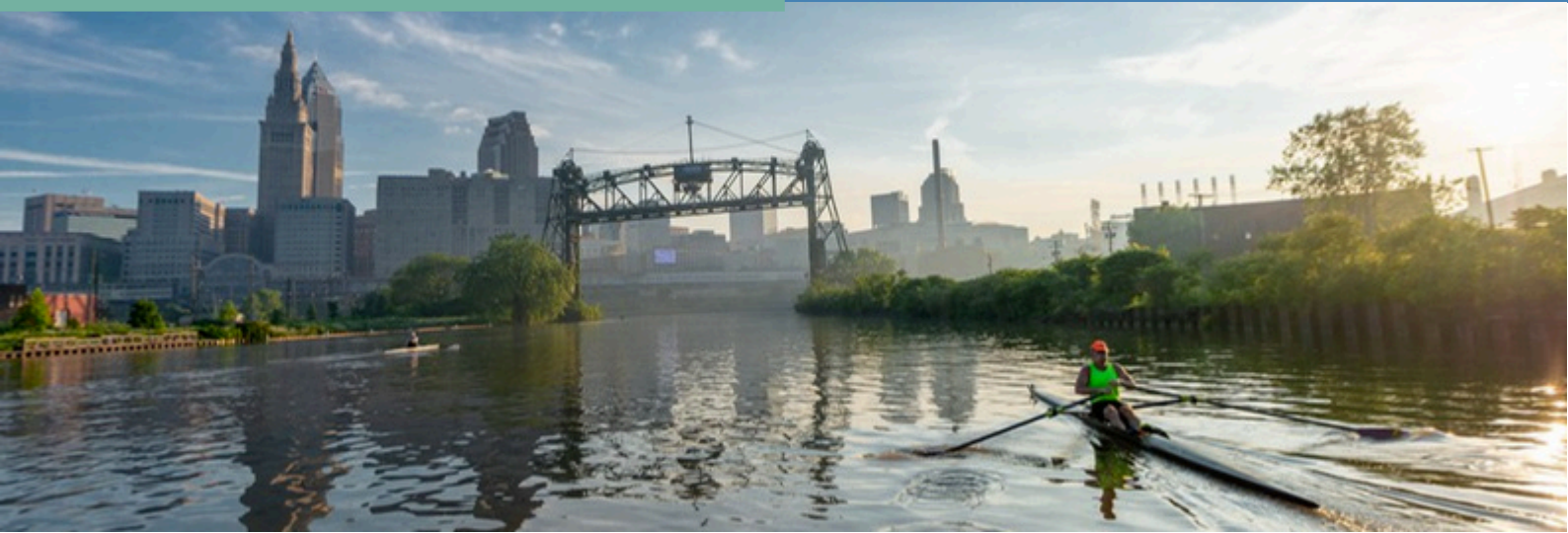
Launch your priority actions, assign responsibilities and establish systems for monitoring and celebrating progress.

## STEP 1

# Review Your GHG Emissions



Analyze your community's greenhouse gas inventory to understand major emission sources and opportunities for reduction.



## Essential Action

Understand where your community's emissions come from and focus your strategies where they'll make the greatest impact. Use the GHG emissions data provided by Cuyahoga County to identify the largest sources such as transportation, buildings or waste and connect those insights directly to your strategies.



## Why this Matters

Your GHG inventory is the foundation of data-driven climate action - revealing which activities and sectors contribute most to emissions and highlights where change is possible. By interpreting this data, communities can target high-impact strategies, justify investment priorities and demonstrate progress over time.



## What to Do Next

**Review your community's GHG** pie chart and sector breakdown from Cuyahoga County.

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**Identify which sectors** (transportation, residential, commercial, industrial, waste) contribute the largest share of emissions using the GHG Emissions Profile Inventory Worksheet.

---

Discuss where your municipality has the **greatest influence and capacity** to act.

---

Connect the highest-emitting sectors to relevant **strategies and actions** in this toolkit.

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**Summarize your findings** by selecting two or three "focus areas" for targeted implementation.

---





## Quick Start Tools

### Cuyahoga County GHG Emissions Inventory

CUYAHOGA COUNTY, Ohio  
Department of Sustainability

HOME INITIATIVES ABOUT US

Home / Department of Sustainability / Plans and Data / Interactive Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data

### Interactive Greenhouse Gas Emission Data

The Department of Sustainability worked with the Brendle Group, a sustainable engineering and planning firm to complete a **detailed inventory of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for all 59 cities and towns** within Cuyahoga County.

The Global Protocol for Community-Scale GHG Inventories (GPC) was chosen as the basis for the inventory calculations, reporting at the Basic level.

[Access Emissions Data](#)

**Understanding Your GHG Inventory Worksheet:** A fillable table that helps communities translate emissions data into % of total emissions, top sources and local influence.

**Instructions: Please replace the numbers in this examples with your community's numbers from the Cuyahoga County GHG Emissions Inventory**

Sector	Metric Tons (from Cuyahoga County Tool)	% of Total Emissions	Local Influence (High / Medium / Low)
Total Emissions in GHG Emissions Inventory	214,050	100%	
Transportation	87760	41.00%	Medium
Residential Buildings	47091	22.00%	Medium
Commercial Buildings	51372	24.00%	Medium
Industrial Buildings	18437	8.61%	Low
Waste and Wastewater	8830	4.13%	High
Large Industrial Processes	560		Low

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## Pro Tips

Use the GHG emissions inventory as a decision-making tool. If buildings make up 60% of emissions, most of your early strategies should address energy efficiency, electrification, and solar.

Start with the top two sectors for the greatest impact. They usually represent 70–90% of local emissions, and build your first strategy set around them.



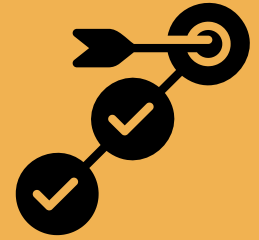
## Want a Deeper Dive?

### [EPA – Local Climate Action Framework](#)

[A Step-by-Step Implementation Guide: U.S. EPA's Local Climate Action Framework \(2017 archived\)](#) is a step-by-step guide helping local governments plan, implement, track, and fund community-wide climate mitigation and adaptation projects. Link goes directly to “Develop GHG Inventory” step.

## STEP 2

# Conduct an Existing Progress Review



Review current plans, policies, and initiatives to identify where climate action is already happening and where gaps remain.



## Essential Action

Gather your community's existing plans, policies, and programs, and systematically review them to identify climate-related goals, progress, and opportunities for alignment.



## Why this Matters

Before setting new climate goals, communities need a clear picture of the work already underway. Many municipalities - intentionally or not - are already implementing climate-related efforts. Reviewing this existing progress helps teams avoid duplication, build on local strengths, and recognize past accomplishments. It also highlights outdated goals, capacity limitations or areas where climate considerations are missing.

