



City Climate Action Planning

By the end of this guide, users will:

- Understand how climate and development goals can be jointly achieved
- Be familiar with common elements of climate action planning: visioning, planning, and implementing.
- Understand the three steps within each element

Course Content

What is a Climate Action Plan?

A climate action plan creates a framework for cities to reduce or “mitigate” greenhouse gas emissions in coordination with other city plans for development, transport, health, and other issues.

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Note: This version is a DRAFT. We welcome feedback to help us improve the content.

Climate Action Plans Can Address Two Areas

City climate action plans can address:

- **Mitigating climate change** by assessing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and/or
- **Adapting to climate change** by assessing the vulnerabilities of city locations and determining how to adapt them to flooding, drought, temperature fluctuations, or species changes caused by climate change.

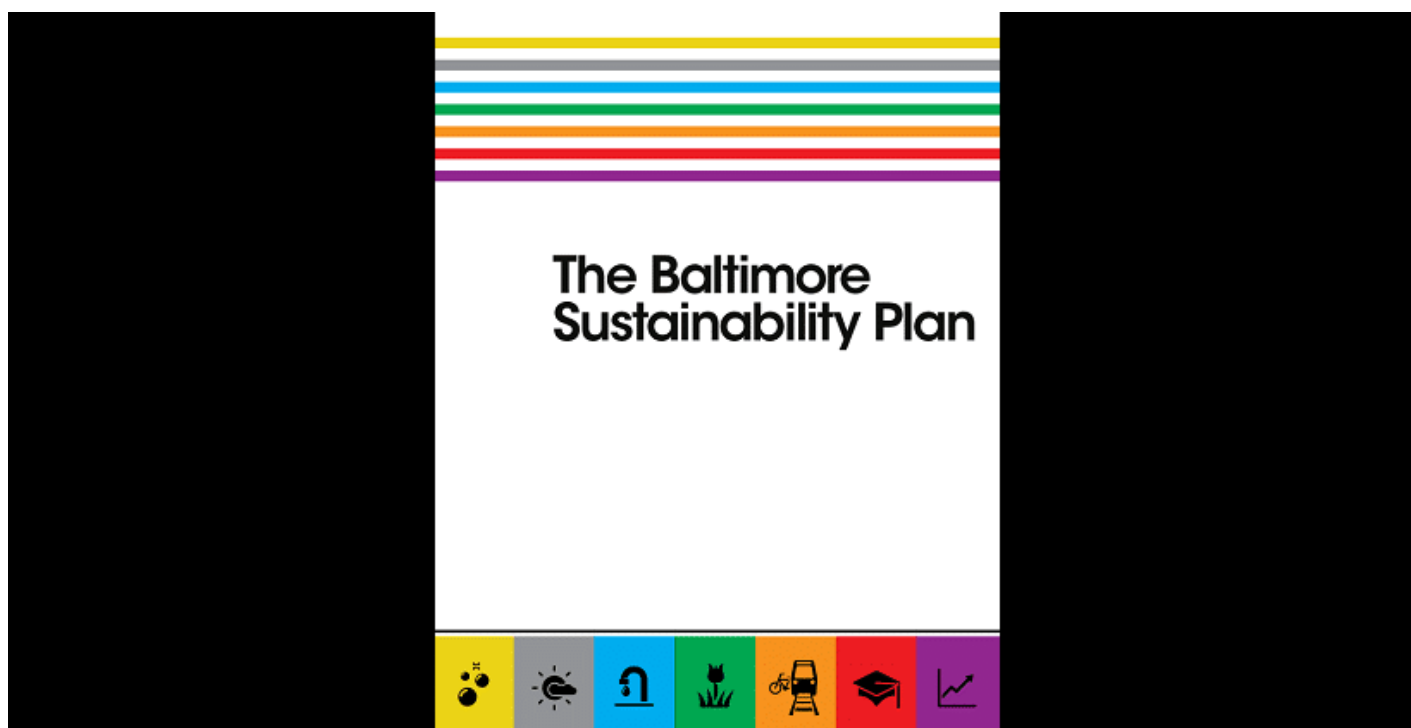
This guide focuses on mitigation but [many city plans include both](#).

