Climate Action Plan

In a Nutshell

A Climate Action Plan identifies the strategies an organization plans to implement to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. While the instructions in this tool are tailored to local governments, any organization (including businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and universities) can complete a Climate Action Plan.

The “How To”

A Climate Action Plan details a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for a municipality. The EPA has a guide for developing a climate action plan. In the St. Louis area, the Regional Environmental Internship Program assisted several municipalities to complete GHG inventories and Climate Action Plans. Community input is a key component to an climate action plan, and the Regional Environmental Internship Program facilitated that discussion.

Municipal Climate Action Plans typically address two categories: emissions associated with the community as a whole, and the emissions associated with activities under the local government's control.

Climate Action Plans are most successful when communities have input in their development. Community meetings and the input of a citizen-led sustainability commission help ensure local priorities as any such plan is developed.

For a list of Climate Action Plans that have been completed for municipalities in the St. Louis region, please see the list of Sustainability Plans provided under the Resources tab of the OneSTL website.

Planning & Zoning

In the St. Louis area, several cities, including Richmond Heights and Wildwood, have worked in partnership with St. Louis University and the U.S. Green Building Council to conduct a GHG inventory with the help of a student intern. Cities that conducted a GHG inventory in partnership with the St. Louis Regional Environmental Internship Program were required to pass a formal resolution authorizing participation in the REIP, hire the intern, attain membership in ICLEI, and complete the GHG inventory. Mayors should also, with the endorsement of the city council, sign onto the U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement. For a list of GHG inventories that have been completed for municipalities in the St. Louis region, click here.

ICLEI-USA’s website has a plethora of information including guidebooks and various other tools. ICLEI also provides guidance on how to invest time and resources into the implementation of a Climate Action Plan. This guidance includes many other recommendations to ensure that a plan is implemented, including coordination between sustainability and finance staff to determine how items in the plan can be factored into the municipal budget.

Dollars & Cents

Climate Action Plans typically explore opportunities for conserving fossil fuels used in heating, lighting, and city fleets. Some city plans include strategies for reducing carbon emissions of businesses, industry, and residents within the city, in addition to the strategies for reduction of direct municipal use.

Energy efficiency strategies have the potential to reduce utility and fuel costs, saving the city and taxpayers significant amounts of money. Often, there is an up-front cost associated with improving energy efficiency, and a plan can help city officials assess costs and benefits and develop a priority for action.

The exact amount of cost saving varies, but opportunities for significant savings can be found. The cost to develop a plan is generally minimal compared to the savings which can be achieved, not to mention the costs of allowing climate change to occur unabated.

Measuring Success

Ongoing measurement of GHG emissions and evaluation of the community's progress toward established GHG emissions reduction targets is necessary to understand the success of the climate action planning process. Ideally, the municipality will complete a Climate Action Plan, implement the strategies included in the plan, and realize the associated emissions reductions.

The ultimate goal of a Climate Action Plan is to make the public aware of the dangers of carbon pollution. This awareness should then spur the public to support municipal action to to reduce carbon pollution by improving energy efficiencies within municipal operation. An inventory of greenhouse gas emissions will enable municipal officials to measure progress toward reducing carbon emissions.

A OneSTL Performance Indicator measures GHG emission levels per capita for the region. The desired trend for this indicator is downward.

Discover More

Public input during the creation of a Climate Action Plan, typically through a community's Sustainability Commission or Green Team, ensures that the community is engaged in the planning process.

The U.S. E.P.A. has recommendations for local climate and energy programs located here.

This report, prepared by East-West Gateway Council of Governments, uses projections produced by climate modelers around the world to describe how climate in the St. Louis region may change over the next half century, discusses potential socio-economic implications, and outlines possible adaptation measures.

Case Studies

Climate Action Task Force

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Description

The City of Creve Coeur appointed a Climate Action Task Force consisting of elected and appointed officials and city staff. The CATF was charged with developing a greenhouse gas reduction target and climate action plan, and reporting both to the city council for formal action. The CATF met monthly, consulted with community resources, considered many possible strategies, and developed a target and a three-phase climate action plan. The first phase was recommended to the city council, and was formally adopted. The CATF continued meeting, and assisted the city to

Cost

The major cost involved the time given to the CATF by the principal staff person involved, which was not documented. Implementation of each specific strategy recommended in the plan would generate a savings or a cost, which should be individually considered before inclusion in the plan. The cost to develop a plan should be considered against the anticipated cost of allowing climate change to occur unabated.

Lessons Learned

Many oopportunities to reduce GHG emissions by reducing energy consumption existed. Political commitment is essential: once the political commitment was in place, staff members became involved. The process of developing the plan required the CATF to educate itself, and that education percolated informally through the government. Pursuing the "low hanging fruit" first was an essential element of the plans success. Cost effective opportunities to reduce energy consumption that were not envisioned in the plan presented themselves from time-to-time, and the flexibility to pursue them was essential.