



PLANNING FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION ON CLIMATE EQUITY



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We acknowledge that the City of Bellingham and Western Washington University are settler colonial institutions situated on land that has been cared for by the Coast Salish Peoples, particularly the Lhaq'temish (Lummi) Nation and Lhéchelesem (Nooksack) Tribe, since time immemorial. As white settlers, we recognize the position of privilege we are in, and hope that in the pursuit of equity, the Indigenous inhabitants of this land are consulted and considered throughout this and future processes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is widely understood that marginalized and vulnerable communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change itself, its causes, and our solutions. Because the mainstream environmental movement has been dominated by the most privileged individuals in our history, these negative impacts have yet to be addressed on a broad scale. Reduction of carbon emissions is the core focus in many current climate action plans, which addresses only the environmental side of sustainable change. However, they lack a careful focus on equity, so vulnerable communities are repeatedly overlooked, and continue to suffer the most.¹

The City of Bellingham (CoB) understands these disparities and intends to incorporate equity as a focus within the new version of the City's Climate Protection Action Plan (CPAP), to be released in 2023. Our project team has provided recommendations to the CoB for incorporating equity into existing and future climate policies and programs through extensive background research on four cities and the individuals that have led the way. Interviewing leaders that have created and implemented plans for climate equity provided insights beyond that which could be gathered from written plans and official documents.

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. Collect demographic data to determine which populations are being served by climate programs.
2. Create or adapt an equity tool to assess climate projects and investments.
3. Hold interdepartmental trainings on climate equity.
4. Develop partnerships with Whatcom County and Western Washington University to expand capacity for climate equity work.
5. Create a compensated task force or steering committee on climate equity, made up of leaders from marginalized and vulnerable communities.
6. Informed by community input, make a distinct section on climate equity within the 2023 CPAP Update.

By investing time and money in addressing climate equity, the CoB has the opportunity to lead in climate work that protects the land, water, and air, along with the most vulnerable in our community. Beyond protection these recommendations have the potential to create opportunities for climate leadership and increased connections within Bellingham and beyond.

¹ Schrock, G., Bassett, E., Green, J. (2015, May 27). Pursuing Equity and Justice in a Changing Climate: Assessing Equity in Local Climate and Sustainability Plans in U.S. Cities. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 35(3), 282–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X15580022>. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0739456X15580022>

INTRODUCTION

While efforts to address climate change must include ways to decrease carbon emissions, carbon represents just one element of this crisis. Climate change, like most other pressures in the world, affects vulnerable and marginalized populations first and worst. By significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preventing higher warming scenarios, vulnerable populations will be kept from additional suffering. However, it is clear that the effects of climate change are already harming these groups immensely, and the pace at which we are globally cutting emissions will not protect those already being impacted. Climate work must also aim to decrease the inequalities perpetuated by a warming atmosphere.

“Climate Equity ensures the just distribution of the benefits of climate protection and alleviation of unequal burdens created by climate change. This requires intentional policies and projects that simultaneously address the effects of and the systems that perpetuate both climate change and inequality.”

-Portland & Multnomah County Climate Action Plan (2015, p. 42)

This report focuses on the term equity, which, while sometimes used interchangeably with the word equality, has important differences. Equality can be seen as the end goal—with all people in equal situations. In a theoretical world, where all people have the same assets and challenges, that end goal could be accomplished by providing equal amounts of resources. Equity, however, recognizes that people start in very different places, and provides each person the resources required to get them to the same end

goal, even when that amount varies. The concept of targeted universalism came up in interviews and background research on the climate equity work being done in King County, Portland, Multnomah County, and Austin and provides further explanation of equity in climate policies and programs.

One key tenet of climate equity is ensuring “that all people have access and opportunity to benefit from climate solutions, while not bearing an unequal burden of the impacts of climate change.”² Without a focus on climate equity, local governments may roll out a climate program with a blanket approach based on the accessibility needs of a dominant group in the community. Structural barriers would

² Stroble, J., S. Rahman (eds.), and the Climate Equity Community Task Force. 2020. *Section II: Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities*. In: *King County 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan*. [King County Climate Action Team (eds.)]. King County, Washington. Page 181. <https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/climate/documents/scap-2020-approved/2020-scip-sustainable-and-resilient-frontline-communities-section.pdf>

keep some groups in the community from receiving equal benefits or protection from that climate program. The local government could avoid this by establishing a program grounded in targeted universalism that captures the accessibility needs of specific groups that are often underserved. By specifically reaching out to marginalized groups, the program is likely to be more accessible for all groups.³

Bellingham has been a leader in climate action amongst similar-sized cities since the early 2000s, releasing its first Climate Protection Action Plan in 2007, followed by an update in 2018, with work just now getting started on another update for 2023.⁴ Each update to the plan offers the opportunity to incorporate new information from developing climate science, technologies, and solutions. Explicitly addressing equity concerns in the Climate Action Plan update is the next step the City of Bellingham staff can take to maintain their position as a climate leader. While it is easy to discuss climate equity in broad terms, it will take significant effort to apply this concept to our community. The recommendations provided in this report should help the City of Bellingham begin that work.



Pictured above: A view of sunset over Bellingham Bay from Alabama Hill.

³ powell, j., Menendian, S., & Ake, W. (2019). Targeted universalism: Policy & Practice. Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley.

https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/targeted_universalism_primer.pdf?file=1&force=1

⁴ City of Bellingham (n.d.). Climate Protection Action Plan. <https://cob.org/services/environment/climate/program>

METHODOLOGY

The information gathered for our recommendations relies on public climate and equity action plans (e.g. Seattle’s Equity and Environment Agenda), additional city documents (e.g. committee pages), and interviews. The interview portion of our data collection involved selecting organizations, cities, and individual people to contact. We have gathered both city and community perspectives for each city of interest. Such cities were chosen based on referrals from both our project sponsor and interviewees, as well as their potential adaptability to Bellingham. Seattle and Portland, for example, were both cities that had developed equity in climate plans and were culturally, politically, and ecologically similar to Bellingham—all of which are important determinants of climate policies. In the cases that aren’t local, such as Austin, Texas, they were chosen due to the explicit nature of equity in their climate plans and implementation processes.

For city perspective interviews, our questions related to enacted plans. We questioned how the individual or group managed to propose and implement policies, what challenges they faced, and what they would change in hindsight. The community perspective interviews were geared more towards individuals’ opinions on the incorporation of equity into the content and creation of the city’s climate plans and whether equity is being achieved in plan outcomes. These interviews shaped the data collected from the official city documents, and together they formed the basis of our recommendations.