Most mitigation climate plans contain:

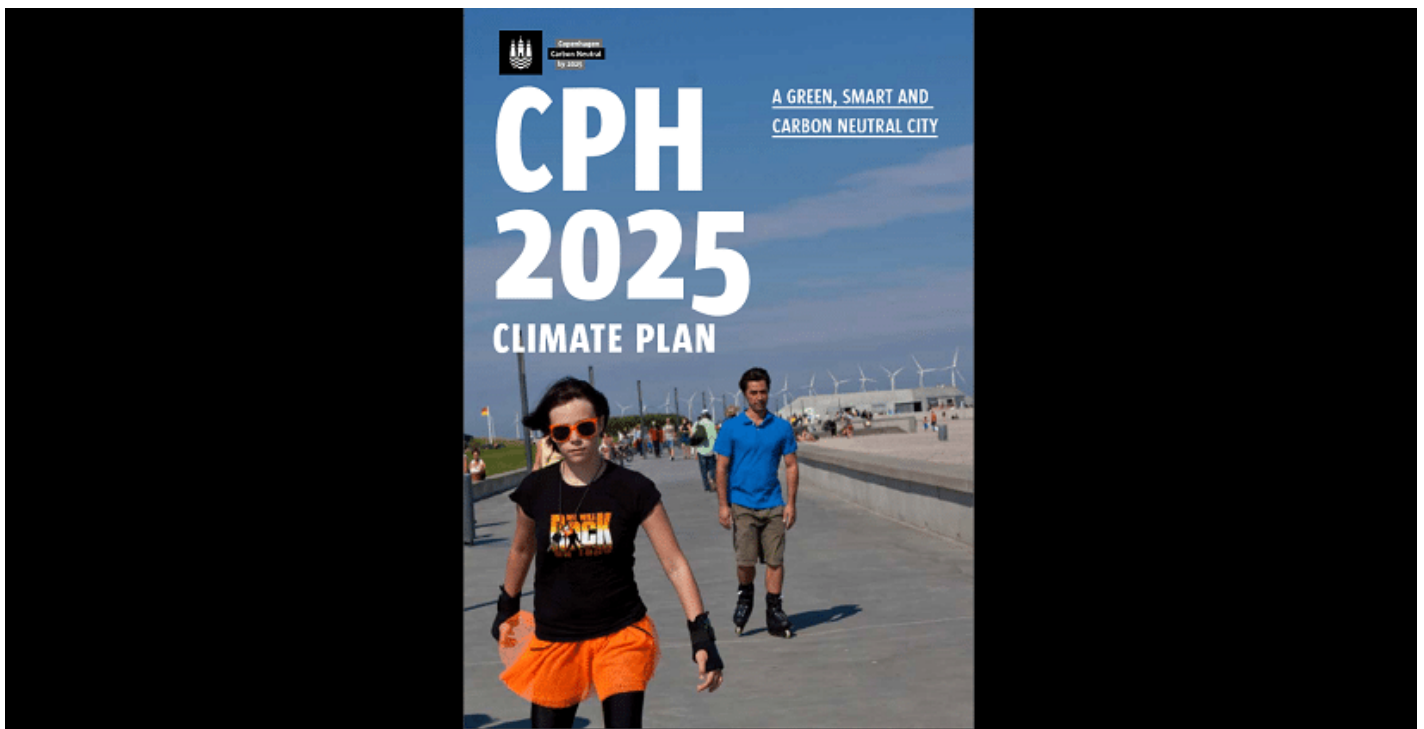
- a city-wide emissions mitigation goal,
- actions to reach the goal, and
- indicators to track progress toward the goal.

Actions can be anything from enacting a more stringent building code to promoting public transport.