## STEP 2 Conduct an Existing Progress Review



### What to Do Next

#### **Collect All Relevant Local and Regional Plans:**

Gather your comprehensive plan, transportation plan, sustainability plan, capital improvements plan, hazard mitigation plan and any county or regional frameworks that influence your community.

---

#### **Review Each Plan for Climate-Related Content:**

Scan for goals, actions, policies or priorities related to mitigation, adaptation, resilience, environmental justice, land use or energy.

---

#### **Capture Key Findings in the Plan Mapping**

**tracker:** Document climate-related elements, alignment with county goals, and the plan's timeframe to identify gaps and overlaps.

---

#### **Summarize Findings Using the Plan Review**

**Summary Worksheet:** Record major insights: What's already underway? What's missing? Which goals need updating? Where do opportunities exist?

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#### **Share Your Review Results with Your Planning**

**Team:** Use your findings to guide sector selection, strategy development, and engagement conversations.

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# STEP 2 Conduct an Existing Progress Review



## Quick Start Tools

**Plan Review Tracker:** A structured tool for cataloging existing plans, documenting climate-related content, identifying alignment with county or state priorities, and spotting gaps in coverage.

Plan Type	Plan Name	Year Adopted	Lead Department / Agency	Climate Mitigation Content (Energy, Buildings, Transportation, Waste)	Climate Adaptation / Resilience Content (Stormwater, Heat, Flooding, Emergency Mgmt)**
Comprehensive Plan	Comprehensive Plan Update	2019	Planning Dept.	Mentions bike/ped improvements, energy-efficient development practices.	Limited—references floodplain management only.

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**Plan Review Summary Worksheet:** A guided worksheet that helps you summarize insights from your document review, including strengths, gaps, and overlaps.

### Plan Review Summary Worksheet

Use this worksheet to summarize and reflect on each existing local or regional plan as part of the climate action assessment process. It helps identify alignment, gaps, and opportunities to integrate climate goals, equity, and resilience across plans.

**1. Plan Overview**

Plan Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Type (Comprehensive, Transportation, Sustainability, Resilience):  
\_\_\_\_\_

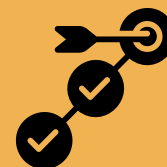
Year Adopted / Last Updated: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Department / Partner: \_\_\_\_\_

Geographic Scope: \_\_\_\_\_

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## STEP 2 Conduct an Existing Progress Review



### Pro Tip

Don't underestimate work that's already happening. Many communities discover that they've already completed 30-40% of a climate action plan without calling it "climate work". By doing so, you unlock momentum and confidence early in the process.



## Want a Deeper Dive?

### Clean Air Partnership – Climate Accountability Toolkit

The Clean Air Partnership Climate Accountability Toolkit (2024) is a practical guide helping municipalities embed transparency, monitoring, and decision-making tools into climate plans to deliver on net-zero commitments. (Page 24 & 25)

## STEP 3

# Assess Your Climate Risks and Hazards



Evaluate how local hazards such as heat, flooding, or severe storms impact people, infrastructure, and ecosystems.



## Essential Action

Identify how climate change could affect your community's people, places, and systems, and determine where action is most needed. Use local and regional data to map the overlap between hazards, vulnerable populations, and critical infrastructure.



## Why this Matters

Every community experiences climate impacts differently. Understanding which hazards pose the greatest threat is the first step in building resilience. By using regional data (like the Cuyahoga County Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment) and federal frameworks (like the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit), your team can prioritize actions that strengthen both physical infrastructure and social resilience.



## What to Do Next

**List Key Assets:** Identify essential systems and resources including roads, housing, schools, health facilities, natural areas, and community centers.

---

**Map Hazards:** Determine which climate hazards (flooding, heat, severe storms, drought) could threaten those assets.

---

**Assess Exposure & Sensitivity:** For each asset, estimate how likely it is to be affected and how severe the impact might be (High / Medium / Low).

---

**Evaluate Adaptive Capacity:** Consider how well each system can withstand or recover from an event—look for existing backup power, green infrastructure, or emergency plans.

---

**Prioritize Risks:** Combine likelihood and impact ratings in a risk tracker to see which areas need immediate attention.

---

**Visualize Results:** Create a summary table or simple map to show patterns of vulnerability, and confirm findings with local leaders and community members.

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# STEP 3 Assess Your Climate Risks and Hazards



## Quick Start Tools

**Climate Risk Assessment Tracker:** A fillable worksheet to rate hazards by likelihood and severity for key assets (transportation, housing, utilities). Helps communities see which hazard-asset combinations represent their greatest overall risk.

Asset / System	Hazard (e.g., flooding, heat, wind)	Likelihood (H/M/L)	Consequence (H/M/L)	Overall Risk (Auto-calc or H/M/L)	Exposure Notes
Example: Roads & Bridges	Flooding	High	Medium	High	Located in floodplain
Example: Substations	Extreme H				Large service area

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**Vulnerability Mapping Worksheet:** This worksheet guides communities through assessing climate-related vulnerabilities by mapping high-risk assets, sensitive populations, and local hazard exposure. It provides a structured way to pinpoint priority areas and inform targeted resilience strategies.