Our attempts at interviews at the community level, both in Bellingham and in our model municipalities, were unfortunately complicated by scheduling. While this was a challenge, it further emphasizes that engaging and partnering with the community requires time and trust. Such a process cannot be rushed or result-oriented.

Our interviews were essential to determining the methods and challenges beyond what was published by the city or seen fully by the external community. This, in addition to interviews with community members, gives us a more detailed view of each city’s climate equity plan. Interviews allow us to build trust and be transparent about our intentions so that we can elicit more effective strategies and challenges of implementing equity in climate planning and policy. To make sure we fulfilled such hopes in these interviews, we created interview guidelines, sample base questions, and made sure to specify our interview questions according to the individual we were interviewing (Appendix 1).

RESULTS & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following results are organized by the municipalities chosen as models for climate equity.

King County, Washington

King County began its climate equity work with the creation of their Climate Equity Community Task Force (CECTF) in the spring of 2019. They created a team of 22 leaders representing BIPOC and other frontline communities, which met approximately bimonthly over the course of two years, for about two or three hours each meeting.⁵ The leaders were compensated at \$50 an hour, which was determined to be the going rate at that time.⁶ Leaders pushing for equity in the workplace have often been expected to perform that labor for free.⁷ When the leaders of this work are themselves BIPOC or of other marginalized identities, that additional burden perpetuates inequity, signaling that the organization they work under either does not understand or is not seriously committed to creating equitable spaces. It was critical to compensate the CECTF members for their work to ensure that an initiative striving toward equity was not itself reproducing the exact disparities in question.

The recommendations created by the CECTF can be seen within the Sustainable and Resilient Frontline Communities (SRFC) section of King County's 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP). The CECTF created six strategies to work across eight focus areas that resulted in 31 specific equity-focused climate actions. The eight focus areas are as follows: Community Leadership & Community-Driven Policy-Making, Community Capacity Development, Equitable Green Jobs & Pathways, Community Health & Emergency Preparedness, Food Systems & Food Security, Housing Security & Anti-Displacement, Energy Justice & Utilities, Transportation Access & Equity.⁸ These categories were developed to encapsulate the biggest climate equity concerns held by frontline communities in King County, and the recommended actions are

⁵ J. Stroble, personal communication, October 25, 2021

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Carrion, S. (2021, July 23). *Pay BIPOC Educators for Their DEI Labor*. Learning for Justice. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/pay-bipoc-educators-for-their-dei-labor>

⁸ Stroble, J., S. Rahman (eds.), and the Climate Equity Community Task Force. 2020. *Section II: Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities*. In: *King County 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan*. [King County Climate Action Team (eds.)]. King County, Washington. Page 181.

<https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/climate/documents/scap-2020-approved/2020-scap-sustainable-and-resilient-frontline-communities-section.pdf>

designed to address them. The SCAP is composed of three main sections: Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions, SRFC, and Preparing for Climate Change.⁹ In other terms, it was organized by mitigation, adaptation, and equity.

Aspects of each section overlap and reference one another. It is by design that both the mitigation and adaptation sections are put through an equity lens, complemented by the equity section. Highlighting the overlaps between sections helps to set up the cross-functional partnerships required to reduce emissions, prepare the community for climate change, and do so in an equitable way. In addition, intentional overlap allows the holistic goals and messages of the SCAP to be seen even by those who read only some sections out of the 334-page report.¹⁰ The Sustainable and Resilient Frontline Communities section gives community members ownership over the report, as it came directly from those most affected by climate change. This is a vast improvement from something created solely by the city and simply run past the community for approval.¹¹ Including the suggestions and ideas of the CECTF in the Strategic Climate Action Plan ensures approval by King County Council, as opposed to a separate advisory document. Council-approved documents hold greater weight, as they require employees to report on their progress periodically. Putting equity measures, goals, and strategies within a council-approved document is a built-in accountability mechanism, and should inspire greater trust within the community that their concerns will be addressed.



Pictured beside: A view of Bellevue looking east towards the Cascades.

⁹ King County Climate Action Team (eds.). 2020. *King County 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan*. King County, Washington.
<https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/climate/documents/scap-2020-approved/2020-king-county-strategic-climate-action-plan.pdf>

¹⁰ V. Raya, personal communication, November 4, 2021

¹¹ J. Stroble, personal communication, October 25, 2021

Seattle, Washington

The City of Seattle launched its Equity and Environment Initiative in 2015, resulting in the Equity and Environment Agenda, the Environmental Justice (EJ) Committee, and the Environmental Justice Fund.¹² The Equity and Environment Agenda was created in partnership with the City of Seattle and the Community Partners Steering Committee (CPSC). The CPSC was composed of individuals with expertise in environmental justice or historically underrepresented groups. They engaged with the community to determine broad goals, concerns, and actions around environmental equity.

The Equity and Environment Agenda lists the eight following Community Identified Actions to support the Agenda's implementation:¹³

1. Create an Environmental Justice Screen to assess cumulative effects of multiple environmental hazards, and the ways racial discrimination, economic disparities, and other social factors affect exposure.
2. Collect demographic data to determine who is currently being served by city environmental programs, or support community organizations to do the same.
3. Target investments towards focus populations and areas as defined in the Equity and Environment Agenda, with special attention paid to "avoiding displacement and alleviating poverty."¹⁴
4. Create an environmental justice committee to increase representation of groups most affected by climate change, in climate policy.
5. Create an Environmental Justice Policy to act as a framework for working on EJ issues and with affected populations.
6. Create opportunities for leadership in environmental work for Communities of Color.
7. Utilize partnerships to create an environmental justice fund to support work led by marginalized groups.

¹² Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment (n.d.) *Equity and Environment Initiative*. City of Seattle. <https://www.seattle.gov/environment/equity-and-environment/equity-and-environment-initiative>

¹³ Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment. (2016). *Equity and Environment Agenda*. City of Seattle. <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OSE/Equity/SeattleEEAgenda.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid. Page 37

8. Create a framework the city and other community organizations can use to center voices of Communities of Color, and community-based policies and priorities

These actions have not all been accomplished in Seattle and do not perfectly apply to Bellingham. However, they have been developed by leaders in marginalized communities in Western Washington and can provide insight into the climate equity priorities of those groups.



Pictured above: View of Mt. Rainier and Seattle skyline during sunrise.

