



Green Umbrella
REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY ALLIANCE

**2022 Climate Equity
Benchmarking Analysis Report**

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Equity Frameworks, Goals, and Recommendations of Peer Regions A Benchmarking Study by Green Umbrella

Purpose

The purpose of this benchmarking survey and analysis is to examine sustainability plans, ordinances, and initiatives that center equity in their recommendations and strategies, and create an idea bank for the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP) and regional governments in Greater Cincinnati.

Methodology

Approach

The survey and analysis were guided by equity core competencies¹, evaluation methods², and indicators developed by the Institute for Sustainable Communities³, Georgetown Climate Center⁴, and the 2021 Cincinnati Climate Equity Indicators Report⁵ (consolidated below). These resources were used to determine which strategies were included in the final report.

Climate Equity Indicators



Credit: My City Center
From the Green Project

People: Age/Population/Race/Language



Health: Life Expectancy/ Disease Prevalence/ Health Insurance



Credit: My City Center
From the Green Project

Ecosystems: Tree Coverage/ Green Space/ Walkability/Food Access



Credit: Hixel HD

Built Environment: Traffic Exposure/Lead Paint/Cancer/ Air Pollution/Heat Islands/ Water Pollution/Proximity to Waste



Credit: My City Center
From the Green Project

Socio Economic Indicators: # of Persons in Poverty/ SNAP/ Rent or Mortgage Burdened/Education Levels



Credit: My City Center
From the Green Project

Neighborhood Planning: Community Councils/ Community Development Corporations (CDCs)

Selection of Cities/Metro Regions:

Cities were selected based on proximity to Cincinnati, Ohio, population size, and ability to demonstrate actionable equity centered strategies for current or future programs. The benchmark analysis analyzed strategies from over twenty American cities, 3 international cities, two state level strategies, and two national projects.

Cities included:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Cleveland, OH | 8. Providence, RI | 15. Seattle, WA |
| 2. Chicago, IL | 9. Baltimore, MD | 16. Oakland, CA |
| 3. St Paul, MN | 10. Ithaca, NY | 17. Los Angeles, CA |
| 4. Bloomington, IN | 11. New Orleans, LA | 18. Santa Ana, CA |
| 5. Kansas, MO | 12. Austin, TX | 19. Tucson, AZ |
| 6. Milwaukee, WI | 13. Houston, TX | 20. Phoenix, AZ |
| 7. Carmel, IN | 14. Portland, OR | 21. Bridgeport, CT |



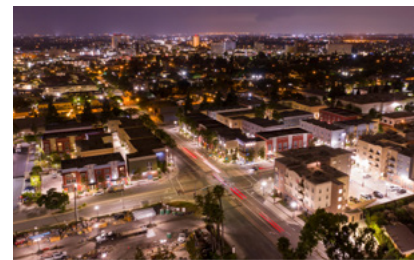
Cleveland, OH



Chicago, IL



Ithaca, NY



Santa Ana, CA

Case studies

National case studies included the Whitehouse Justice40 online community engagement portal, a national community resilience hub training network, an Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) equity entered report, and the Climate Justice Act of Illinois. Kamikatsu, Japan, Paris, France and the European Union served as international examples. All of the case studies mentioned above exemplified applicable equity focused strategies that could be adapted for the 2023 GCP and regional government actions in Greater Cincinnati.

Analysis Categories & Descriptions



Advocacy,
Education, &
Outreach

Strategies demonstrated equitable creation of green workforce development training programs, opportunities for youth and historically marginalized communities to participate in community outreach efforts and the creation of programs, and more.



Created by Alice Design
from the Neuen Project

Buildings & Energy

Strategies outlined equitable examples of GHG emission reduction initiatives (i.e equitable decarbonization, community solar).



Created by apikke

City Operations

Strategies outlined how local governments incorporated equitable actions into operational programs, projects, and budgets.



Created by Alice Design
from the Neuen Project

Food

Strategies highlighted a variety of policy and project based opportunities to reach diverse audiences and create equitable access to healthier food options



Created by Alice Design
from the Neuen Project

Natural
Environment

Strategies highlighted equitable programs and initiatives that address inequities concerning urban natural environments (i.e tree canopy coverage).



