

How to Harness the Power of Your Community to Address Climate Change



A Local Official's Guide

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Institute for Local Government
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California Air Resources Board**

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Cover photos: (left to right)

Infill development supports healthy neighborhoods.

Local officials work with residents to explore policy options.

Providing bicycle friendly streets makes it easier to commute to work on bikes.

Introduction

California has set ambitious goals to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Because of the diversity of California's topography and different local climates, the effects of a changing climate on California communities are complex and will differ from community to community. And, because California communities themselves are different, reducing greenhouse gas emissions will also vary from community to community, as will adapting to climate change.

Local agencies throughout California are successfully involving their residents and businesses to develop local policies, programs and action plans to address climate change. This guide offers:

- Suggestions about key community engagement strategies;
- Examples of how counties and cities have used these strategies to involve the public in their climate change deliberations;
- Ways to energize the community to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- Lessons learned from local agencies that used public involvement to promote community and individual action to address climate change; and
- Resources to learn more.



A bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly downtown supports sustainable communities.

AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, establishes a process for California to reduce its statewide greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Climate change, according to the scientific consensus, is caused by greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions; electricity generation and natural gas use in buildings are the second largest source. Climate change is addressed both by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and by adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Involving the Community in Designing Climate Change Policies, Programs and Action Plans



Local officials describe proposed climate action plan.

What type of community involvement strategy is best for addressing climate change? The answer depends, of course, on the individual community, the resources available, and the topics involved. Different local agencies use different strategies, depending upon what makes sense for the issue and community.

For some activities, such as informing the community about a new policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, simply providing information to the appropriate community groups may be the best approach. For other activities, such as developing a comprehensive climate action plan, using multiple approaches over time may work best. Processes that inform the public about the issue, gather stakeholder input, and engage the community in prioritizing options can collectively result in broad community support.

To learn more about the public involvement examples included in this Guide, plus stories and examples from other communities, please see www.ca-ilg.org/ClimateLeadershipStories.

Public Engagement Options

Three main types of public engagement strategies can be used to inform the public about climate change and involve them in developing climate action policies, programs and plans. Many agencies use a combination of these strategies.

Public information and outreach activities provide one-way information to the general community or targeted groups, such as explaining the science of climate change and ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Public consultation efforts typically offer opportunities for individual opinions or feedback on an upcoming issue, plan or decision, such as through a web-based survey to prioritize options included in a proposed climate action plan.

Public deliberation occurs when community members participate together in give and take discussions that provide the local agency with their collective ideas and recommendations, such as by involving the building and environmental communities when designing a green building ordinance.

Key Things to Remember When Getting Started

Be sure to ...

- ✓ Match the public engagement strategy selected to the results the agency hopes to achieve.
- ✓ Involve the community and stakeholder representatives early in the process so that diverse perspectives are considered and the public trusts the process.
- ✓ Recognize that while some public engagement strategies, such as public deliberation, may require more resources, they generally result in an outcome with broader community support.



Retrofitting buildings with dual pane windows made with low-emittance (Low-E) glass reduces energy use.



Educating people about how to design vibrant communities helps build community support.

Public Information and Outreach

Local agencies use these techniques to help residents understand the impacts of climate change and why it is important to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The techniques provide ideas, tools and encouragement that can, for example, encourage residents to change their behavior in ways that reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions.

Remember though, public information and outreach techniques are not useful to encourage two-way dialogue and resolve differences. But, they can be effective to inform the community about, for example, a draft climate action plan or challenge them to join a “carbon diet” competition.

HOW TO USE PUBLIC INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

Provide Good Information and Encourage Residents to Take Action

San Mateo County uses websites, a “green bag” lunch series, and green business certification program to educate residents, local businesses and employees about climate change and green practices. The goal is to encourage them to reduce individual and business greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the county’s “green bag” lecture series offers information about green buildings, chemicals and climate change, and food choices.

Pasadena conducts community workshops on specific sustainability topics, including green building, solar energy and water conservation. Six hundred residents attended a Green Pasadena Leadership Summit, participated in educational workshops, and provided input to the city’s proposed green action plan.

Morgan Hill established a “Carbon Diet Club” to challenge residents to “lose” 5,000 pounds of carbon dioxide in thirty days. The program engages residents in small groups over a thirty day period to support the lasting behavior changes needed to address climate change. To date, the carbon dieters have lost over 324,000 pounds of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. The long term goal is to enroll 4,400 households, helping the city achieve half of its community-wide greenhouse gas reduction goal of 25 percent from 2005 levels by 2020.

Use Agency's Website to Provide Information

Santa Clarita launched a new website in July 2009 to make it easy for residents and businesses to go green. It includes information about alternative-fuel vehicle fueling stations, recycling, energy efficiency, green building and sustainable development (www.greensantaclarita.com).