Portland, Oregon

The City of Portland (CoP) created the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) after a citizen ballot measure passed in November 2018. The PCEF is a municipal grant program that distributes funding for climate action that advances racial and social justice through a nine-member Grant Committee. In an effort to increase the equity lens and implementation in their work, the committee is required to reflect the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of Portland in its membership. This Grant Committee then uses the additional revenue from the Clean Energy Fund to help priority populations.¹⁵

The PCEF focuses on two “priority populations”. The first is priority populations for clean energy, green infrastructure, and regenerative agriculture projects; this would include low-income populations and people of color. The second is priority populations for workforce and contractor development projects, which might include women, people with disabilities, people of color, and people who are chronically underemployed. The City of Portland pays for these programs partially through a Clean Energy Surcharge, which is a surcharge on large retailers and is not a sales tax imposed on customers or consumers. They currently estimate annual tax receipts to be ranging from \$44 million to \$61 million.¹⁶

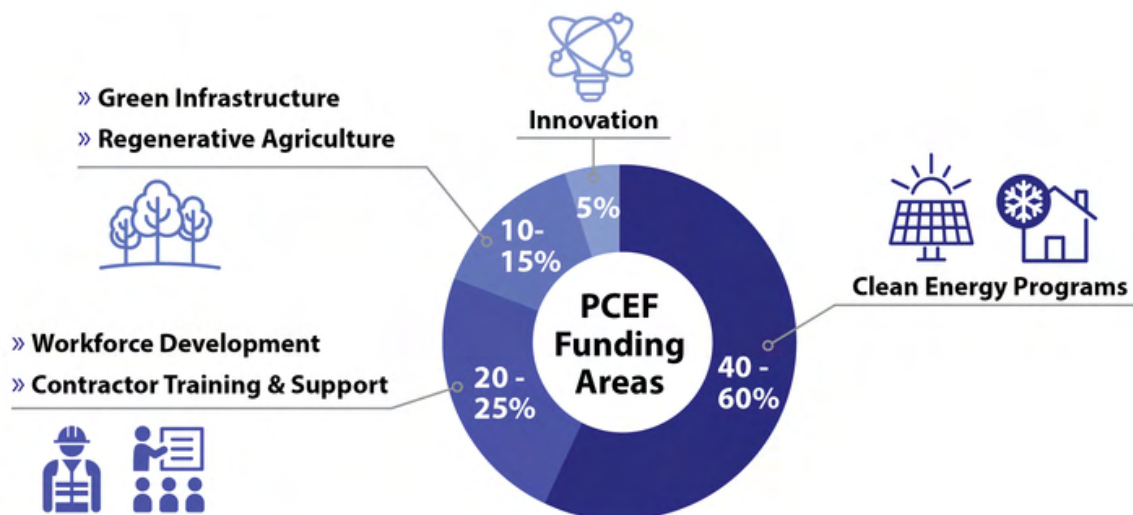


Figure 1: Portland Climate Equity Fund Funding Areas¹⁷

¹⁵ Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. *About PCEF*. City of Portland. <https://www.portland.gov/bps/cleanenergy/about#toc-pcef-priority-populations>

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

The City of Portland and Multnomah County came out with a joint Climate Action Plan (CAP) in 2015 with a section explaining climate equity issues on a local scale, and how they incorporated equity considerations into the plan as a whole. For input from diverse community interests, the CAP had a Steering Committee of over 20 members from schools, businesses, nonprofits, and the City's Planning and Sustainability Commission and County's Advisory Committee on Sustainability and Innovation.¹⁸ The City and County also created an Equity Working Group (EWG) during the development of the CAP to work equity into the plan in a meaningful way. Through an application process, six community organizations were selected to make up the core of the EWG. Members of the Steering Committee were invited to participate, and on the government side, "staff from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and Multnomah County Health Department also joined the Equity Working Group."¹⁹

The Equity Working Group met between May and October of 2013, with their first meeting spent establishing relationships and a shared understanding of climate change and the EWG's role. In the second meeting, the participants worked to establish a shared definition of equity with the help of Multnomah County's Equity and Empowerment Lens and 5P process.²⁰ Portland received a grant in 2013 to help fund the integration of equity and community engagement into their CAP update. \$5000 went to an equity scan of their 2009 CAP (performed by PSU professors), \$5000 to compensate an equity intern, and \$20,000 to community engagement. Multnomah County contributed an extra \$4000 to the community engagement component so that each of the six community organizations selected for the EWG could apply for \$4000 to support their staff's time and effort.²¹

Portland and Multnomah County shared a critical lesson they learned about meaningful community engagement within their EWG process. Originally, government staff planned to present the draft of each CAP chapter to the community organizations, along with a list of the planned actions in each chapter. The organizations were to come back a week later having identified the "equity implications" of each action.²² A month in, through an ongoing feedback process, the community organizations voiced that they "found this approach to be constraining the creativity of the group and creating an imbalanced power dynamic between

¹⁸ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2015). *Climate Action Plan*.

https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-2015_june30-2015_web_0.pdf

¹⁹ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. Page 10.

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

²⁰ Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity. (n.d.) Equity and Empowerment Lens. Multnomah County.

<https://www.multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens>

²¹ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. Page 10.

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

²² Ibid. Page 10

chapter authors (staff) and grantee organizations (community).”²³ The process was then altered; when each chapter topic was introduced, the EWG members could share the issues in their communities around that specific topic before asking follow-up questions and assessing individual actions. This feedback created a list of nine Equity Considerations that city staff used to revise actions before bringing them back to the EWG for approval. The Climate Action Through Equity case study, with lead authors from Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, concluded that the change in process “was sizable and required more time for a project that was already behind schedule. But the time and effort was worth it as it ultimately ensured the process was both accessible and meaningful for all participants.”²⁴



Pictured above: View of Portland city lights and Mt. Hood

²³ Ibid. Page 11

²⁴ Ibid. Page 11

Austin, Texas

Austin's Office of Sustainability and City Council finalized the first iteration of their Climate Equity Plan in September of 2021. The central goal of this plan is to equitably meet net-zero greenhouse gas emissions throughout the community by 2040. They emphasize how the effects of climate change are not felt equally among different communities, as the burden falls more heavily on low-income populations and people of color. Austin has taken a particular focus on racial equity, and prioritized perspectives from people of color in forming the plan. With the help of their steering committee and Community Climate Ambassadors, they set goals across five focus areas: "Sustainable Buildings, Transportation and Land Use, Transportation Electrification, Food and Product Consumption, and Natural Systems."²⁵