Created by Alice Design
from the Neuen Project

Mobility

Strategies outlined equitably improving public transit, distribution of electric vehicle (EV) car sharing platforms and ownership, reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and creating policies to promote alternative modes of transportation.



Created by Laynik
from the Neuen Project

Resilience

Strategies highlighted equitably preparing communities for climate change (flooding, extreme temperatures, etc.). Strategies highlighted neighborhood and city level actions that equitably increase rates of reuse and landfill diversion measures in communities with diverse demographics.



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from the Neuen Project

Zero Waste

Strategies highlighted neighborhood and city level actions that equitably increase rates of reuse and landfill diversion measures in communities with diverse demographics.

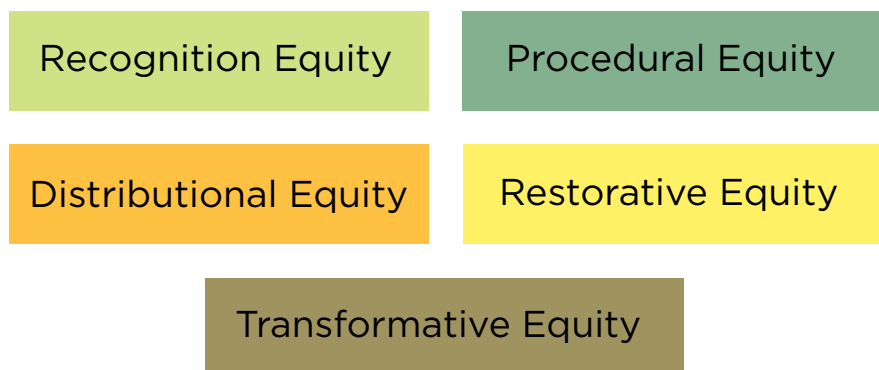
Features of the Equity Benchmarking Matrix:

The results of the survey were compiled into a matrix document, i.e. a sortable spreadsheet that allows users to explore equity-centered strategies through the following filters:

- **Category:** The equity centered benchmarking analysis of sustainability recommendations examined eight major categories (as provided by the City of Cincinnati's Office of Environment and Sustainability) that either cause greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) or contribute to an inequitable quality of life for community members, and reflects the 2023 GCP Subcommittees. Categories include: City Operations; Buildings & Energy; Food; Natural Environment; Mobility; Advocacy, Education, & Outreach; Resilience; and Zero Waste (see Table 2 for descriptions).
- **Source:** reference materials for the goal/strategy listed
- **Location:** city/metro area the strategy originated
- **Goals:** equity-centered goal that the strategy supports
- **Strategy:** description of the recommendation
- **Equity Type:** types of equity are described in the body of this report and include Recognition, Procedural, Distributional, Restorative, and Transformative
- **Equity Description:** how the strategy is connected to equity type
- **Funding Amount and Mechanism:** when available, a funding amount and mechanism was included to assist Cincinnati agencies and stakeholders in identifying future funds.

How to read this report

The 2022 Climate Equity Benchmarking Analysis Report summarizes the trends observed in the Equity Benchmarking Matrix. The report is organized around the five types of equity. For each equity type, the following is provided: a definition, overarching themes, a supporting case study, and guiding questions to promote equitable engagement and future GCP recommendation creation. The report concludes with closing remarks.



Recognition Equity

Identifies and acknowledges injustices affecting specific populations

Theme 1: Acknowledge Injustices to the BIPOC community

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community members have grown to distrust government agencies after years of intentional harm due to a legacy of white supremacy. Housing discrimination, human trafficking, and decades of discriminatory zoning laws have created wealth gaps between Caucasians and other races⁶.

Acknowledging the role governments have played in the oppression of community members helps to build trust and encourages skeptical community members to participate in community engagement processes. It is equally important to acknowledge the role white dominant culture plays in the decision making process in organizations that engage with community members.

Some characteristics of white dominant culture can be harmful when deemed as the “right way” if the minority group did not actively choose them as preferred standards. Power hoarding, fear of any open conflict, or exclusively promoting transactional relationships to achieve specific goals can inflict unintentional harm⁷.