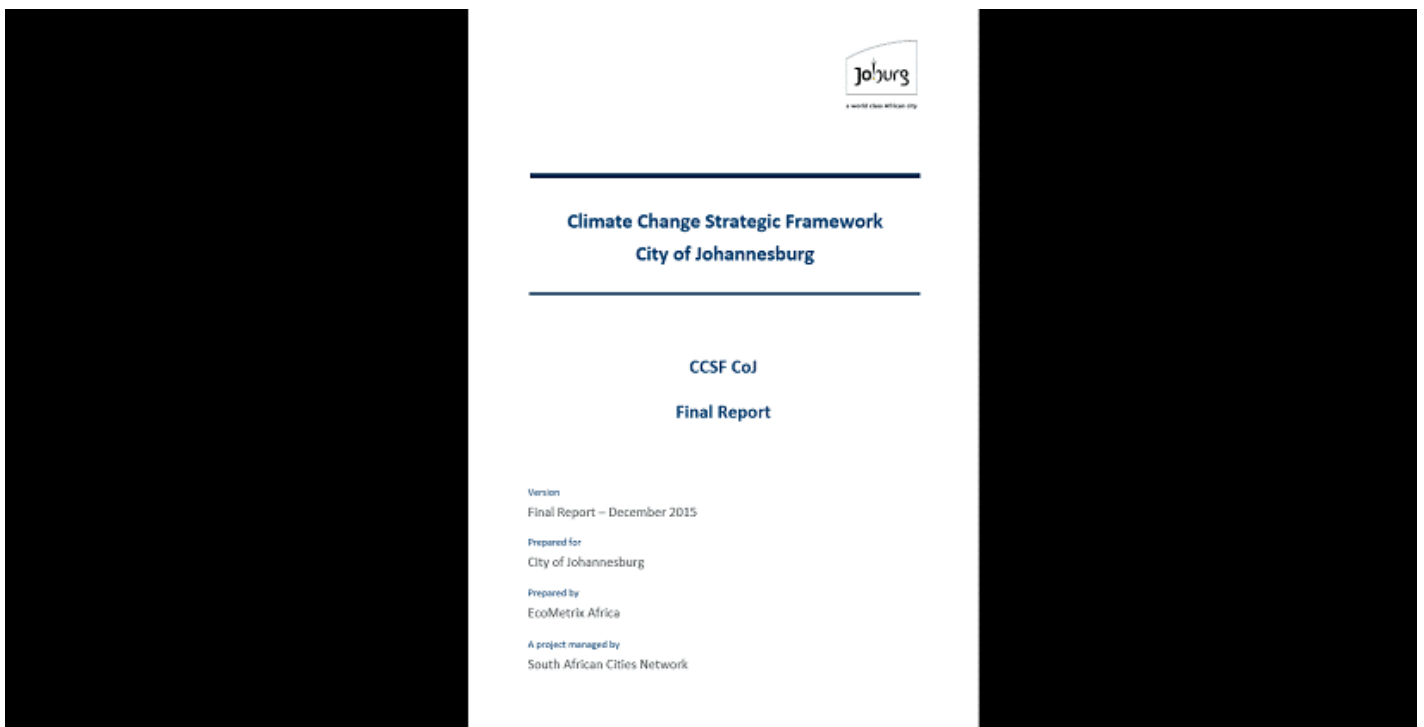
Some examples of city climate change plans:



[Baltimore's plan](#) focuses on inclusive processes and programs to improve sustainability awareness, education, and training.



[Copenhagen's plan](#) has an aggressive target to reach carbon neutrality by 2025.



[Johannesburg's climate action plan](#) includes both mitigation and adaptation goals.

Why Take Action on Climate Change?

A climate action plan can create shared vision around a climate goal.

It can align climate policies with social and economic development goals, unlocking complementary social and economic benefits for cities.

Here are some examples:

- Improving energy efficiency can reduce municipal budgets and household energy bills over the long term.

- Expanded bus service not only conserves energy but also reduces traffic-related injuries and fatalities.
- Reducing air pollution improves health outcomes and cuts health care costs.

For more examples, see [Opportunity 2030: Benefits of climate action in cities](#), and “The economic development side of sustainability: growth versus smart growth.” In [Taking sustainable cities seriously: Economic development, the environment, and quality of life in American cities](#).

Can You Achieve Both Climate and Development Priorities?

Actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions can also improve environmental and social outcomes. For instance, [Yokohama’s](#) conversion to a denser urban structure will both support an aging population and reduce emissions.