This ambassador program is a unique solution for community outreach. Initially launched in 2019, this group was made up of twelve community members of color who were recruited based on their ability to apply an equity lens to climate work through their historical or lived experience. They were selected through an application process and were financially compensated for their time and efforts. The primary role of the ambassadors was to converse with their networks about climate issues in order to inform further decisions around the formation of the Climate Equity Plan.²⁶

The development of these goals and programs was a result of the City's Equity Office, which was formed in 2016 as a way to evaluate and lead initiatives surrounding equity throughout the city government and the community.²⁷ The Climate Equity Plan is a culmination of discussions around the intersections between climate change and socioeconomic inequalities. A central aspect of this plan is their Equity Tool. This is a criterion for new and existing legislation to assess whether it builds equity, remains neutral, or perpetuates inequality. The tool utilizes seven themes: health, affordability, just transition, accessibility, community capacity, accountability, and cultural preservation. Any new action for climate must be scored based on these themes, having a positive (+), negative (-), or neutral (0) impact; if there are any negative scores, they return to the revision process. The goal of this process is to ask more important questions and hold legislation to a higher and more consistent standard.²⁸

²⁵ Austin Office of Sustainability. (2021). *Climate Equity Plan*. City of Austin. Page 6. https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/Climate%20Equity%20Plan/Climate%20Plan%20Full%20Document_FINAL.pdf

²⁶ Austin Office of Sustainability (n.d.) *Community Climate Ambassadors*. City of Austin. <https://austintexas.gov/page/community-climate-ambassadors>

²⁷ Austin Equity Office. (n.d.) Equity Office. City of Austin. <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/equity-office>

²⁸ Austin Office of Sustainability (2020, March 24). Equity Tool Process. [Google Slides] Google Slides. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1izCJfBRlx-LF7pYWVlcOitNkBWAYl6qdgisJu2h8uA/edit#slide=id.g80f9447277_0_0



Pictured above: View of Austin skyline and city lights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Climate work should go beyond reduced emissions and green infrastructure and expand towards community-centered processes and solutions. This report envisions a Bellingham that deconstructs the inequitable systems that climate change exacerbates and perpetuates in exchange for climate equity. The following recommendations range from simply expanding the current research being done by the City of Bellingham to truly inclusive opportunities for community ownership, all of which are a step toward a more stable and equitable future.

Data & Analysis

Recommendation 1: Collect demographic data to create statistics on which population are being served by the community and city's climate programs.

To best ensure that marginalized communities are not underserved by climate solutions implemented by the City of Bellingham and other community organizations, the city must know the demographic information of the people being served. While the City of Bellingham does not directly oversee programs that offer subsidized weatherization, electrification, or solar panel installation services, other nonprofits in the community that the city supports, do.

Opportunity Council and Sustainable Connections' Community Energy Challenge is one such program that helps make such sustainability upgrades more accessible to the community. The city recognizes these types of programs as big steps toward the city's climate goals, as seen with the Community Energy Challenge being listed as a community solution in the city's current Climate Protection Action Plan. If the city creates and shares similar goals around climate equity, they can encourage and provide guidance for partner organizations on how to help further those goals. The city can establish the demographic information for equity assessments of climate programs. Such information could include data such as race, income, language spoken, disability status, neighborhood lived in, and other relevant characteristics. The CoB could also provide guidance on how to anonymize and aggregate this data to protect privacy.

If community partners are able to collect this data and willing to share it with the city, both parties will be able to see if there are gaps in the communities being served and can then formulate more targeted strategies to reach those communities. The city can report the findings of these demographic studies in

subsequent climate action plan updates, or in periodic updates to the council to measure progress on climate equity.

Creating a foundation for collecting climate program equity coverage and effectiveness data will prove useful in the future when the city expands its climate programs. While the city government's current climate programs are limited to the ALL IN for Climate Action Week campaign, it is very possible that more programs could emerge in the near future. Mayor Fleetwood has initiated work to create a tax that would fund citywide climate programs for projects like electrification.²⁹ Should this tax get passed, whether the City assumes day-to-day responsibility for these programs or gives out grants to other organizations, it would have the opportunity to ensure the funded programs are serving the community equitably.

This recommendation comes directly from the City of Seattle's Equity & Environment Agenda. Eight actions were identified by the community to support the goals in the agenda. These actions were designed for the City to "lead by example and help create best practices for other partners to follow."³⁰ The second action is as follows:

"Demographic Data Collection: Accelerate efforts to collect demographic data and evaluate programs, in order to better understand who is currently benefiting from environmental programs. Programs should collect disaggregated racial data when possible or analyze based on zip codes or program type to understand if 'city-wide' programs are truly accessible or appropriate for all residents of the city."

- City of Seattle's Equity and Environment Agenda (2016, p. 36)

The City can partner with these local organizations to further specify their data collection without increasing the fiscal and labor burden beyond what the City deems plausible at its current capability.

²⁹ Mittendorf, R. (2021, November 10). Bellingham mayor urges tax to fund climate programs. Bellingham Herald. <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/politics-government/article255658271.html>

³⁰ Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment. (2016). *Equity and Environment Agenda*. City of Seattle. Page 35. <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OSE/Equity/SeattleEEAgenda.pdf>

Recommendation 2: Create or Adapt an Equity Tool to Assess Climate Projects and Investments.

In order to incorporate equity into climate policy, there must be consistent and intentional work over a long period of growth and change. One-time efforts are not enough. Instead, we recommend that the City of Bellingham develop or adapt their own equity tool that can be used to assess new and existing climate projects and investments.

Austin created an equity tool system to determine whether each proposed climate action has a positive, negative, or neutral impact on marginalized populations. Their process includes seven different categories through which each aspect of their Climate Equity Plan is put.