Being willing to share power, receive direct constructive feedback, and establish transformational relationships, signals to the non dominant culture that government officials are willing to have uncomfortable conversations to equitably improve quality of life.

Case Study

In 2019, the City of Providence, Rhode Island mandated all city staff receive racial equity and environmental justice training upon hire¹² and in 2021, the city acknowledged historical injustices to people of African and Indigenous heritage in their “A Matter of Truth” a report¹³.

Theme 2: Acknowledgement of Land Stewardship

Colonialism is a historical and ongoing driver of the current climate crisis⁸ Acknowledging the original stewards of the geographic space community members and government agencies reside in presently demonstrates a level of respect that has previously not been communicated. This action also helps to establish trust and encourages more participation from diverse audiences.



Recognition Equity

Identifies and acknowledges injustices affecting specific populations

Theme 3: People Centered Vulnerability Assessment

People Centered Vulnerability Assessments are an equitable strategy to assess the individual needs a community or individual may have after a climate related disaster. This allows stakeholders to take individual circumstances and demographics like race, age, income, gender, and language proficiency into consideration⁹ when identifying current and potential climate impacts.



Guiding Questions

1. Have marginalized communities participated meaningfully in the development of the program, project, plan or policy making process with sufficient support?¹⁴
2. Does the policy, program, project, or plan center the decision-making of marginalized communities?¹⁵

Theme 4: Data Measures & Evaluation

Data collected, analyzed, and interpreted in an equitable way can produce measurable benefits for marginalized communities. The reverse is also true; the collection and analysis of data can be harmful if practitioners do not address potential biases¹⁰.

To ensure data is not used to skew information for potentially preferred outcomes, data equity acknowledges that some communities have not been provided opportunities to offer valuable quantitative input.

Collaborating with community members and community based organizations to incorporate qualitative data (i.e lived experiences) and quantitative data (metrics) helps to determine where to target investments, track progress and evaluate program performance for all partners involved¹¹.

Procedural Equity

Focuses on strategies that address power structures and access to participation in decision-making. The goal is to establish equitable, inclusive, and meaningful engagement.

Theme 1: Establishment of Equity Centered Offices & Working Groups

Government positions and working groups centered around equity and inclusion provide highly visible opportunities to shift power, build trust and ensure accountability, both structurally and intergenerationally.

Theme 2: Establishment of Equity Centered Communities & Youth Councils

Committees formed by community members representing diverse backgrounds support inclusivity in decision making processes for government projects. Developing and establishing youth councils ensures that the youngest and often most vulnerable voices are heard, and included in engagement processes.



Case Study

Richmond, VA established a Public Works Office of Equitable Transit and Mobility when the city determined only 2% of jobs in a 40 mile radius were accessible by public transit.

Richmond is currently developing shared-use paths with strategically integrated tree coverage that will prioritize connecting low income neighborhoods to natural resources and local and regional greenways.

Theme 3: Participatory Budgeting^{16,17}

Equitably engaging diverse audiences expenditure decisions helps ensure funds are earmarked to improve quality of life. Doing so also builds trust and empowers community members to strategically improve their own communities.

Theme 4: Compensation for Sharing Lived Experiences

Community members should be financially compensated for sharing lived experiences. While quantitative data is pivotal to the success of all sustainability plans, the qualitative data gained from frontline community members is imperative for an informed decision making process. Nuance experiences can fill data gaps, and provide a highly visible opportunity to demonstrate commitment to uplifting the voices of community members who have been undervalued in the past.

Procedural Equity

Focuses on strategies that address power structures and access to participation in decision-making. The goal is to establish equitable, inclusive, and meaningful engagement.

Theme 5: Economic Inclusion in Procurement¹⁸

Empowering historically marginalized populations in the procurement of local business contracts promotes inclusivity amongst community members, government staff, and partners. This may include Women/Minority Owned Businesses, BIPOC owned businesses, Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), Business Enterprises Owned by People with Disabilities (BEPD) programs, and more.



Theme 6: Community Engagement and Partnership¹⁹

Community engagement processes and partnerships should foster equity by establishing meaningful engagement opportunities for diverse audiences. Building authentic community partnerships will help ensure communication remains authentic, and build trust for long term sustainable relationships.