## Vulnerability Mapping Worksheet

*Cuyahoga County Climate Action Toolkit*

### 1. Asset or System Being Assessed

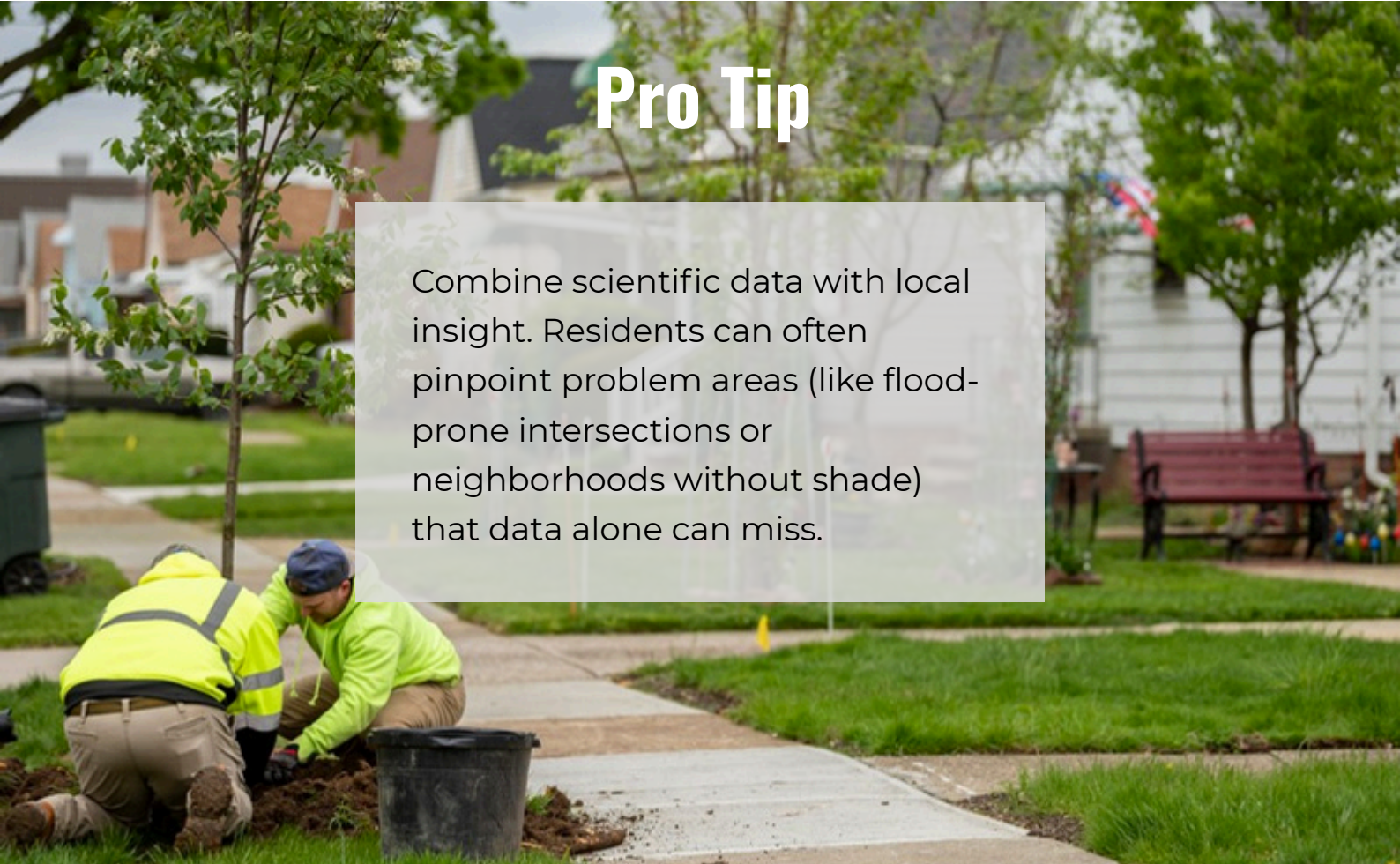
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## STEP 3 Assess Your Climate Risks and Hazards



### Pro Tip

Combine scientific data with local insight. Residents can often pinpoint problem areas (like flood-prone intersections or neighborhoods without shade) that data alone can miss.



### Want a Deeper Dive?

**Cuyahoga County Climate Change Vulnerability**

**Assessment:** Provides regional hazard data and maps for use in local risk analysis.

**U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit:** Offers the Steps to Resilience Framework plus tools and case studies for community use.

## STEP 4

# Develop Your Strategies And Actions



Identify high-impact, equitable strategies that address both emissions reduction and community resilience.



## Essential Action

Prioritize the strategies and actions that meaningfully reduce emissions in your community's highest-emitting sectors - which are typically transportation, buildings, and industry - using local data, existing progress and community values as your guide.



## Why this Matters

Choosing the right strategies is where climate planning becomes climate action. By grounding decisions in emissions data, local priorities, and co-benefits, communities can focus resources on the highest-impact initiatives. Sector-specific strategies help small and mid-sized communities work efficiently while improving public health, lowering energy burdens, and supporting economic development. Early strategic alignment builds public support, avoids wasted effort, and positions communities to leverage funding opportunities.

# STEP 4 **Develop Your Strategies And Actions**



## **What to Do Next**

### **Compare Potential Strategies to Existing**

**Progress:** Review your existing plans and actions to determine which strategies fill gaps, reinforce current initiatives, or offer new opportunities. (Use the “Existing Progress Review Worksheet.”)

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**Prioritize 3–5 High-Impact Strategies:** Select strategies based on mitigation and/or resilience/adaptation potential, feasibility, co-benefits, alignment with community values and timing (near vs. long term).

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**Break Strategies Into Clear, Practical Actions:** List the specific policy, programmatic, partnership and infrastructure steps needed to implement each strategy.

---

**Assess Co-Benefits & Equity Implications:** Identify how each strategy improves public health, reduces costs or supports underserved communities to strengthen community support and funding justification.

---

**Prepare for Community Engagement:** Bring the draft list of strategies to residents and stakeholders to validate priorities and co-create implementation approaches.

---

# STEP 4 Develop Your Strategies And Actions



## Quick Start Tools

**Sector Strategy Quick Reference Sheets:** Four downloadable handouts summarizing the top 5 strategies for Transportation, Residential, Commercial, and Industrial sectors each with descriptions and co-benefits.

### Recommended Strategies



This tool provides a focused menu of high-impact climate strategies that small and mid-sized cities can realistically lead or influence. Rather than an exhaustive list, these strategies highlight actions where local governments have the greatest control, strongest leverage, and clearest pathways to implementation. Cities can select strategies that align with their priorities, capacity, and community context, and support economic and resources grow.

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### Strategy Development Worksheet:

A customizable tracker that helps communities compare up to 5 strategies based on emissions reduction potential, feasibility, alignment with values, cost, equity impacts, and timeframe.

<b>Transportation: Suggested Mitigation Strategies</b>		
Strategy	Description	Co-Benefits
Active Transportation Infrastructure	Build sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use paths, and safe crossings to reduce car trips.	Health benefits, safer streets, lower vehicle miles traveled.
Complete Streets Policies & Implementation	Design streets for all users and integrate multimodal features during routine repaving.	Safer corridors, stronger local economies, reduced household transportation costs.

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## STEP 4 Develop Your Strategies And Actions



### Pro Tips

Focus on strategies that deliver multiple co-benefits, not just emissions reductions. Actions that improve safety, lower energy bills or support economic development help to build momentum and support over time.

Start small but strategic: choose one or two high-impact, high-visibility actions early on. Quick wins build credibility, unlock funding, and motivate staff and stakeholders for further implementation.

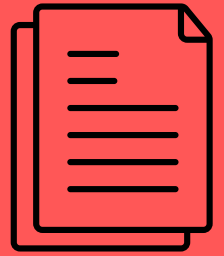


### Want a Deeper Dive?

**U.S. EPA Local Climate Action Framework**: Mitigation Strategies: A comprehensive guide to local mitigation measures, including sector-specific actions and funding pathways. (Page 65)

**ACEEE Local Policy Database**: Provides detailed examples of energy efficiency and building electrification policies used by cities nationwide.