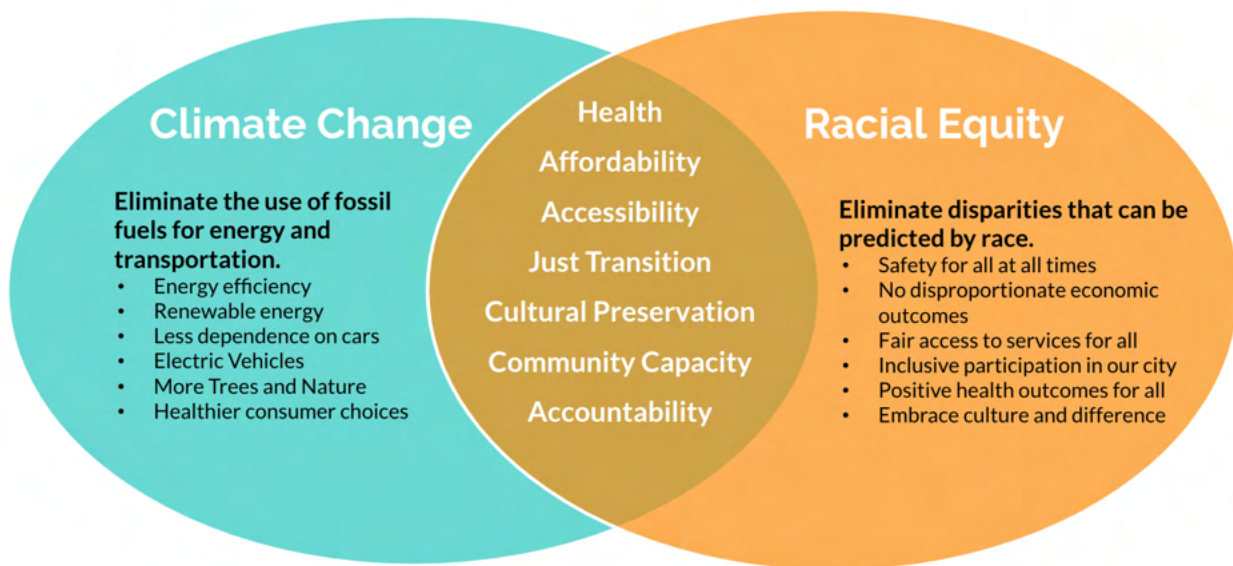


Figure 2: Categories used in Austin’s Equity Tool³¹

If there is a negative impact in any of these seven categories, the action returns to the revision stage; therefore, no climate action is passed that negatively impacts vulnerable communities.

³¹ Austin Office of Sustainability (2020, March 24). Equity Tool Process. [Google Slides] Google Slides. Slide 3. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1izCIJfBRlx-LF7pYWVlcOitNkBWAYl6qdgisJu2h8uA/edit#slide=id.g80f9447277_0_0

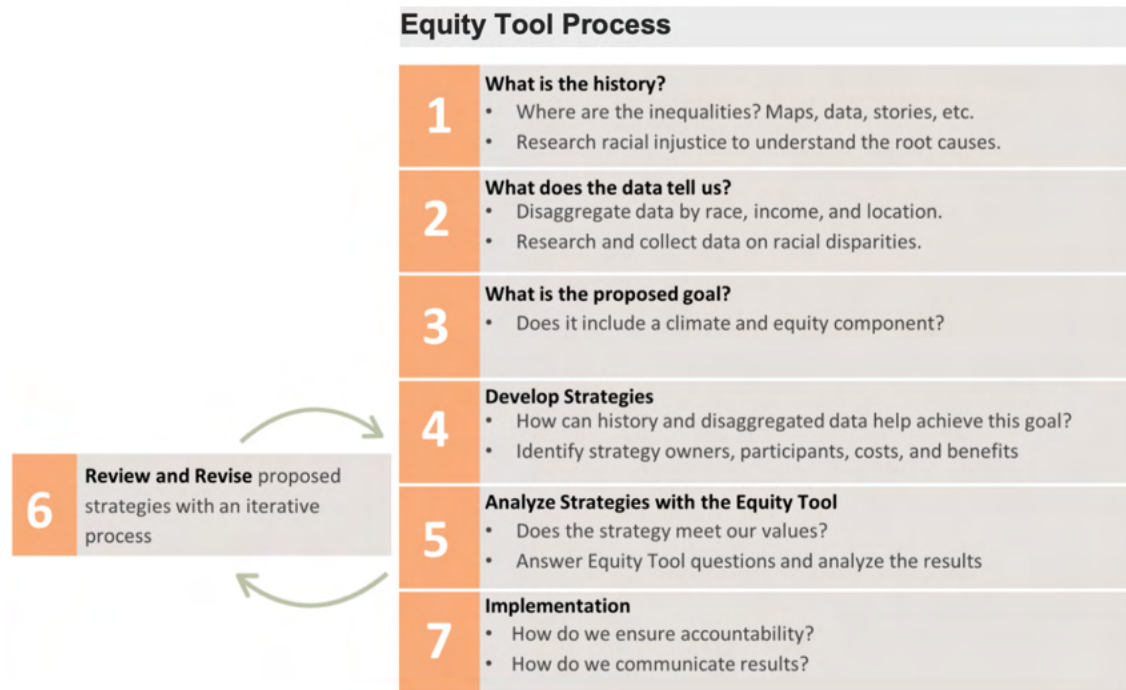


Figure 3: Austin's Equity Tool process³²

Before taking larger steps toward climate equity, the City of Bellingham must take the time to think about the climate crisis as a result of colonialism, capitalism, and systemic racism. According to Phoebe Romero, who was central in organizing Austin's plan, the first step was to analyze how departments are currently evaluating equity. From there, they were able to determine areas of possible growth. Bellingham has varied areas for improvement, including a heavier emphasis on economic inequality and housing, taking into consideration the percent of Bellingham residents who are renters, and the size of the city's houseless population. However, Austin's model is an incredibly useful starting point in developing an Equity Tool for Bellingham.

In Portland, the Equity Working Group community organizations provided feedback on each draft chapter of their 2015 Climate Action Plan. That feedback was distilled into nine Equity Considerations that city staff then used as an equity lens to revise the chapter actions. The revisions were brought back to the EWG to determine if their concerns were addressed.

³² Austin Office of Sustainability. (2021). *Climate Equity Plan*. City of Austin. Page 24. https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/Climate%20Equity%20Plan/Climate%20Plan%20Full%20Document__FINAL.pdf

EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Disproportionate impacts

Does the proposed action generate burdens (including costs), either directly or indirectly, to communities of color or low-income populations? If yes, are there opportunities to mitigate these impacts?

2. Shared benefits

Can the benefits of the proposed action be targeted in progressive ways to reduce historical or current disparities?

3. Accessibility

Are the benefits of the proposed action broadly accessible to households and businesses throughout the community — particularly communities of color, low-income populations, and minority, women and emerging small businesses?

4. Engagement

Does the proposed action engage and empower communities of color and low-income populations in a meaningful, authentic and culturally appropriate manner?

5. Capacity building

Does the proposed action help build community capacity through funding, an expanded knowledge base or other resources?

6. Alignment and partnership

Does the proposed action align with and support existing communities of color and low-income population priorities, creating an opportunity to leverage resources and build collaborative partnerships?

