# Centering Equity in Climate Change Resilience Planning
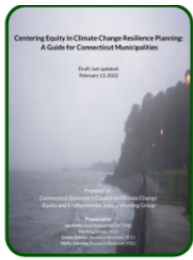
## A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities

**QUICK START GUIDE**

Prepared for: Connecticut Governor's Council on Climate Change Equity and Environmental Justice Working Group

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# Centering Equity in Climate Change Resilience Planning: Guidance for Connecticut Municipalities

**Quick Reference and Executive Summary**

## Our Immediate Need for Inclusive Planning Practices

As a result of discriminatory land use decisions and systemic disinvestment, people in low-income communities and communities of color are more likely than people in affluent areas to experience the negative impacts of climate change shocks and stressors, including sea level rise, increased storms and precipitation, extreme heat, and drought. People most at risk also have relatively limited resources for planning and response. Connecticut must center and collaborate with the most impacted communities in local climate resilience planning.

## The Role of Planners

Local governments designed and implemented many of the policies and zoning decisions that—together with federal and state policies and programs—have created current inequities. Using the recommendations and framework laid out in this document and the full guide, planners and local government leaders have the power and unique platform to address these past decisions and help to shape more equitable outcomes.

## Framework

Through a suggested nine-step process, the full guide and quick reference/executive summary seek to help planners embed equity into climate resilience planning and other planning processes, while providing room for flexibility based on the characteristics and initiatives of each municipality. Worksheets will help planners identify people and communities that are critical to the planning process.
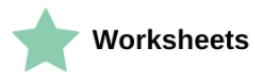
**Worksheets**

People of Concern
Environmentally Exposed People
Vulnerable Institutions
Community Lifelines

## Equitable Climate Action Planning Is:

**Relationship-Oriented**: Treat the process as "living," meaning it is a moment within our long-term future with climate change and the relationships established with stakeholders are ongoing.

**Community-Led**: Leadership teams should center representatives from groups most affected by climate change. Knowledge will be co-developed with the community through joint-fact finding of latest science as well as the knowledge of lived experiences.

**Compensation-Based**: Compensate people for their time and support community-led organizations within the process.

**Driven by Meaningful Participation**: Plan for barriers to participation and allot abundant time to practice listening and incorporating input. Be open to and welcome changes to the plan based off of community feedback.

**Designed to Address History**: Be honest about how planning and local government decisions of the past have created challenges including systemic racism, environmental injustice, and climate injustice.

## Background:

To pursue environmental and climate justice, municipalities must confront Connecticut's history of racial and social inequities. Planners' past land use and development practices created current disparities. Planners' decisions will continue to exacerbate these harms unless they recognize their role in addressing ongoing inequities and understand the ways that **climate threats will compound these existing social, physical, economic, and political vulnerabilities**.



Image 2. HOLC redlining map of Hartford, CT. Source: Mapping Inequality Project, University of Richmond

Today, the median household income of Connecticut residents differs significantly by race and ethnicity: Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino households earn about half the income of White households, according to the 2016-20 ACS 5-Year Estimate. This impacts where residents live, and how they can respond to climate threats. For example, the state's urban heat islands–areas with concentrations of pavement and buildings that result in higher temperatures–correlate with low-income communities and communities of color. This is not an accident; disinvestment in housing and green spaces impacts temperatures, and residents in these neighborhoods may also have fewer resources to pay for air conditioning. Occupation also plays a role: Hispanic people, who are the state's fastest growing demographic, comprise almost half of people who work outdoors nationally, and are more likely to die from heat-based illnesses on the job than non-Hispanic people. There are already over 400 heat-related emergency visits in the state each year, and this number is expected to increase with more extreme heat days.

Since Connecticut's founding and throughout its history, distinct state policies have discriminated against Indigenous people and people of color. European settlers violently stripped Algonquin-speaking tribes of their homelands to gain territory, and later, as a state, Connecticut profited greatly from the trade of enslaved peoples. Prejudicial policies and practices have evolved with time and continue to perpetuate intergenerational trauma on Indigenous people and people of color. This includes infringement on the sovereignty of the recognized and unrecognized tribes that still hold a strong connection to their lands.

In the 20th century, Connecticut enacted land use policies that created highly segregated cities and suburbs, and pursued government-sponsored redlining and informal racist housing practices that forced Black families into crowded urban neighborhoods, often sited near polluting industry. Connecticut was an epicenter of the country's "Urban Renewal" policies, which produced highway infrastructure that displaced thousands of people of color and low-income residents. Connecticut's ongoing laws, policies, and practices place a disproportionate share of the state's environmental and
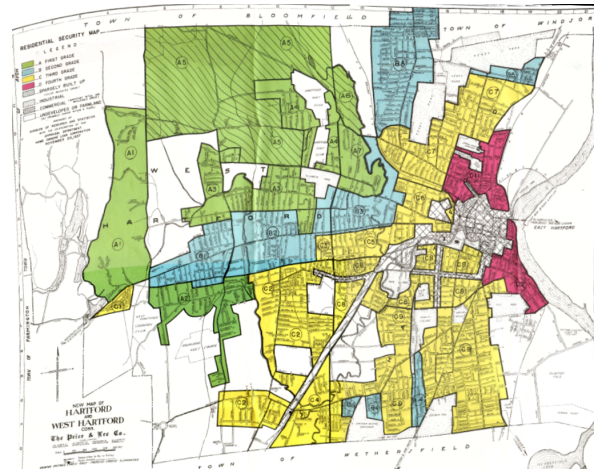
*For more information on definitions and sources, see the full guide.* 🔗

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economic burdens on communities of color. For example, polluting facilities are concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color and there is a $639 million public school education funding gap between districts with majority White students and districts with majority students of color. *Centering Equity in Climate Change Resilience Planning* provides planners with guidance on how to confront these disparities in their planning efforts.

