



Writing A Climate Action Plan

Climate Change is impacting our towns and cities, our families and neighborhoods. Your town can be a part of the solution, and becoming sustainable and climate friendly as a community starts with making a plan. Working with your neighbors and your elected officials, you can get from where you are today to a better world.

What is a Climate Action Plan?

A Climate Action Plan (CAP) is a document that outlines a strategy to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions. By setting goals and priorities for reducing emissions, a climate action plan provides a framework for achieving those goals.

How is It different from a Sustainability Plan or a Climate Resilience Plan?

A CAP is a framework of strategies for reducing GHG emissions and mitigating climate change. A Sustainability Plan is generally broader in scope, and addresses many more environmental issues, such as those related to solid waste, water use, and land conservation. A CAP may touch on these areas as they pertain to climate change, and it often makes sense for a CAP to be part of a larger Sustainability Plan.

A climate resilience or adaptation plan differs from a CAP in that it addresses the expected impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise and extreme weather event, rather than the mitigation of climate change. Communities should ideally develop both of these types of plans, and focus on initiatives that will help to both reduce GHG emissions and also reduce the effects of climate change. An example of this is green roofs, which both reduce energy consumption and lower emissions from heat use, and also reduce stormwater runoff resulting from increased precipitation.

Why Is a Climate Action Plan important?

A Climate Action Plan is important because it helps your town prioritize the actions you need to take to reduce your climate impact, and it provides a framework and a roadmap for implementing actions and policies. Writing a plan allows everyone to be involved in prioritizing actions, and facilitates coordination among town officials and departments.

What are the steps to writing your plan?

1. Determine your leadership team, advisory council, and responsibilities.
2. Determine the scope of the plan - what areas of energy use will it address?
3. Come up with a strategy for communicating with and engaging all stakeholders and community members. (see our fact sheet on integrating equity into climate planning, here: <http://bit.ly/2h3ssRh>)

4. Complete and analyze GHG inventory (baseline emissions) if this hasn't been done.
5. Set goals and GHG emissions reductions targets.
6. Identify initiatives and implementation measures to reach emissions reduction goals. Consider using SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely) criteria for developing initiatives.
7. Quantify the potential impact of the initiatives, and prioritize initiatives.
8. Develop a plan for implementation.
9. Establish metrics for tracking and reporting progress toward goals.
10. Draft the plan, get feedback, and edit your plan.
11. Implement the plan - and don't forget to track and report your progress!

A Success Story from Brookline:

Brookline was one of the first communities in Massachusetts to address climate change. The town did an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions in 2000, and wrote the first Climate Action Plan in 2002. While the town took a number of steps to reduce emissions based on that plan, they wanted to do more.

In 2008, Climate Action Brookline presented a warrant article to town meeting, which passed overwhelmingly, to create a 15 member Climate Action Committee. The committee then did another baseline emissions inventory, and rewrote the Climate Action Plan in 2012. The goal, consistent with the MA Global Warming Solutions Act, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25% from 1990 levels by 2020, and 80% by 2050. To write the plan, a subcommittee reviewed plans from around the US and the world, and then solicited public input online and in meetings for actions to take to reduce emissions. The subcommittee then ranked over 150 possible actions, and established rating criteria such as carbon savings, cost, and feasibility.

They narrowed the list of actions to 37, and grouped them into 6 categories such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, and food and agriculture. As a result of Brookline's Climate Action Plan, the town has implemented measures such as "Green Homes Brookline," to increase the number of home energy audits and weatherizations, Solarize Mass, which increased the number of homes with solar panels, and Community Choice Aggregation, which will increase the amount of energy from renewables that the town uses for electricity.

*The steps for writing a Climate Action Plan are based on the recommendations in the "Climate Action Planning Guide," developed by the Climate Smart Communities Program of the New York Energy Research and Development Authority.

(http://www.midhudsoncsc.org/documents/CAP%20Guide_MAR%202014_FINAL.pdf)