Yokohama’s future vision for 2050:

-  Conversion to a **city with an intensified urban structure** to support the super-aging, falling-population society in the future
-  A **city with a small environmental footprint** that uses energy very efficiently
-  A **city** that achieves environmentally-friendly **transportation that makes it easy** for everyone to get around
-  A **city** with a marine and green environment befitting of Yokohama that takes advantage of **the appeal of the city**



Source: [City of Yokohama, 2015](#)

What Makes a Good Climate Action Plan?

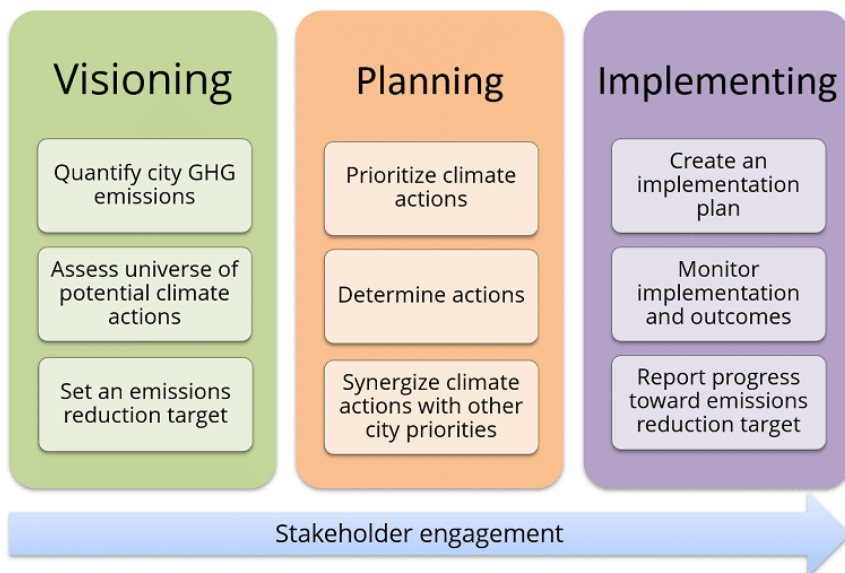
[Good climate action planning is:](#)

	Ambitious: Setting goals and implementing actions that evolve iteratively towards an ambitious vision.
	Inclusive: Involving multiple city government departments, stakeholders, and communities (with particular attention to marginalized groups) in all phases of planning and implementation.
	Fair: Seeking solutions that equitably address the risks of climate change and share the costs and benefits of action across the city.
	Comprehensive and integrated: Coherently undertaking adaptation and mitigation actions across a range of sectors within the city, as well as supporting broader regional initiatives and priorities of higher levels of government when possible and appropriate.
	Relevant: Delivering local benefits and supporting local development priorities.
	Actionable: Proposing cost effective actions that can reasonably be implemented by the actors involved given local mandates, finances, and capacities
	Evidence-based: Reflecting scientific knowledge and local understanding, and using assessments of vulnerability and emissions and other empirical inputs to inform decision making.
	Transparent and verifiable: Following an open decision-making process and setting goals that can be measured, reported, independently verified, and evaluated.

Source: [UN Habitat, 2015](#)

What Are the Main Elements of Climate Action Planning?

The three main elements of Visioning, Planning, and Implementing, and the steps in each, will be discussed in this guide. The important element of Stakeholder Engagement must be carried out simultaneously with all three.



Engaging Stakeholders is Essential

Engaging stakeholders underlies all phases of climate action planning. It improves the legitimacy of the plan and enables better decision making. Cities can identify key stakeholders and encourage them to take part in the process.

The chart below by the [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#) shows how public participation efforts can range from informing the public to empowering stakeholders, which means actually including them in decision making. Many efforts stop at providing information, but those that move further toward empowerment usually gain greater stakeholder involvement.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Source: [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#)

Quantify City Greenhouse Gas Emissions



- Climate action planning starts by [assessing current levels of greenhouse gas emissions](#).

- This “inventory” of emissions will help identify the economic sectors in the city that provide the greatest opportunity to reduce emissions.