## STEP 5



# Document Your Climate Actions

Summarize your goals, data, and strategies in a clear, actionable document to guide implementation and track progress.



## Essential Action

Capture your community's goals, strategies and actions in a structured, easy-to-navigate document that aligns with local values, uses the latest data and provides a roadmap for implementation.



## Why this Matters

Documenting climate action is a milestone that turns planning into a living roadmap for reducing emissions and building resilience. Whether your community produces a comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CAP) or a shorter memo, having a written framework ensures climate goals remain visible, shared and actionable. Clear documentation strengthens accountability, supports funding applications and provides continuity when elected officials or staff roles change. Many impactful climate actions begin with short, targeted memos or plans that evolve into more formal CAPs over time.



## What to Do Next

**Choose Your Documentation Format:** Decide whether your community will create a full Climate Action Plan, a shorter sector-focused memo or a phased roadmap aligned with existing plans.

---

**Organize Content Using a Clear, Navigable**

**Structure:** Typical flow: Executive Summary → GHG Emissions Snapshot → Vision & Goals → Strategies by Sector → Action Tables → Implementation & Progress Tracking.

---

**Use Your Prioritized Actions to Build Out an**

**Action Table:** Include responsible parties, timeframes, funding opportunities, partners, and expected outcomes.

---

**Incorporate Both Mitigation and Resilience**

**Strategies:** Ensure your community addresses emissions reduction and climate risk. Many smaller communities start with one and add the other over time.

---

**Make It Readable & Public-Friendly:** Use plain language, visuals, and short sections especially important for communities new to climate planning.

---

**Share a Draft for Community Feedback:**

Transparency strengthens trust; incorporate community input before finalizing.

---



# Quick Start Tools

**Action and Implementation Table (in the Strategy Development Worksheet):** A table found in the last tab of the strategies worksheet to capture working strategies, related actions, timeframes, lead agencies, potential partners, cost estimates, equity considerations and Key Performance Indicators. (See Actions Worksheet Tab).

<b>Transportation: Suggested Mitigation Strategies</b>			
Strategy	Description	Co-Benefits	City Role
Active Transportation Infrastructure	Build sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use paths, and safe crossings to reduce car trips.	Health benefits, safer streets, lower vehicle miles traveled.	Plan and implement and biking improvement capital projects, paint materials, and grant
Complete Streets Policies & Implementation	Design streets for all users and integrate multimodal features during routine repaving.	Safer corridors, stronger local economies, reduced transportation	Adopt a Complete St incorporate multimod standard street proje

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## Climate Action Memo Outline:

A structured template for building an action memo with headings, suggested language and recommended flow.

## Climate Action Plan Memo Outline



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**A short, clear, 5–10 page format for quick climate action planning**  
 Use this version when your community wants to move quickly, start small or produce a concise document that can later grow

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## STEP 5 Document Your Climate Actions



### Pro Tip

Start small. A 5–10 page action memo with strong, clear structure is far better than a long, unfocused plan, and it can evolve over time into a full Climate Action Plan as capacity grows.



### Want a Deeper Dive?

**Oberlin, OH Climate Action Plan:** A leading small-city example that integrates mitigation, resilience, and equity through strong community partnerships and clear, sector-based actions tailored to local capacity.

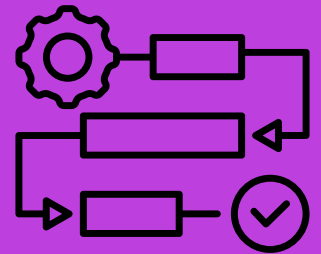
**Cleveland Heights, OH Climate Action Plan:**

A strong inner-ring suburb example that translates climate goals into practical, community-scale actions with a focus on housing, transportation, and neighborhood-level implementation.

## STEP 6

# Begin Implementation

Launch your priority actions, assign responsibilities, and establish systems for monitoring and celebrating progress.



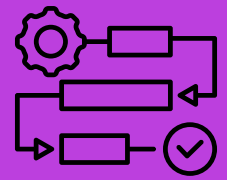
## Essential Action

Use the Climate Action Implementation Tracker to prioritize, plan, and sequence your strategies ensuring the most impactful, feasible, and community-aligned actions move forward first.



## Why this Matters

Implementation makes planning become real progress. After selecting your strategies, implementation involves determining how work will advance, who will lead it, what resources are required, and when each action should occur. Prioritization ensures limited time, staff, and funding are directed toward actions that deliver the highest climate impact, meaningful equity outcomes and strong community benefits.



## What to Do Next

**Conduct an Impact/Ease Prioritization Exercise:** Sort strategies based on expected emissions reductions and feasibility. Prioritize quick win “high impact / high ease” items first.

---

**Populate the Climate Action Implementation tracker:** Enter each selected strategy and its supporting actions, including sector, authority, timeframe, cost, partners, funding sources, and more.

---

**Identify Key Partners & Assign Leads:** Clarify who is responsible—city staff, regional agencies, utilities, community organizations—and map partners who can accelerate progress.

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**Sequence Your Actions:** Organize actions into short-term (<1 year), mid-term (1–3 years), and long-term (3+ years) categories to build a realistic roadmap.

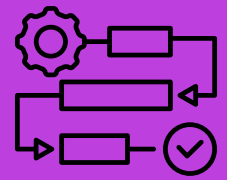
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**Align Actions with Funding Opportunities:** Match strategies with grants, rebates, state and federal funding, and utility incentives to maximize impact and reduce local costs.