Organize a Leadership Summit

Yolo County organized a leadership summit with officials from all jurisdictions within the county, including the county, schools, the four cities, and the port. The summit provided information about climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The group continues to meet bi-monthly and serves as a clearinghouse for climate change related information in the county. As a result of the initial summit activities, the agencies ultimately signed a compact to measure greenhouse gas emissions, set a reduction target and prepare a climate action plan.

Types of Community Engagement Activities

- Inform the public about the science of climate change
- Encourage community members to take individual action to reduce their own carbon emissions
- Challenge residents to join a “carbon diet” competition
- Hold neighborhood or community meetings to gather ideas and opinions about agency programs
- Involve the community in developing the agency's climate plans and actions

Involve Diverse Groups

- Business groups
- Media
- Neighborhood leaders and civic groups
- Non-profit groups
- Immigrants
- Non-English speaking residents
- Communities of color
- Low income residents
- Youth and schools
- Clergy and congregations



Community members vote with “sticky-dots” to recommend local priorities.

Public Consultation

Local agencies use public consultation to gather input about the agency’s proposed policies or programs. Examples include webpages or public meetings that allow community members to share their views, such as on a proposed climate action plan. Generally, consultation activities provide little opportunity for back and forth discussion among participants. Public consultation and public deliberation activities frequently overlap.

HOW TO USE PUBLIC CONSULTATION TECHNIQUES

Hold Public Meetings to Gather Community Input

Pasadena organized a Green Pasadena Leadership Summit. A weekend event, it was designed to increase community awareness of the city’s green action plan, engage residents in dialogue to measure their support and get help in prioritizing seventy climate action proposals.

Fremont held a community meeting during which 150 diverse community members used a “sticky-

dot” exercise to prioritize the city’s green task force climate action plan recommendations. The city council adopted many of the recommendations, including setting a greenhouse gas reduction goal, buying alternative fuel vehicles and setting aside funds to develop a climate action plan. Attendees also signed pledges to reduce their own carbon footprints.

Consult with Stakeholders

San Mateo County is initiating a series of monthly “Solar Roundtable” discussions with interested residents to explore how the county can promote the installation of solar and other renewable energy systems on homes and businesses in the county unincorporated area.

Riverside conducted extensive community consultation, particularly with the two local bike clubs, to learn about their priorities for future bicycle travel as part of updating the Riverside Bicycle Master Plan in 2007. While two primary bike trails already exist within Riverside, through consultation, bicyclists and other residents identified a need for enhanced bicycle connectivity between job centers and shopping.

Public Deliberation

Public deliberation involves give and take discussions to develop recommendations or actions for the local agency to consider. Examples include community conversations over several months to provide input to the agency's climate action plan or the work of an ongoing task force to reach consensus recommendations on how to make the business district more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly.

HOW TO USE PUBLIC DELIBERATION STRATEGIES

Appoint a Task Force to Develop Recommendations

In **Mountain View**, over sixty-eight residents served on a task force to craft, refine, and prioritize a list of eighty-nine recommendations on sustainability topics to the city council. They deliberated in small groups over a seven month period. The city sought input from diverse groups in the community by having a translator at meetings, publicizing the meetings in multiple languages, and reaching out through faith communities and youth groups.

Fremont's "green" task force advises the city council on ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and become more sustainable. The council has adopted many of the task force's recommendations.

Manhattan Beach established a nineteen member task force of residents and city officials to develop recommendations to address a range of environmental challenges, including ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The task force included members with diverse skills and experience and held numerous meetings to gather broader community input on ways the city can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The city council adopted many of the task force's recommendations, including new green building requirements and water conservation measures.



Task force members discuss options for local policy makers to consider.

South Pasadena involved over 100 residents in creating and revising a master plan for bicycling in the city. A city natural resources and environmental commission researches and discusses environmental issues and makes recommendations to city staff and elected officials. For example, the commission proposed a green purchasing policy for city operations that the city council is considering.

Form a Subcommittee of An Existing Committee

San Carlos uses a subcommittee of its Citizens General Plan Advisory Committee to participate in the development of a climate action plan that will be integrated with the city's general plan update. Two community workshops were attended by two hundred youth and adults who helped with the planning process and contributed to the creation of a twenty-eight point climate action plan for the city.

Continue Public Deliberations Overtime

Monterey County's business, government, environmental and sustainability groups met regularly over time to collaboratively develop the county's StepUp2Green program. It offers homeowners a voluntary green building certification program to encourage home retrofitting and assure homeowners that they are making improvements that effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A Word about Public Participation and Climate Action Plans

A climate action plan is the agency’s map for implementing coordinated efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Discrete activities, such as green building ordinances, increased commercial recycling, and planning strategies to make communities more pedestrian friendly and reduce vehicle miles traveled help create sustainable communities. They also can be part of a comprehensive climate action plan.

The key to successfully developing a city or county climate action plan is community involvement. Like the benefits of involving the public when updating the general plan, a robust effort to involve all sectors of the community in creating a climate action plan will improve the final result and promote broader public support.



Charging stations at public parking lots make it easier to drive an electric vehicle.