Assess the Universe of Potential Climate Actions



- Review completed, ongoing, and planned climate actions and assess what GHG emissions reductions and/or other benefits they accomplished.
- Look at what similar cities are doing and with what results.
- This review will help determine the city’s climate mitigation goal and suggest new actions to achieve the goal.

The online Planetizen course, [Creating a Low-Carbon, Resilient City](#), gives guidance on assessing actions.

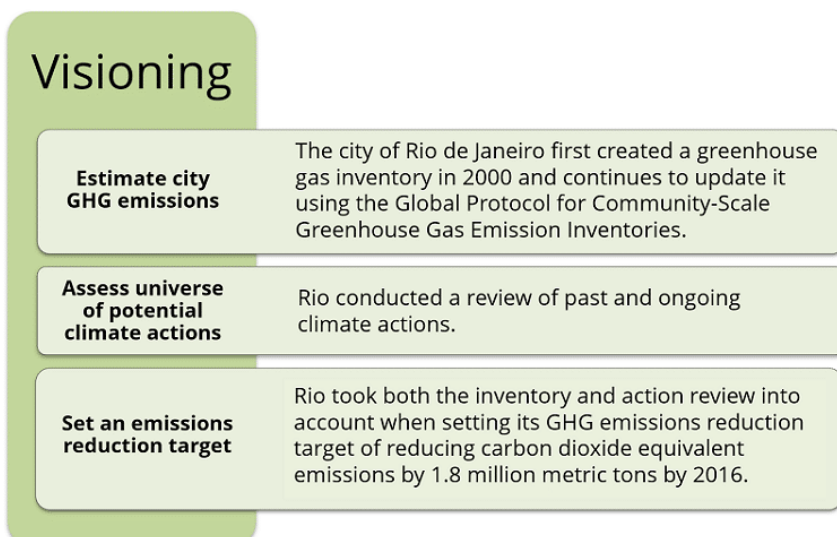
Set an Emissions Reduction Target



- An emissions reduction target is a commitment to limit greenhouse gas emissions to a specific quantity by a specific date.
- Setting a quantifiable limit for emissions allows you to determine which actions will be necessary to meet it.

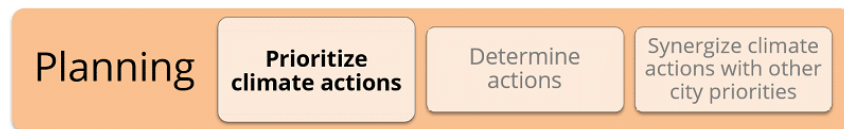
For more guidance, see chapter 4 in [Mitigation Goal Standard](#).

Example: Rio de Janeiro



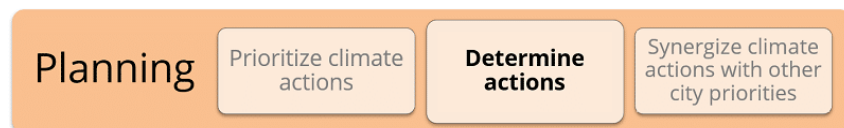
Learn more about [this example](#).

Prioritize Climate Actions



- Prioritize the possible climate actions that, in combination, will achieve the target. Priorities should be guided by the findings of the emissions inventory and the review of existing actions.
- Cities should also consider availability of funding, stakeholder input, balancing climate adaptation with mitigation goals, and synergies with local development priorities.

Determine Actions



Actions can be new policies, practices, or tools to reduce carbon emissions.

They should be:

- **Specific** enough that they can be readily implemented and measured
- **Prioritized** with clear timelines for implementation
- **Assigned to specific agencies**, organizations, or stakeholders that can be held accountable for implementation
- **Evaluated for their net costs and benefits** (both to the climate and otherwise), and potential sources of financial support

Climate actions defined in Washington DC's [Sustainable DC Plan](#) show the timeframe and responsible parties for each action.