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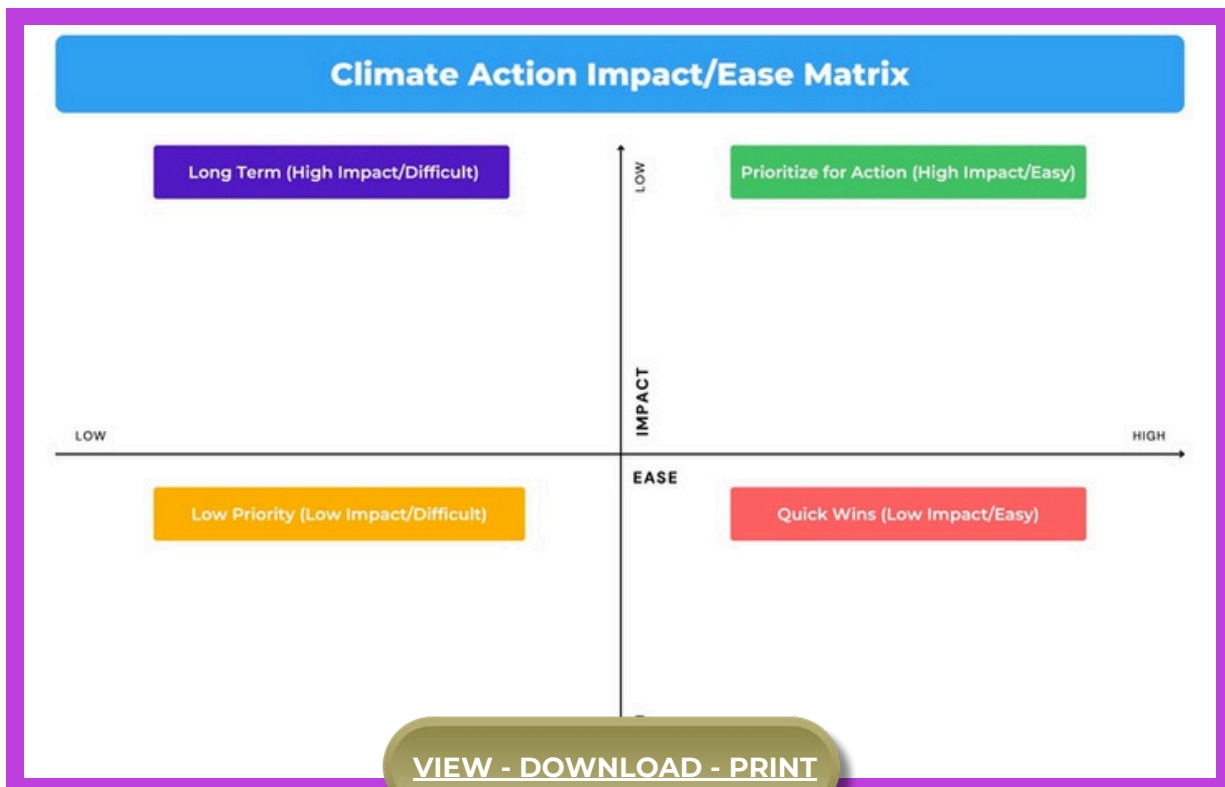
**Develop a 12-Month Implementation Plan:** Select 3–5 near-term, high-impact actions and create a short-term workplan with defined deliverables and checkpoints.

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## Quick Start Tools

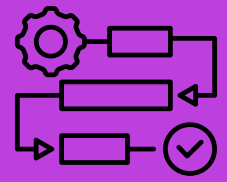
**Impact/Ease Decision Chart:** Conduct a prioritization exercise with your planning team to determine the impact and ease of each strategy and action. This chart will help you determine quick wins, priority projects, longterm items and supporting actions.



**Populate the Implementation Tracker:** Fill out the remaining columns on your Strategies tracker including type, City authority, partner support, GHG Emission Reduction Potential, timeframe, anticipated Cost, potential Funding Source, Implementing Agency or Individual and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

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## STEP 6 Begin Implementation



### Pro Tips

Integrate Climate Actions into Existing Workflows. Instead of launching new processes, embed actions into activities already happening like capital improvement planning, permitting updates, facility maintenance, or infrastructure upgrades.

Assign clear ownership for each action. Every action in your implementation tracker should have one primary lead, even if multiple partners are involved. Clear ownership accelerates progress, and makes follow-up easier.



### Want a Deeper Dive?

#### **Implementation Priorities Summary May 2025 Riverside, IL:**

The Village of Riverside's Road to 2050: Climate Action & Resilience Plan includes an implementation priorities summary. It's a good example for how a smaller municipality creates a sector-based strategy, prioritized action list and implementation roadmap.

# Toolkit Resources by Step

Step # and name	Resource	Link
Step 1: Review Your GHG Emissions	Cuyahoga County GHG Emissions Inventory	
Step 1: Review Your GHG Emissions	GHG Emissions Worksheet	
Step 2: Conduct an Existing Progress Review	Plan Review Tracker	
Step 2: Conduct an Existing Progress Review	Plan Review Summary Worksheet	
Step 3: Assess Your Climate Risks and Hazards	Climate Assessment Risk Tracker	

# Toolkit Resources by Step

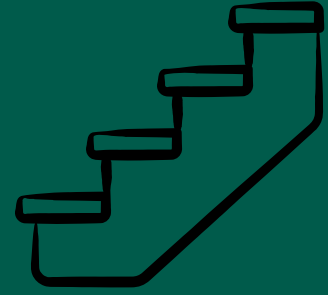
Step # and name	Resource	Link
Step 3: Assess Your Climate Risks and Hazards	Vulnerability Worksheet	
Step 4: Develop Your Strategies	Top 5 Strategies Per Sector	
Step 4: Develop Your Strategies	Strategy Development Worksheet	
Step 5: Document Your Climate Actions	Strategy Development Worksheet (Actions Tab)	

# Toolkit Resources by Step

Step # and name	Resource	Link
Step 5: Document Your Climate Actions	Climate Action Memo Outline	
Step 6: Begin Implementation	Climate Action Impact/Ease Decision Chart	
Step 6: Begin Implementation	Actions worksheet/implementation tracker	

# Supporting Steps

Recommended When Capacity Allows



These steps represent best practices in climate action planning and help ensure that the process is collaborative, grounded in community priorities, and guided by clear goals.

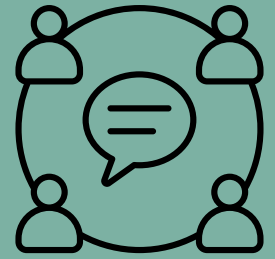
While some smaller communities may not have the staff capacity or time to complete each of these steps, they are strongly recommended when feasible. Communities can adapt, scale, or sequence them to fit local resources.

These supporting steps strengthen climate action at any stage.

They are recommended best practices for effective, inclusive climate planning, but they are not prerequisites for using this toolkit.

Communities can complete the supporting steps before, during, or after the six core steps or return to them as capacity grows. Many municipalities begin implementation first and layer in visioning, engagement, or team-building later. Use these steps when they are most helpful for your community.

## Supporting Step



# Form Your Planning Team

Build a cross-sector team of staff, community members, and partners to guide your climate action process and ensure shared ownership.



## Essential Action

Bring together a small, motivated group of people to lead your community's climate action effort.

- Start with 2-4 trusted colleagues or interested community partners
- Set clear expectations for their involvement
- Make participating easy and fun



## Why this Matters

A successful climate plan starts with a core team. You don't need a large committee—just a few people who represent key perspectives. This team serves as a coordination hub, keeping the process organized, inclusive, and moving forward. Starting small helps ensure the plan reflects community priorities while building momentum as interest and partnerships grow.