Theme 7: Community Driven Resilience Planning

Community Driven Resilience Planning promotes equity by allowing community members and vulnerable communities to define for themselves the most relevant climate change adaptation solutions they need.²⁰ Frameworks are developed in partnership with community members to ensure their community vision, voice, capacity is considered when determining priorities and evaluation methods.

Guiding Questions

1. Does the community driven resilience planning process prioritize health, wellness, and equity?
2. Does the establishment of equity centered offices, working groups, youth councils and committees shift power and reduce future harm?
3. Does the establishment of equity centered offices, working groups, and committees foster accountability structurally and intergenerationally?
4. How can your office or partnership create opportunities for community members to access knowledge that may fall outside of your range of influence?

Distributional Equity

Focuses on strategies that address the distribution of burdens and benefits across different populations. This is especially important when addressing energy justice, which focuses on equitable decarbonization projects to reduce burdens on marginalized communities ²¹

Theme 1: Deployment of Targeted Universalism

While well known universal policies provide the same benefits and protections to all community members regardless of group membership (like minimum wage programs), they can deepen inequality in different demographic settings. Targeted Universalism however sets universal goals that can be achieved through targeted approaches ²². Los Angeles, California recently announced \$10.5 million dollar Climate Equity Fund designed to provide mitigation actions specifically to low income communities that disproportionately suffer from climate impacts. Funds will be distributed for an air purifier giveaway program, air quality monitoring at oil drilling sites, and heat mitigation home retrofits.

This targeted approach can be measured over time to reach universal quality of life goals (like access to clean air) for communities across the city. This can be accomplished by following five steps:

- Define a universal goal
- Measure how the overall population fares to the universal goal
- Measure the performance of population segments relative to the universal goal
- Understand how structures and other factors support or impede group's progress towards achieving the universal goal
- Implement targeted strategies

Case Study

Oakland, CA set a goal to establish voluntary and compliance GHG mitigation fees that will be invested in frontline communities first by 2023. Projects could include tree planting, creek restoration, neighborhood EV car sharing, and building electrification retrofits. This would include establishing partnerships with Oakland businesses to create a "Carbon Neutral Oakland Business" designation, where any offset or "polluter pay" fees would be invested locally, and prioritized in frontline communities first.²⁵

Theme 2: Development of Climate Equity Funds

Committees formed by community members representing diverse backgrounds support inclusivity in decision making processes for government projects. Developing and establishing youth councils ensures that the youngest and often most vulnerable voices are heard, and included in engagement processes.

Guiding Questions

1. Does the policy, program, project, or plan prioritize economic, social, or health benefits for marginalized communities?²³
2. Are opportunities to promote Targeted Universalism explored as a strategy to equitably achieve universal goals?²⁴

Restorative Equity

Focuses on making a commitment to correct past harms and facilitate repair.

Theme 1: Reclamation of Degraded Land

Land reclamation involves restoring previously usable degraded sites to useful activities. These sites often serve as storage facilities for toxic waste, non operable landfills, and other hazardous human activities. Revitalization measures can include remediation and create opportunities for cooperative businesses, community energy, and local job creation.



Theme 2: Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building²⁶ is a collaborative approach that centers democratic participation and ownership. It is a bottom-up strategy to allow regions and communities to use place-based economics while combating the old model that promotes private wealth, displacement, and disinvestment. Community Wealth Building principles can be applied in all communities, and create sustainable ecosystems that foster the establishment of long term anchor jobs everyone can benefit from.

Case Study

Houston, Texas recently secured funding to establish an urban community solar farm on a 240 acre former incinerator site and will power 5,000 homes. The former brownfield will be America's largest community solar farm, and include a biking and walking trail, an electric vehicle charging station, backup power for a nearby community center, and an aquaponics greenhouse to grow produce²⁹. A local congressman also secured \$750,000 in federal funding for a job training program that will train community members to assist in the project construction.

Guiding Questions

1. Does the policy, program, project, or plan aim to remedy prior harms faced by communities negatively impacted by detrimental human or business activities?²⁷
2. Does the policy, program, project, or plan account for present inequitable harms caused by human or business activity?²⁸

Transformative Equity

Focuses on addressing underlying structural conditions that are the root cause of social and racial injustices. Strategies cultivate accountability, reduce harm, and prevent future unintended consequences.