## Purpose:

Inclusive planning grounded in environmental and climate justice results in more resilient communities. This is well-understood as best practice by climate change planning organizations such as C40 Cities and the American Society of Adaptation Professionals. More resilient communities can better adapt to or recover from major disruptions such as extreme heat days or flooding streets.

*Centering Equity in Climate Change Resilience Planning* outlines a nine-step framework grounded in the principles of procedural equity. The proposed process centers environmental justice communities and other people who face the most extreme climate threats. Justice and practicality both demand that planners disrupt the pattern of leaving people out of efforts to map the future. The following page details the suggested climate change planning process and identifies key ways planners should integrate equity at each step.

**Further Reading**

Redlining and Housing Discrimination in Connecticut

Richard Lee's Urban Renewal in New Haven

Connecticut and the West Indies: Sugar Spurs Trans-Atlantic Trade

Climate Change and Health in Connecticut

Nuestro Futuro: Climate Change and U.S. Latinos

Governor's Council on Climate Change Equity Lens

Community-Centered Climate Resilience in Connecticut

Roadmap for Inclusive Planning Executive Guide

Racial Disparities in Connecticut Education Funding

# Suggested Planning Framework

**1**

**Establish an Oversight Team**

*Equity Key*
- Use community-led nomination process.
- Save seats for trusted community leaders who work with most impacted populations.
- Pay people who aren't on City payroll.

**2**

**Determine the Scope of the *Resilience Assessment and Prioritization Plan***

*Equity Key*
- Learn land use history, Indigenous heritage, and regional ecology.
- Ensure timeline allows for meaningful public engagement.
- Prioritize budget for low-income participants and organizations led by people of color.

**3**

**Identify Potential Climate Change Threats**

*Equity Key*
- Connect science with resident experiences.
- Consider threats to *Community Lifelines, Vulnerable Institutions* in connection to *People of Concern,* and *Environmentally Exposed People.*

**4**

**Conduct Initial Assessment of Community's Social and Physical Vulnerabilities**

*Equity Key*
- Identify *People of Concern, Environmentally Exposed People, Vulnerable Institutions,* and *Community Lifelines.*
- Engage with organizations and leaders of the most at-risk groups to learn about their priorities.

**5**

**Establish the Community-led Planning Team (CPT)**

*Equity Key*
- Pay community team members.
- Involve and engage representatives from the most at-risk groups.
- Consider additional barriers to participation and possible meeting accessibility issues.

**6**

**Hold CPT Meetings**

*Equity Key*
- Create group norms.
- Apply best practices for inclusion and deep democratic decision-making.
- Identify resilience solutions that address goals of the most at-risk groups and the community.

**7**

**Prioritize Community-Identified Issues and Actions**

*Equity Key*
- Prioritize actions that bring resources to under-resourced areas of the community and the most at-risk groups.
- Maximize funding resources by leveraging other opportunities.

**8**

**Draft *Resilience Assessment and Prioritization Plan***

*Equity Key*
- Avoid jargon.
- Keep the public aware and engaged as the drafting occurs.
- Build off the efforts of community members, especially the most. at-risk groups.

**9**

**Circulate Plan and Seek Public Comment**

*Equity Key*
- Ensure plan is accessible, and share widely.
- Allocate time for public comment, incorporation of comments, and revisions.
- Follow-up on feedback received.

**Implementation**

4

# What makes a planning process successful?

An effective *Resilience Assessment and Prioritization Plan* will clearly incorporate and reflect the items below.

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- Expertise and feedback from **frontline communities,** which are "communities that bear the brunt of the impacts caused by climate change" and are "typically communities of color and low-income communities." (NAACP)
  - *i.e. municipal staff would have clearly documented how multiple rounds of input were incorporated*

- **Co-produced knowledge** and data.
  - *i.e. plan uses both state-level data and climate predictions and on-the-ground data from residents closest to the threats*

- **Contextual equity,** which means including the legacy of **structural racism**—**"**a history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color" (Government Alliance on Race and Equity)—when assessing the vulnerabilities of communities across Connecticut to climate change.