## What to Do Next

**Identify your champions.** Choose one or two staff or community leaders to help convene the group.

---

**Invite key voices.** Include representatives from different sectors -government, business, schools, and community organizations.

---

**Clarify your purpose.** Agree on the team's role: guiding the process, reviewing data, and connecting with residents.

---

**Set a simple structure.** Decide how often to meet and how you'll communicate progress.

---

**Seek support.** If capacity is limited, reach out to Cuyahoga County or Power A Clean Future Ohio for facilitation support or technical assistance.

---





## Quick Start Tools

### **Stakeholder Project Team List:**

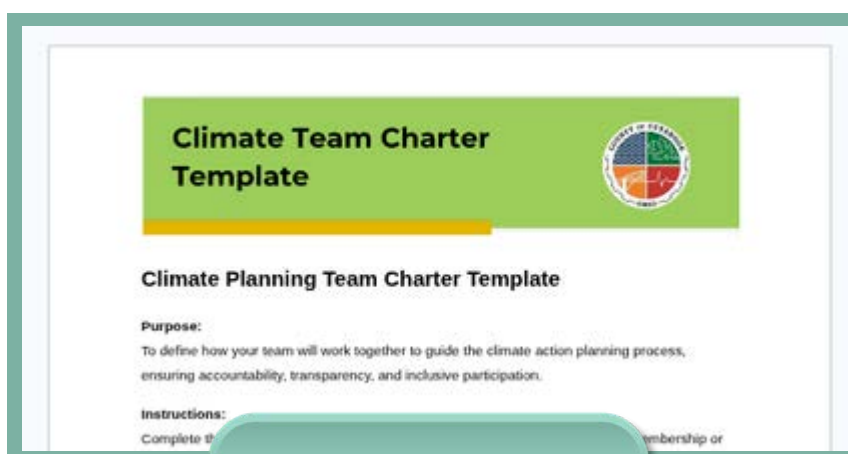
A tool to identify key participants in your climate action process.

A	B
Category	Examples of Stakeholders
Elected Officials	Mayors, City Council Members, County Commissioners
Municipal Staff	Planning, Public Works, Sustainability, Emergency Management, Finance
Community Organizations & Leaders	Nonprofits, Advocacy Groups, Neighborhood Associations, Environmental Justice Leaders
Local Businesses & Institutions	Chambers of Commerce, Small Businesses, Major Employers, Hospitals, Utilities, Higher Education
Residents & Vulnerable Communities	

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### **Planning Team Charter:**

A template to define your group's purpose, structure, and roles.



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## Supporting Step

# Form Your Planning Team



## Pro Tips

Don't wait to have the "perfect" team. Instead, begin with who's available. You can always add members later, but early momentum matters more than assembling every sector at once.

Start with people already doing the work. Many communities already have informal champions like planners, public works staff, school leaders or local nonprofits. Invite them in early. A small but committed team is more effective than a large but disengaged one.



## Want a Deeper Dive?

### **[Planning for Climate Change: A Strategic, Values-Based Approach for Urban Planners - UN-Habitat Toolkit:](#)**

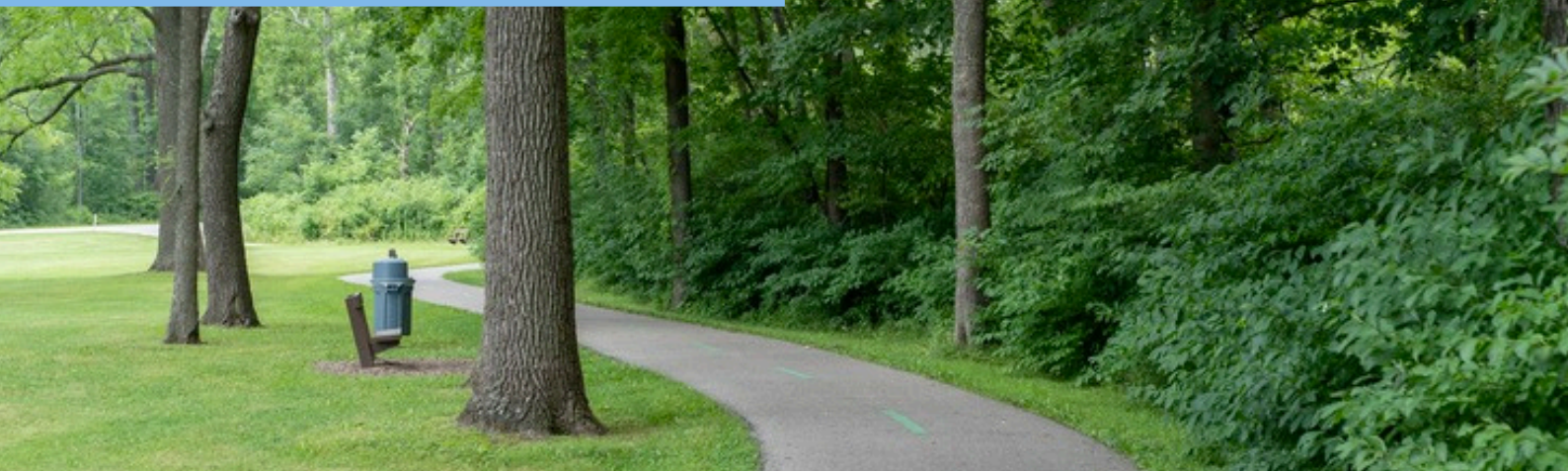
This globally recognized framework helps local governments align climate planning with community values, stakeholder engagement, and equitable decision-making. (Tool 1C, page 7).

## Supporting Step



# Define Your Vision And Goals

Establish a clear, community-driven vision and measurable goals that reflect local values, equity, and sustainability priorities.



## Essential Action

Clarify where your community wants to go, and how you'll measure progress along the way.

- What are your community's top 3 priorities this year?
- How can you align your climate action priorities with those broader community priorities?



## Why this Matters

Your climate action vision is your north star - it defines what success looks like for your community and inspires others to get involved. Clear, measurable goals turn that vision into an actionable roadmap. This step helps ensure every future strategy, investment and partnership aligns with your long-term purpose.



## What to Do Next

**Host a Vision Workshop.** Bring your planning team members and a few key stakeholders together to brainstorm a shared climate vision.

---

**Translate Ideas into Goals.** Use baseline data (like your GHG inventory or hazard assessment) to set realistic, evidence-based targets.

---

**Map Your Goals.** Fill out the Vision-to-Goals Mapping Worksheet to connect vision themes to measurable metrics, lead departments, and timelines.

---





## Quick Start Tools

**Shared Vision Workshop Template:** A guided template to help participants define a collective long-term vision.

### Purpose

To bring stakeholders together to co-create a long-term vision and equitable community. This workshop helps define shared principles that will shape future climate actions.