7. Relationship building

Does the proposed action help foster the building of effective, long-term relationships and trust between diverse communities and local government?

8. Economic opportunity and staff diversity

Does the proposed action support communities of color and low-income populations through workforce development, contracting opportunities or the increased diversity of city and county staff?

9. Accountability

Does the proposed action have appropriate accountability mechanisms to ensure that communities of color, low-income populations, or other vulnerable communities will equitably benefit and not be disproportionately harmed?

Figure 4: Portland Equity Working Group's Equity Considerations³³

An equity tool like the ones used in Austin or Portland could be useful beyond climate work as well. Putting all projects and legislation through an equity filter has immense potential for positive impact on frontline communities in Bellingham.

³³ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. Page 12.

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

Build Capacity for Equity

Recommendation 3: Hold interdepartmental equity trainings.

Incorporating equity into climate work requires a shared foundation of what encompasses climate equity and its causal relationship. These proposed trainings would ideally be held with a climate equity expert from another city to discuss the various methods, challenges, and benefits to an equity lens (See Climate Equity Experts in Appendix 2). Their purpose would be to address the disproportionate effects of the climate crisis on disadvantaged and marginalized communities, who are often decentered and neglected in climate work.

Jamie Stroble worked as the Climate Engagement Specialist for King County during the creation of their 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan. In our interview, she described how the lack of a shared understanding of the overlaps between climate and inequality often results in further marginalization of vulnerable communities and their specific relationship with the climate crisis.

In the City of Austin, they held equity trainings for their climate staff, hiring a consultant with background experience in Environmental Justice, Indigenous Climate Practices, and organizing with the Sierra Club. These trainings had three goals:³⁴

1. To get people to understand the history of injustice in Austin,
2. To define and understand together what “equity” meant to them and within their climate plan, and
3. To understand the role of white supremacy in their organizational culture and how that affects their climate work.

These trainings created not only a shared vision between all relevant staff but also pushed implementation of equity within climate.

For Bellingham, these trainings should be done with everyone involved in climate work at the city. The Prep for Mayor’s Climate Team is an ideal group to engage in this training, as it is made up of a variety of staff with different focuses, that collectively engage in climate work. Training during these meetings offers an opportunity to develop shared understandings of climate equity among staff members that wouldn’t otherwise have the time to focus on the subject themselves. An open invitation could also be extended to other city staff and city council members.

³⁴ P. Romero, personal communication, October 29, 2021

Recommendation 4: Develop partnerships with Whatcom County and Western Washington University on climate equity.

While it would be most beneficial for the City of Bellingham to hire a staff member to focus solely on Climate Equity and Community Engagement, we understand that they lack the capacity to do so in the near future. This recommendation is designed to increase the city's capacity for equity work through collaboration with Whatcom County and potentially Western Washington University.

One example of this type of collaboration can be seen in the 2015 joint Climate Action Plan and Equity Working Group created by Multnomah County and the City of Portland. The city and county shared financial resources, staff members, and time on this project. Portland is the largest city within the county, and the seat of the county, so it was reasonable to create one CAP rather than two. Similarly, Bellingham is the largest city and seat of Whatcom County, so joining forces on climate work is not unreasonable. This team-up also included University participation, with a Portland State University professor and a PhD candidate consulted for an analysis of equity in the previous iteration of their CAP.³⁵

Another example of multi-jurisdictional collaboration is the King County Cities Climate Collaboration, or K4C. K4C now has 18 members that include most of the major cities within King County, and collectively represent 80% of the County's population. To join, members sign an Interlocal agreement, pay modest dues based on their population size, commit staff resources to attending meetings, and have the option to sign the Joint Climate Action Commitments.³⁶ They convene quarterly with mayors, legislators, and staff present to share resources around climate issues. Recently, they discussed updating comprehensive plans to include climate issues, including climate equity.³⁷

These types of arrangements can have carrying levels of resource commitments, and can expand the City of Bellingham's ability to do climate equity work, provide the city with resources it would not otherwise have, and help to coordinate some of the many parallel efforts towards climate justice currently occurring in the community.

³⁵ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. Page 9.

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

³⁶ King County. (2021, July 2). King County - Cities Climate Collaboration. King County.

<https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/climate/actions-strategies/partnerships-collaborations/k4c.aspx>

³⁷ V. Raya, personal communication, November 4, 2021

Community Engagement

Recommendation 5: Create a Task Force or Steering Committee on Climate Equity, made up of leaders from marginalized and vulnerable communities.

A group of leaders from communities most vulnerable to climate change and least represented in the city, facilitated by city staff members, can help to identify the most pressing concerns around climate and equity held by these communities in Bellingham. This space would be used to create goals, strategies, and policies to help address inequity through the city’s climate work. Throughout this process, it is vital that these leaders are compensated for their work at the going rate.

We used the Spectrum of Community Engagement throughout this project as a gauge of effort directed back toward the community. This was also mentioned by multiple interviewees from our different model municipalities.