Target: By 2032, Reduce Greenhouse Gases by 50 Percent			
Goal 1: Minimize the generation of greenhouse gas emissions from all sources			
ACTION	TIMEFRAME	LEAD AGENCY	PARTNER AGENCIES
1.1 Create online tools that allow people to view and share greenhouse gas emissions data and make more informed choices.	Short	DOEE	OCTO
1.2 Create financial tools that support climate protection programs by capturing the environmental costs of products and services.	Short	DOEE	OCTO, OP
1.3 Report District emissions on a regular basis to track the reductions that can be attributed to specific initiatives.	Short	DOEE	DGS, DPW

Source: [Washington DC Department of Energy and the Environment, 2012](#)

Synergize Climate Action with Other City Priorities

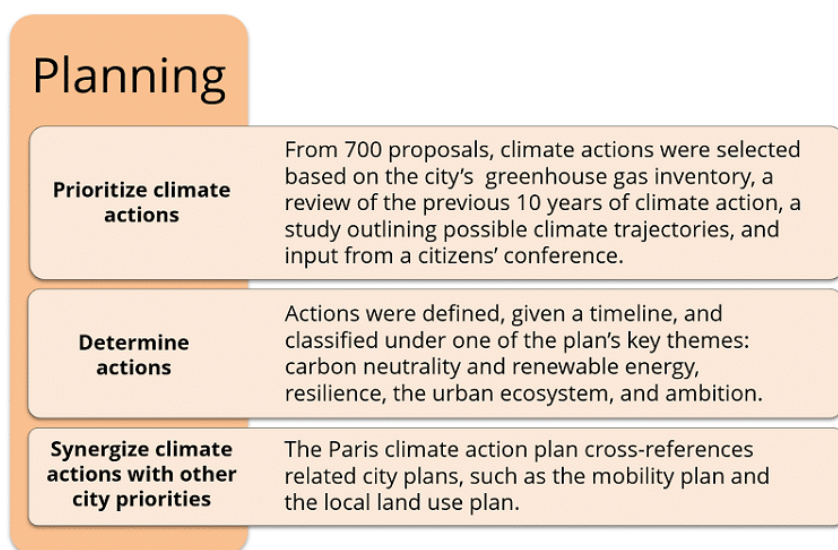


The city climate action plan can be a stand-alone document or be integrated across other city plans, such as comprehensive plans, zoning or building codes, or capital projects programs.

The climate action plan can be integrated through the following strategies:

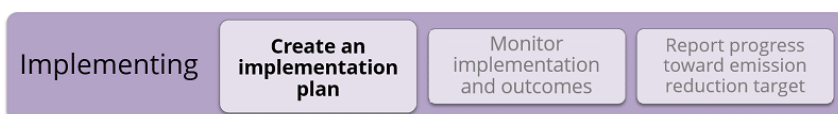
- **Cross references:** The climate action plan is cross-referenced by other city plans and vice-versa
- **Appendices:** The climate action plan is listed as an appendix in other city plans
- **Chapters:** City plans include a chapter on the climate action plan
- **Integrated:** Elements of the climate action plan, such as the emissions reduction target and specific actions, are directly integrated into city plans

Example: Paris



Learn more about [this example](#).

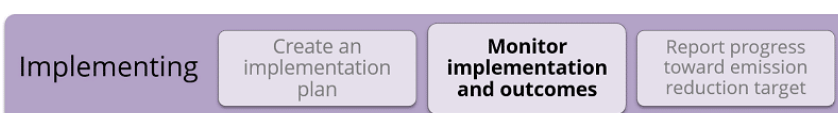
Create an Implementation Plan



The implementation plan may include:

- The specifics defined for each action such as cost, responsibilities, and timelines
- Indicators that can track and assess action performance, such as progress toward completing the action, the GHG reduction impacts, and benefits from the action

Monitor Implementation and Outcomes



Cities can monitor the **progress of the implementation plan according to the designated indicators**. Implementation indicators can be a percent of the action achieved, or be more specific. For instance, indicators to support Washington DC's sustainability goal for increased urban density include

increasing affordable housing and restricting parking surfaces for large developments.

Cities can also monitor the **outcomes of actions over time**. Outcomes can be GHG emissions reductions and other benefits like jobs created or financial savings.

For more information, see chapters 5-14 of the [Policy and Action Standard](#).