### Workshop Objectives

- Identify the community's core values and aspirations for the future
- Develop a shared vision statement that reflects those values
- Begin identifying guiding principles to inform climate action

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**Essential Visioning Questions:** A curated set of questions to help groups define a shared climate vision.

### *Visioning Questions for Co-Creation (Policy Link)*

1. What does a thriving, climate-resilient community look like to you?
2. What environmental or climate-related issues concern you most in your neighborhood?
3. What climate-related challenges are you or your community already facing?
4. What community strengths can we build on to address climate challenges?
5. What resources or knowledge does your community bring to the table?
6. How should equity and justice be reflected in our climate goals?

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## Pro Tips

Don't Aim for Perfection on Day One. Your vision and goals will evolve as you learn more about your emissions, your risks and your community's priorities. Start with a draft vision, validate it through engagement, and refine as you go.

Keep the Vision Inspiring, Keep the Goals Measurable. A strong climate vision should be short, memorable, and values-based while goals should be specific, time-bound, and grounded in your data. Pairing inspiration with clarity creates a direction that people feel and understand.

Photo credit: Cuyahoga County Planning Commission



## Want a Deeper Dive?

**Climate Action Planning Framework:** C40 Cities Knowledge Hub This is a step-by-step resource that integrates visioning and goal-setting into a full climate planning process, complete with templates and examples from peer cities. (1.1 Pages 11-17)

## Supporting Step



# Design Your Community Engagement

Design an inclusive engagement strategy to ensure diverse voices and perspectives shape your climate priorities.



## Essential Action

Develop a clear engagement plan that identifies who you will engage, how you will reach them, and what input you need at each stage of the climate action process using the Cuyahoga County Community Engagement Implementation Guide as your “how-to” roadmap.



## Why this Matters

Community engagement ensures climate action reflects the priorities, lived experiences, and knowledge of those most affected. By involving residents, businesses, and local organizations early and consistently, communities build trust, improve the quality and equity of their strategies, and generate shared ownership. Engagement also strengthens accountability and long-term partnerships that can accelerate resilience, sustainability, and equity efforts..



## What to Do Next

**Define your engagement goals** - clarify what input you need from the community.

---

**Identify who you need to engage** - ensure representation from residents, businesses, community-based organizations, youth, seniors, and historically underserved groups.

---

**Select engagement methods** that match the goals and audience such as surveys, listening sessions, workshops, focus groups or pop-up outreach.

---

**Build a timeline** that aligns engagement moments with key milestones in your planning process (strategy development, prioritization, drafting, review).

---

**Prepare accessible materials** - plain-language summaries, visuals, translated content and multiple ways for people to participate.

---

Close the loop by **summarizing what you heard**, how input shaped decisions, and what comes next - this builds trust and encourages ongoing involvement.

---



## Quick Start Tools

**Engagement Planning Worksheet:** A simple template to define your engagement goals, priority audiences, outreach methods, key messages, and timeline.

### Engagement Planning Worksheet

*Cuyahoga County Climate Action Toolkit*

Use this worksheet to plan and structure your community engagement activities for climate action planning. It will help you clarify your goals, identify key audiences, choose outreach methods, craft messages, and develop a timeline for implementation.

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**Stakeholder Mapping:** A visual tool for identifying residents, organizations, businesses, institutions, and underserved groups whose perspectives are essential to shaping climate solutions. (See 2<sup>nd</sup> tab “tracker to Populate”).

Category	Examples of Stakeholders	Role in Climate Action
Elected Officials	Mayors, City Council Members, County Commissioners	Policy leadership, visibility, alignment with county goals
Municipal Staff	Planning, Public Works, Sustainability, Emergency Management, Finance, Water, Waste	Technical expertise, plan implementation, integration with municipal services
Community Organizations & Leaders	Nonprofits, Advocacy Groups, Neighborhood Associations, Environmental Justice Leaders	Represent community perspectives, amplify underrepresented groups

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## Pro Tips

You don't need to build a new engagement network from scratch. Leverage trusted partners that the community already works with.

Effective engagement is about lowering barriers. Offer multiple ways for the community to participate including online and offline, in a variety of locations and at different times to accommodate the most participants.



## Want a Deeper Dive?

**Cuyahoga County Community Engagement Guide:** Created for this toolkit project, the guide compiles best practices and tips for successful community engagement planning and activities,

**U.S. EPA Public Participation Guide:** This comprehensive guide provides best practices, worksheets, and step-by-step approaches for designing inclusive and culturally responsive engagement processes, including stakeholder mapping, meeting formats, and evaluation methods.

## Supporting Step



# Conduct Community Engagement

Build a cross-sector team of staff, community members, and partners to guide your climate action process and ensure shared ownership.



## Essential Action

Launch community engagement as soon as your draft strategies are identified. Use a mix of informing, consulting, and collaborating tactics to ensure your climate plan is shaped by the people it is designed to serve.



## Why this Matters

Community engagement turns a climate plan from a government document into a shared community roadmap. Early involvement of residents, local organizations, and businesses builds trust, improves equity and effectiveness, and supports smoother implementation. Engagement also surfaces lived experiences data may miss and helps avoid solutions that don't fit local needs or capacity.



## What to Do Next

### **Share Your Draft Strategies Early**

Present initial ideas, even if they're not final, to invite feedback, questions, and community-led refinements.

---

### **Choose Engagement Tactics Based on the “Ladder of Engagement”**

Use informing tools (fact sheets, social posts), consulting tools (surveys, listening sessions), and collaborating tools (workshops, roundtables) depending on readiness and capacity.

---

### **Meet People Where They Already Are**

Use trusted community spaces including libraries, schools, faith centers, neighborhood events to ensure diverse and accessible participation.

---

### **Collect Input in Multiple Formats**

Combine in-person and online tools like mapping exercises, idea boards, comment forms, and facilitated conversations to broaden reach.

---

### **Synthesize Themes**

Share back what you heard and how it will shape the plan to maintain transparency and trust.

---

### **Build Toward Long-Term Partnerships**

Identify residents, organizations, and institutions interested in being ongoing collaborators during implementation.

---



## Quick Start Tools

**Community Engagement Tactics Menu (Ladder of Engagement)** A structured menu of engagement tactics from informing to empowering with suggested use cases, resource needs, and sample agendas.

Engagement Level	Tactic	Description
Inform	Host informational webinars and town halls	Offer accessible forums—both virtual and in-person—where residents and stakeholders can learn about climate action plans, hear from experts, and ask questions in real time.
Inform	Create infographics and short social media explain	Use visual storytelling and bite-sized content to share key climate facts, highlight community successes, and make complex explaining and shareable.