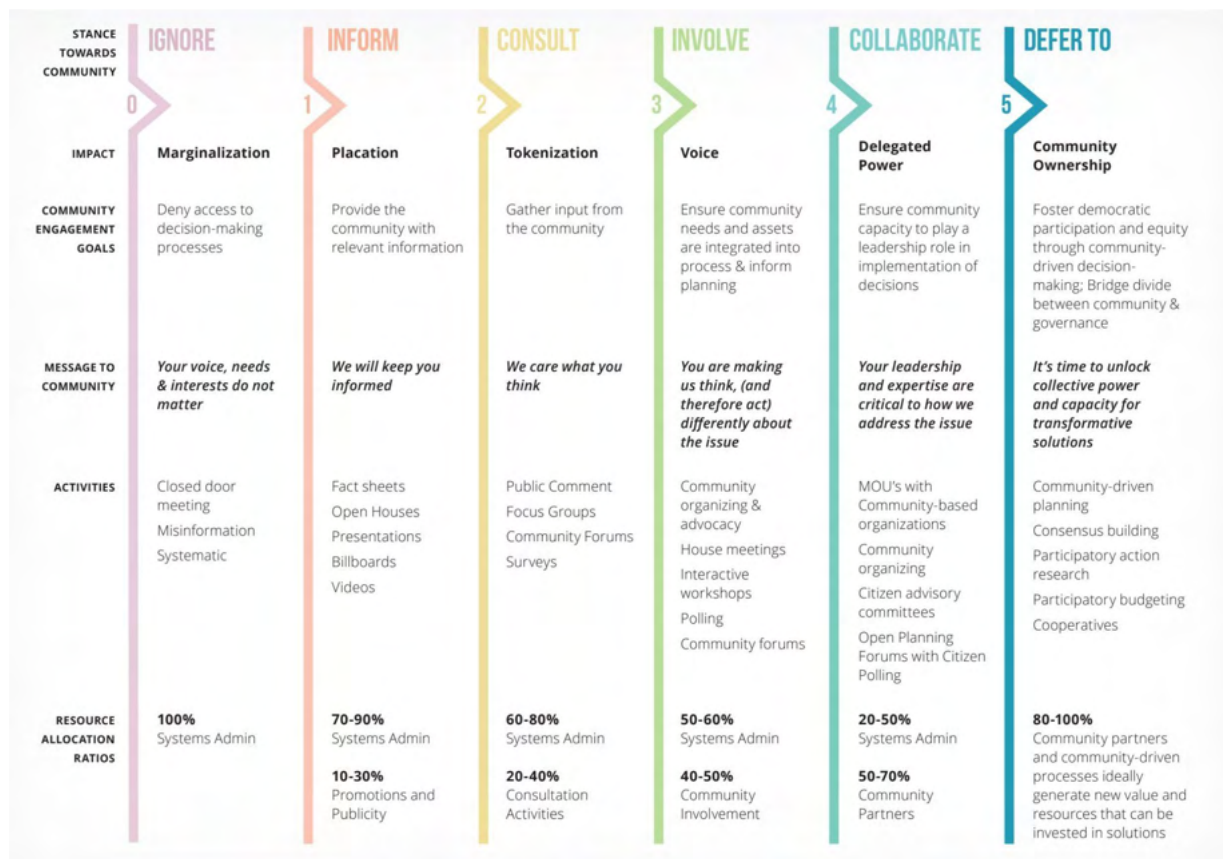


Figure 5: Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership³⁸

³⁸ Gonzalez, R. (2020, August 4). *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. Facilitating Power. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/facilitatingpower/pages/53/attachments/original/1596746165/CE2O_SPECTRUM_2020.pdf?1596746165

There are ample examples from other cities that have created various forms of task forces, steering committees, and community involvement programs. There are steps to incorporating community voices, each with a different level of temporal and financial commitment. The City of Austin began this process with a series of climate justice workshops, in which a facilitator led discussions of visions for the future. This kind of open conversation can help to build a culture of empathy and radical care. These workshops led to the formation of a steering committee consisting of community members, which provided city staff with guidance to “[ensure] the plan and process-centered equity, garnered political support, and was well-positioned for successful implementation and ongoing accountability.”³⁹

Beyond equity workshops and steering committees, the City of Austin implemented their Community Climate Ambassadors Program, in which a group of twelve financially compensated community leaders communicated with their networks in order to determine issues most important to the vulnerable communities within the city. This system utilizes the existing connections within and between marginalized groups and pays people for operating within them.

In Seattle, “Mayor Ed Murray appointed sixteen leaders to serve on the first-of-its-kind Community Partners Steering Committee (CPSC) to ensure that those most affected by environmental inequities would lead in creating the Agenda” for the Equity and Environment Initiative.⁴⁰ The CPSC members led conversations with community members, city staff, elected officials, and other foundations and NGOs.

Portland and Multnomah County created an “Equity Working Group made up of representatives from six community-based organizations representing the interests of low-income populations and communities of color. The insights and local knowledge that these groups provided was invaluable.”⁴¹ Using money from a grant the City of Portland received, participating organizations were compensated with sub-grants of \$4000 for their time on the EWG.

In King County, Jamie Stroble was hired as a Community Engagement Specialist and created the Climate Equity Community Task Force (CECTF). The community organization representatives on the CECTF were paid \$50 an hour for their work, which was determined to be the going rate at the time. Jamie Stroble indicated that the going rate for this kind of work is trending upwards in some places, so

³⁹ Austin Office of Sustainability. (2021). *Climate Equity Plan*. City of Austin. Page 118. https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/Climate%20Equity%20Plan/Climate%20Plan%20Full%20Document__FINAL.pdf

⁴⁰ Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment. (2016). *Equity and Environment Agenda*. City of Seattle. Page 8. <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OSE/Equity/SeattleEEAgenda.pdf>

⁴¹ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). *Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan*. Page 6. <https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

Bellingham will need to assess what that is whenever they initiate compensated community work.⁴² The CECTF created the Sustainable and Resilient Frontline Communities (SRFC) section of King County’s SCAP, with Jamie Stroble as lead author.

	Austin, TX	Portland, OR	King County, WA
Names Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Group & Steering Committee • Community Climate Ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity Working Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Equity Community Task Force
Length of Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassadors: January-May 2020 	2013: Grant period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June: 2 meetings • July-Oct weekly meetings 2014: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple voluntary meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About once a month for 2-3 hours • Originally planned for Spring 2019-June 2020, but extended because of COVID to roughly 2 years
Number of Organizations or People Involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 individuals; 15 received stipends for child care, gas money, etc • 12 individual Climate Ambassadors & two organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 selected community organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 community leaders
Pay Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$500 stipends for committee participants • \$1500 for Ambassadors & \$3000 for organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$4000 sub-grant per organization for engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$50/hour

Bellingham is a much smaller municipality than the other examples we have provided, and we acknowledge that resources and funding will be more limited. There are many different potential levels of community engagement and commitments of time and money. What is clear from these example municipalities is that some meaningful effort at community involvement is a necessary component of climate equity work. It weaves equity into the process, builds trust between communities and government, and creates more informed and actionable policy.

⁴² J. Stroble, personal communication, October 25, 2021

Recommendation 6: Informed by community input, make a distinct section on Climate Equity within the 2023 CAP Update, or in a separate plan that is also approved by council.

While an equity lens should be applied to climate policies and programs as a whole, a separate section within the CAP or other council-approved document could better ensure that city efforts serve marginalized communities. Council-approved documents hold more power, and have a built-in mechanism for accountability, through the periodic updates that city staff provide to council.

Providing a distinct section on climate equity accomplishes two things. First, it provides a space for the city to clearly establish and explain how climate inequity presents in Bellingham, and the city's main goals and strategies for addressing it. This can help organize and guide further climate equity work the city does, and grounds that work within the direction of a Council-approved document. Secondly, if community input is incorporated into the writing of the CAP, that work can be highlighted within this section to provide community members a sense of ownership over the plan.⁴³ This can continue to build the capacity for trust between community and government, which will be necessary in order to respond to climate change collectively, and secure equitable outcomes for everyone.