Residential solar photovoltaic systems produce green energy.

“Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.”

— Harry Truman

Key Best Practices and Lessons Learned

- **Lead by example.** Be sure the agency has adopted the proposed activity for its own facilities and operations before asking the community to change its behavior.
- **Use positive messaging.** Promoting personal and community opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions works better than “doom and gloom” messages.
- **Promote community ownership.** Find ways to encourage community ownership of the process and resulting plans, policies or programs.
- **Select the right strategy.** Match the public participation strategy to the desired goal when evaluating options.
- **Smaller tasks are effective.** Because addressing all aspects of climate change can be overwhelming, breaking into small working groups to address specific topics makes the job more manageable.
- **Become part of the solution.** Asking people to become part of the solution is a powerful tool.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** Provide residents with information about what other communities are doing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Highlight multiple benefits.** Be sure to describe the multiple benefits of an activity or policy when explaining climate action strategies to the community.
- **Embrace the community's climate skeptics.** Most climate change skeptics support many actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions for other reasons, such as saving money and resources. Involve them in the process so they are part of the solution.
- **Promote broad consensus.** Involving residents and businesses in developing climate action activities promotes broader consensus.
- **Understand the impacts on different groups.** Understand how climate change applies to different groups and involve them in the public participation efforts.
- **Be inclusive.** Broadly publicize opportunities to get involved, using websites, ethnic media and non-profit organizations. At meetings, make translation equipment available for non-English speaking participants.
- **Make participating easy.** Find ways to make the public engagement process available to residents who otherwise might have difficulty participating.
- **Involve youth.** Engaging youth in climate change deliberations helps enrich a community's climate change conversations and educates young people about climate change and sustainability issues.



Increasing transit options helps residents leave their cars at home.

Resources to Learn More

Institute for Local Government

- The California Climate Action Network offers resources, case stories and other materials on climate change. www.ca-ilg.org/ClimateChange
- Stories about the local agencies mentioned in this report, plus other examples of local agency activities. www.ca-ilg.org/ClimateLeadershipStories
- Best practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. www.ca-ilg.org/ClimatePractices
- The Collaborative Governance Initiative supports effective and inclusive public engagement in California cities and counties, and provides information and resources to help local officials make good decisions about the design and use of these participation processes. www.ca-ilg.org/cgi
- Tips on designing community engagement strategies to match activities to goals. www.ca-ilg.org/publicforums

CoolCalifornia

- CoolCalifornia includes quick, easy-to-use and reliable tools to help Californians save money and reduce their impact on the climate. CoolCalifornia is a partnership between the California Air Resources Board, the California Public Utilities Commission, the California Energy Commission, the UC Berkeley Institute of the Environment, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and Next Ten. www.coolcalifornia.org/
- CoolCalifornia's Local Government Tool Kit provides resources and guidance to help local governments reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save money. www.coolcalifornia.org/local-government
- The California Climate Champions, sponsored by the California Air Resources Board and the British Council, is an international network of young people addressing climate change www.coolcalifornia.org/article/champion-the-cause

California Air Resources Board

- The California Air Resources Board provides information about science, regulations and technical assistance related to climate change. www.arb.ca.gov/cc/cc.htm
- Local Government Actions for Climate Change includes resources for local agencies www.arb.ca.gov/cc/localgovernment/localgovernment.htm

Other

- State of California climate portal provides links to resources and information about climate change. www.climatechange.ca.gov/
- Climate change frequently asked questions provides basic information about the science and impacts of climate change. www.climatechange.ca.gov/publications/faqs.html
- The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation's seven core principles of good public engagement. www.ncdd.org/pep
- ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability website on engaging your community. www.icleiusa.org/action-center/engaging-your-community
- Local Government Commission climate change public participation information. www.lgc.org/issues/climatechange/public_participation.htm

About the Institute for Local Government

The Institute for Local Government is the nonprofit research affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. Its mission is to promote good government at the local level.

The Institute's current program areas include:

- Climate Change
- Collaborative Governance Initiative
- Healthy Neighborhoods
- Intergovernmental Conflict Resolution
- Land Use and Environment
- Local Government 101
- Public Service Ethics

About the Air Resources Board

The California Air Resources Board is a part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, whose mission is to restore, protect and enhance the environment, to ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality. The California Air Resources Board is responsible for promoting and protecting public health, welfare and ecological resources through the effective and efficient reduction of air pollutants while recognizing and considering the effects on the economy of the state.

The major goals of the Board are to:

- Provide Safe, Clean Air to All Californians
- Protect the Public from Exposure to Toxic Air Contaminants
- Reduce California's emission of greenhouse gases
- Provide Leadership in Implementing and Enforcing Air Pollution Control Rules and Regulations
- Provide Innovative Approaches for Complying with Air Pollution Rules and Regulations
- Base Decisions on Best Possible Scientific and Economic Information
- Provide Quality Customer Service to All ARB Clients

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