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### Feedback Synthesis Worksheet

A template for capturing input from events, surveys, conversations, and online tools; categorize themes and map them to specific strategies.

#### 1. Engagement Activity Details

**Engagement Type:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Workshop                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening Session   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Survey / Poll                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder Meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online Engagement (map, idea board, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Event     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                              |  |

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## Pro Tips

Conduct outreach to hard to reach populations through building relationships with trusted community partners.

Always Close the Loop. After every engagement activity, share back what you heard and how it shaped the strategies to build trust and show accountability.



## Want a Deeper Dive?

**City of Roseville, MN Community Engagement Toolkit:** This in-depth toolkit guides leadership in creating engagement materials and plans, particularly emphasizing putting diversity and inclusion at the center of all projects.

**Visible Network Labs Community Engagement 101 - Ultimate Beginner's Guide:** This comprehensive guide covers every stage of the community engagement lifecycle, providing fundamental practices, frameworks, and tools.

# Conclusion

## Strategies for a safer, more sustainable Cuyahoga County



Climate mitigation is both achievable and deeply beneficial for communities of all sizes across Cuyahoga County. For small and mid-sized municipalities, where staff capacity is often limited and progress can feel daunting, the most important message is this: **you don't have to do everything to make meaningful climate impact.** By focusing on a handful of high-impact strategies tied to your largest sources of emissions, communities can reduce greenhouse gases while delivering immediate, local co-benefits such as lower energy bills, cleaner air, safer streets, and more resilient neighborhoods.

Mitigation actions like improving building efficiency, expanding clean transportation options, and advancing renewable energy are not only climate solutions—they are economic development tools, public health interventions, and quality-of-life investments. Even modest steps, taken consistently, can generate visible improvements and build momentum. And communities don't have to do this alone: regional partners, the County, utilities, and peer municipalities provide support, templates, and pathways that reduce the burden on local staff.

By using this toolkit, whether step-by-step or by jumping directly to the tools most relevant to your needs - communities can start where they are and grow their climate leadership over time. Each action taken today strengthens the foundation for a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous future for residents. The path is clear, the resources are here and every community has the power to make meaningful progress. **Let's get started.**

# Appendix



# Acknowledgements

Cuyahoga County extends its sincere appreciation to the many individuals and communities whose leadership, collaboration, and commitment made this Climate Action Toolkit possible.

The County gratefully acknowledges the Climate Action Pilot Communities that participated in a Quick Start Climate Action process led by Nutter Consulting. The insights, feedback, and real-world experience shared by these communities were instrumental in shaping a toolkit that is practical, flexible, and grounded in local realities.

Finally, we recognize the Nutter Consulting team for developing the Climate Action Toolkit as well as for designing and facilitating the pilot community strategic development. Their expertise in local climate action planning, equity-centered engagement, and implementation-ready tools helped ensure that this resource is accessible and actionable for communities across Cuyahoga County.

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Melanie Knowles, Director of Sustainability

Katharyne Starinsky, Sustainable Development Program Coordinator

Audrey Ray, Cleveland Foundation Public Service Fellow

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Tina Turick, City Administrator

Ben Lombardi, Communications Manager

Chris Arrietta, Public Works Director

*City of Brook Park*

Korey Smerk, Assistant to the Mayor

*City of Maple Heights*

Annette Blackwell, Mayor

*City of Solon*

Edward Kraus, Mayor

Michael Ionna, AICP, Director of Planning and Community Development  
Richard Parker, Director of Recreation

André Mitchell, Solon Resident Green Team Lead

## **Nutter Consulting**

Melanie Nutter, Principal

# Glossary of Terms

## **Co-benefits**

Positive outcomes that occur in addition to the primary goal of a climate action. For example, a strategy designed to reduce emissions, such as improving building energy efficiency, may also create local jobs, improve indoor air quality, reduce utility bills, or enhance public health. Co-benefits help communities achieve multiple goals through a single action.

## **Mitigation**

Actions that reduce the magnitude or rate of climate change by cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or increasing carbon sequestration. Mitigation efforts include transitioning to renewable energy, improving building efficiency, electrifying transportation, reducing waste, and protecting or restoring natural systems that absorb carbon.

## **Adaptation**

Actions that help communities adjust to existing and expected climate impacts, such as extreme heat, flooding, drought, or severe storms. Adaptation strategies increase the ability of people, infrastructure, and ecosystems to withstand climate-related hazards - for example, expanding tree canopy for cooling, enhancing stormwater systems, or updating building codes.

## **Resilience**

The capacity of a community, system, or environment to withstand, recover from, and adapt to climate-related shocks and stresses. Resilience includes social, economic, and environmental dimensions - for example, ensuring critical facilities remain operational during extreme weather or supporting vulnerable households in preparing for emergencies.

## **Environmental Justice**

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or background, in environmental decision-making. EJ focuses on eliminating disproportionate environmental burdens and ensuring that benefits such as clean air, safe housing, and green jobs are equitably shared. Climate actions should prioritize communities that have historically faced environmental harm or underinvestment.

# Glossary of Terms

## Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) Inventory Sectors

A GHG inventory groups emissions into sectors that represent where emissions occur in the community:

- Residential Buildings: Emissions from energy used in homes, including electricity, natural gas, fuel oil, and propane.
- Commercial Buildings: Emissions from energy used in non-residential buildings such as offices, schools, hospitals, and retail establishments.
- Industrial Sector: Emissions from manufacturing, processing, and other energy-intensive industrial activities.
- Transportation: Emissions from on-road vehicles (cars, trucks, buses), off-road equipment, and in some inventories, aviation, rail, and marine sources.

## Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) Inventory Sources

Categories describing the type of energy or fuel that generates emissions:

- Electricity: Emissions associated with producing the electricity consumed in homes, businesses, and industry. Emissions depend on the local grid's fuel mix (coal, natural gas, renewables).
- Natural Gas: Emissions from burning natural gas in buildings or industrial facilities for heating, hot water, and processes.
- Fuel Oil, Propane, and Other Heating Fuels: Emissions from onsite combustion in buildings or equipment.
- Gasoline and Diesel: Emissions from transportation powered by internal combustion engines.
- Other Sources (as applicable): May include refrigerants (HFCs), industrial process emissions, waste decomposition (landfills), and wastewater treatment.

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Measurable metrics used to track progress toward climate, energy, equity, and resilience goals. KPIs help communities evaluate whether actions are effective and inform adjustments over time. Examples include:

- Annual GHG emissions reductions
- Percent of municipal fleet electrified
- Renewable energy capacity installed
- Tree canopy coverage in priority neighborhoods
- Participation rates in energy or resilience programs

KPIs should be specific, measurable, time-bound, and equity-informed to ensure accountability and transparent progress tracking.