- Prioritized actions that further **environmental justice, "**the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, or ability, with respect to the development, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation of laws, regulations, programs, policies, practices, and activities, that affect human health and the environment," (White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council) and **distributional equity**, which ensures that "the distribution of the benefits and burdens of climate change mitigation and adaptation are equitably distributed." (GC3 Equity and Environmental Justice Working Group)

- **Procedural equity,** or "planning in partnership with low-income communities and BIPOC communities." (GC3 Equity and Environmental Justice Working Group)
  - *e.g. the process increases understanding among municipal staff about how climate threats specifically impact frontline communities and increases understanding among frontline communities about the impacts of ongoing climate threats in their neighborhoods and how they can participate in public processes to shape solutions*

- A plan for how municipal, community, and other partners will continue to work together through **collaborative governance**, which demonstrates a "clear commitment among all parties to both build the capacity for collaboration and break down existing barriers to equitable participation." (Urban Sustainability Directors Network)

- A statement explaining how additional partners will be brought into the process (though many people were engaged, there will still be people who were missed).

- Processes for **corrective equity**, which means "providing communities with clear processes to hold the municipality accountable to its commitments to pursue equity." (Urban Sustainability Directors Network)
  - *e.g. continued involvement of the Community-led Planning Team*

*For more information on definitions and sources, see the full guide.* 🔗

*Worksheets can help you synthesize your guesses, refine your knowledge, and target your outreach. This section samples worksheets your team can use in discussions to arrive at lists of people to contact and interventions to recommend. These worksheets are a starting point to help you identify needed areas of research and relationship-building.*

## People of Concern - Worksheet I

People of concern disproportionately experience social and economic stressors and risks to their health and safety due to climate change. These include, among others:

- People of color
- People who are immigrants/migrants
- People with limited English proficiency
- People who are low-income
- Elderly people (65 years and older)

- Young children (under 5 years)
- People who are homeless
- People with mental disabilities
- People with physical disabilities
- Pregnant people

Who are the people most at risk of climate change threats in your community?

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Where do they live, work, spend time?

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How are they impacted by climate change?.

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What organizations can help you identify and engage people of concern? What steps can you take to build or grow relationships with the identified organizations?

*Ex. Ethnic organizations and media, civil rights organizations, local health department, school district, social service agencies, daycare centers, day homes (See Full Guide (Appendix 1) for more details)*

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## Environmentally Exposed People - Worksheet II

Environmentally exposed people experience increased risk to their health, safety, and wellbeing from climate change based on factors not necessarily related to race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Factors affecting a person might include occupation, location, or infrastructural quality of a home or workplace. People facing higher risk include:

- People working outdoors
- People working in hazardous indoor spaces (ex. HVAC or kitchens)
- People living in flood zones
- People living in substandard housing
- People in urbanized areas
- People living close to the shoreline
- People living in remote areas

Who are the environmentally exposed people in your community?

Where do they live, work, spend time?

How are they impacted by climate change?.

What organizations can help you identify/engage environmentally exposed people?

*Ex. Local labor union(s), community organizations, employers, state agencies, housing department, building inspectors, mapping tools (See Full Guide (Appendix 2) for more details)*

## Vulnerable Institutions - Worksheet III

Vulnerable institutions directly serve people of concern. Their roles range from providing child care to health care to housing management. People of concern, and the wider community, rely heavily on these institutions, and impacts to these institutions may therefore have wide ranging effects.

- Daycare centers
- Schools
- Homeless shelters
- Hospitals
- Community health clinics
- Mental hospitals

- Substance rehab centers
- Prisons
- Nursing homes
- Senior housing & assisted living facilities

- Emergency shelters
- Community centers
- Public housing
- Libraries

What are the vulnerable institutions in your community?

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Which populations rely on these institutions?

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Do these institutions have climate change/disaster plans? Are they adequate and consistent with those of the municipality?

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What organizations can help you identify and engage vulnerable institutions?

*Ex. 211 CT, local health department, CT data website, local directories, institution websites, regional hazard mitigation plan, mapping tools (See Appendix 3 for more)*

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## Community Lifelines - Worksheet IV

Community lifelines are the critical infrastructure that uphold the health, safety, and overall function of the community, ensuring safe drinking water, heat, means for travel and evacuation, and electricity. Climate change may increase the likelihood that these systems fail. Community lifeline failures–resulting in food and medication spoilage, isolation from emergency services, and failure of lifesaving medical devices–will likely disproportionately threaten community members facing systemic social and economic barriers.

**Transportation Systems**
- Buses, railways, bike paths, roads and bridges

**Emergency Response Systems**
- Emergency shelters, ambulance bays

**Food Systems**
- Grocery stores, markets, farms

**Electric Systems**
- Power lines, substations, power stations, solar grids

**Healthcare Systems**
- Hospitals, nursing facilities, mental institutions

**Flood Protection Systems**
- Dams, levees, floodplains, wetlands

**Communication Systems**
- Radio towers, telephone lines, cellular towers

**Water and Sewage Systems**
- Treatment facilities, pump stations

What are the community lifelines in each category that serve your community?
*See Appendix 4 for more examples*

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Which populations would be most impacted by failures of each of these systems? How?

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How can these systems be made more resilient to the impacts of climate change?

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**This is a living document that is open to changes and ongoing feedback. Please send your comments to Dr. Mark Mitchell, mmitch3@gmu.edu. This document was last revised June 7, 2022.**

# Acknowledgements