Report Progress toward the Emission Reduction Target

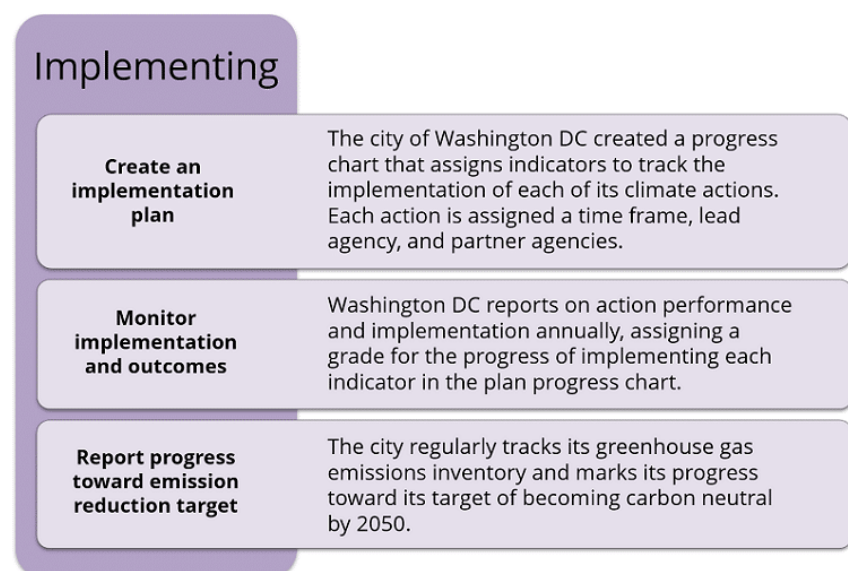


Cities can calculate overall progress toward achieving their emissions reduction target using the following steps:

- Calculate emissions during the target period or target year.
- Calculate the change in emissions since setting the target and calculate additional emission reductions needed to achieve the target.
- Assess why emissions have changed since the start of the target and whether the city is on track to achieve the target.

For more information on monitoring and reporting progress toward the target, see chapters 8 and 9 of the [Mitigation Goal Standard](#).

Example: Washington DC



How Can National Governments Support City Climate Actions?

A national government can [act as a partner](#) on climate action planning by offering supportive national and regional policies and financing.

Policies can be direct such as setting energy standards for new buildings, or act as enablers, such as providing design planning tools to cities.

Examples of Direct and Enabling National Policy Measures

	Policy goal	Examples of policy measures
Direct interventions	Promote energy-efficient design of new buildings	- Establish national building energy codes - Provide incentives for efficient building design and construction
	Carbon pricing and fuel price reform	- Remove fossil fuel subsidies - Institute carbon pricing
Enabling measures	Enhance the financial capacities of local governments	- Develop an enabling regulatory and legal environment for responsible sub-national borrowing - Build local government capacities on finance and revenue generation
	Build local administrative and technical capacity for low-carbon development	- Design planning tools for cities - Provide training opportunities relating to low-carbon development

Source: [Broekhoff, Piggot, & Erickson, 2018](#)

Recap

A climate action plan creates a framework for cities to reduce climate impacts in coordination with other city plans such as those for development, transport, and health.

Most climate action plans contain a city-wide climate mitigation goal, actions to reach the goal, and indicators to track progress toward the goal.

Actions to reduce climate change impacts can create development benefits along with positive environmental outcomes.

Quiz Yourself - 1

- ☐ CAP goal of lower carbon emissions and CDP goal of better mass transit and reduced traffic congestion.
- ☐ CAP goal to save heating and cooling energy and CDP goal of compact urban building design for walkable neighborhoods.
- ☐ CAP goal of investments to attract wind and solar power manufacturing and CDP goal of attracting new jobs.
- ☐ CAP goal of increasing fuel efficiency of urban transit and CDP goal of building more roads.

Quiz Yourself - 2

- ☐ Implementation, visioning, planning
- ☐ Planning, visioning, implementation
- ☐ Visioning, planning, implementation
- ☐ It doesn't matter

Quiz Yourself - 3

- ☐ Indicators showing progress toward goal
- ☐ Employee hours spent on the plan
- ☐ Changes in traffic congestion
- ☐ Complaints

References and Climate Action Plans

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Credits

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