Theme 1: Removal of Structural Barriers to Reduce Future Harm

For years, restrictive zoning laws have limited housing density near transit corridors, helped promote racially and economically segregated neighborhoods, and increased environmental degradation opportunities in some communities³⁰. Promoting progressive zoning reform helps to address these issues while preventing further harm in the future.

Theme 2: Establishment of Enforcement and Compliance Mechanisms

Establishing enforcement and compliance mechanisms cultivates a culture of accountability and reduces the chance of future harm³¹. Transformative policies may include pollution fees being earmarked specifically for frontline communities they harmed, and the development of environmental justice positions to respond to community members complaints concerning illegal harmful activities taking place in their communities.

Theme 3: Strategically Promote Transparency and Answerability³²

Partnerships between community development corporations (CDCs), neighborhood community members councils, and other neighborhood grassroots based organizations promotes open lines of communication between government officials and citizens.

Case Study

Portland, Oregon's Climate Action Plan set a goal to build local staff capacity to maximize career development opportunities for underserved populations in environmental careers. Opportunities are being developed in green building, transportation, and superfund remediation redevelopment projects.³⁹

Theme 4: Promotion of Circular Economies & Regenerative Practices

Calculating the true cost of the consumption of raw materials from cradle to grave is a developing science³³. It is also not financially feasible to complete life cycle analysis studies on the millions of products humans consume on a daily basis, but we know all human activities have an impact on the planet's finite resources. Establishing mechanisms to reuse, recover, or prevent any resource from entering landfills and oceans is transformative. It addresses structural conditions (where many cities have no policies in place) and reduces future harm.



Transformative Equity

Focuses on addressing underlying structural conditions that are the root cause of social and racial

Theme 5: Creation of Equitable Green Workforce Development Programs

Frontline community members are the first to experience the consequences of climate change, but are often rarely provided opportunities to gain professional skills to prepare their vulnerable communities for inevitable changes.³⁴ Programs that intentionally recruit vulnerable populations to participate help ensure community members learn how to increase their personal wealth while learning how to strategically advocate for climate adaptation resources in the future.

Guiding Questions

1. Does the policy, program, project, or plan make community solar, transitions to electric vehicles, or access to transit oriented development more accessible and affordable to marginalized communities?
2. Does the policy, program, project, or plan remove barriers to empower communities to address structural conditions that create social and racial injustices?
3. Does the policy program, project, or plan cultivate accountability with various stakeholders while avoiding future harm?

Theme 6: Establishment of Anti-Displacement Strategies

Climate gentrification occurs when communities implement climate change adaptations and property values increase. Although these actions make communities more physically resilient, they can also unintentionally displace vulnerable community members.³⁵ Many city climate action and resilience plans mention community members' concerns about climate gentrifications and tools to address such.³⁶

Theme 7: Establishment of Regional Approaches

Addressing climate impacts requires collaboration across jurisdictions. Regional Climate collaboratives are forming across the country to bring local governments, universities, utilities, other multisectoral stakeholders, and varying sources of funding together to address climate change.³⁷ Green Umbrella will launch a Greater Cincinnati Regional Climate Collaborative in summer 2022³⁸, with support from the Urban Equity Climate Compact. This partnership will create a platform to center community member's voices, share local government best practices, and help secure funding for regional equitable climate adaptation strategies.

Closing Remarks

This report and associated matrix documents over 350 forward-thinking strategies to ensure sustainability and resilience goals can be accomplished using an equitable lens. These resources intend to be made available for use by the City, regional partners and stakeholders, and Cincinnati community members in the development of the 2023 GCP and other future initiatives.

By addressing the roots of injustice and unsustainability at the same time, GCP recommendations can tackle the economic, environmental, political, and social challenges that have led to disparities such as the 25 year average life expectancy gap between Cincinnati neighborhoods.⁴⁰ Although marginalized communities in Cincinnati have suffered from these inequities for years, the 2021 Climate Equity Indicators Report⁴¹, this report, and a new equity focused GCP can serve as an opportunity to restore and transform Cincinnati neighborhoods into enjoyable places where we can all live, work, and play.

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