In the SRFC section of King County's SCAP, as explained in the Background section, equity is woven throughout the plan as a whole, but intentionally has its own section as well.⁴⁴ Portland's 2015 CAP has a chapter on "A Prosperous, Healthy and Equitable Community", "Community Engagement, Outreach and Education", and "Climate Action Through Equity,"⁴⁵ which they expanded on in a 20-page case study of the same name in 2016.⁴⁶

⁴³ J. Stroble, personal communication, October 25, 2021

⁴⁴ King County Climate Action Team (eds.). 2020. King County 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan. King County, Washington.
<https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/climate/documents/scap-2020-approved/2020-king-county-strategic-climate-action-plan.pdf>

⁴⁵ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2015). *Climate Action Plan*.
https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-2015_june30-2015_web_0.pdf

⁴⁶ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. Page 10.
<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

BUDGET

It is clear that budget is one of the top constraints for accomplishing climate equity work at the City of Bellingham. We have collected some financing options through our background research and interviews.

In interviews with Jamie Stroble⁴⁷ and Vicky Raya,⁴⁸ the interviewees explained how King County finances its 3 full-time climate employees. Essentially, King County levies a carbon tax across each department, depending on that department's carbon footprint. The resulting revenue funds 3 full-time climate positions, which work with all the departments.

In an interview with Phoebe Romero from Austin, Texas, she explained that in addition to normal departmental funding, the city of Austin has a for-profit utility that helps to fund their Office of Sustainability.⁴⁹

Much of Portland and Multnomah County's climate equity work was funded through grants. Portland "...received a grant from the Bullitt Foundation and Partners for Places, a partnership between the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, to support community engagement and equity integration into the 2015 Climate Action Plan."⁵⁰

Seattle's Environmental Justice Fund and Portland's Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund both offer great examples of how to ensure that climate investments are made in a way that advances equity. Bellingham's own Mayor Fleetwood has requested funding from the City Council to create a ballot measure for a tax that would fund a Climate Action Fund.⁵¹ This fund could greatly advance equity or widen the gap in climate action depending on how it's implemented.

⁴⁷ J. Stroble, personal communication, October 25, 2021

⁴⁸ V. Raya, personal communication, November 4, 2021

⁴⁹ P. Romero, personal communication, October 29, 2021

⁵⁰ City of Portland & Multnomah County. (2016, July 12). Climate Action Through Equity: The integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. Page 10.

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/cap-equity-case-study-web29jul.pdf>

⁵¹ Mittendorf, R. (2021, November 10). Bellingham mayor urges tax to fund climate programs. Bellingham Herald. <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/politics-government/article255658271.html>

MONITORING & EVALUATIONS

Going forward, there are two potential next steps for the City of Bellingham in light of this project team's recommendations. The first is to determine the main sections of the 2023 Climate Protection Action Plan Update where equity fits in.

Recommendation 6 can be planned out, as can planning for some initial steps toward community engagement. If a proposal request for the writing of the updated report has not yet been finalized, then these aspects should be worked into that RFP.

Second, an internal project champion team should be developed at the City of Bellingham. This project team can share the findings of this report in a presentation format to members of the Prep for Mayor's Climate Team, other interested city staff, and council members. This is the same audience as suggested in Recommendation 3 for further climate equity trainings.

CONCLUSION

Climate work has historically been driven by the most privileged members of society, leaving behind those most vulnerable to the impacts of a warming atmosphere. These efforts have mainly centered on the reduction of carbon emissions, which, while important on a global scale, lacks explicit focus on disproportionately impacted populations.

The project team has provided the City of Bellingham with six recommendations for incorporating equity into the 2023 Climate Protection Action Plan update. These recommendations fall in the categories of data and analysis, building capacity for equity, and community engagement. We recognize that these require a greater degree of effort, communication, and funding, which is daunting for any city government. Bellingham has been a leader in climate work amongst comparable cities for nearly two decades, and the next step in maintaining that status is prioritizing climate equity.



Pictured above: view of Bellingham and Mt. Baker from Bellingham Bay

APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Methodology

Interview Guidelines:

- Begin each interview with introductions, and a reminder of where we're from and why we're doing this
- Calling Hours: Between 9am and 5pm M-F
- Follow-up procedure: If requested, send an email with your contact info and summary of project goals in the call, as soon after calling as possible.
- When scheduling, ask if they would like to see the questions in advance

Email Template: (for following up and initial contact)

Hello, my name is ___, and I am a part of a student research team from Western Washington University in Bellingham. We are working with Seth Vidaña at the City of Bellingham to do research on other cities that have included equity measures in their climate action plans, and I was wondering if I could set up a time to interview you.

Interview Questions:

- Do you consent to this interview being recorded for internal notetaking purposes only?
- What did you do? Can you describe how you incorporated equity into your climate planning? (policy, lens, program, what?)
- How did you make it happen? What was the process for undertaking this work? Can you give us a timeline, step-by-step? (Did you hire a consultant?--if so whom?---Create a committee?)
- Did it work? How do you measure that progress?
- What were the biggest challenges to making it happen?

- What would you change if you could? What would you need for that to happen? (More money, time, connections with community members, etc)
- Did this plan/policy/program receive backlash or criticism, and if so, what for? Would you change anything? What would you need for that to happen?
- How much public input did you have for your plan? How much representation did marginalized communities have in the making of this plan? How did you structure that? (council of community leaders)

Appendix 2. Climate Equity Expert Suggestions

1. Jamie Stroble founded the climate equity program at King County, and was the lead author of the Sustainable and Resilient Frontline Communities section of their 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP). She built and facilitated the Climate Equity Community Task Force, which guided that section. She also served on the Community Partnership Steering Committee for Seattle's Equity in Environment Agenda back in 2015-16. She is currently the Climate Director for the WA chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and can be reached for consulting work at Jamie@noiopathways.com.
2. Vicky Raya has been hired to continue the work Jamie Stroble started at King County, as the Climate Equity and Community Partnerships Manager. She is working on creating a presentation on how to incorporate equity into local climate planning, which she has said she is willing to share with the City of Bellingham. She can be reached at vraya@kingcounty.gov.
3. Phoebe Romero, Environmental Program Coordinator at the City of Austin's Office of Sustainability collaborated across the city and community on the creation of the 2021 Austin Climate Equity Plan. She can be reached at phoebe.romero@austintexas.gov.