



Seven Principles of Strong Climate Change Planning

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As we struggle to adjust our lives and work to the COVID-19 pandemic, it may seem like a strange time to consider how we can better plan for climate change. But as with this current pandemic, climate change will have far reaching consequences for our public health, economy, and social lives. As the impacts of COVID-19 are being felt unevenly by members of our community, so too will the impacts of climate change. As such, we are in a unique position to learn from the current crises and reflect on how to create stronger plans for climate change.

Practicing planners undoubtedly face many political pressures and constraints in climate change planning. Numerous studies have examined the barriers to climate change planning (Hamin et al., 2014; IPCC, 2014a; Moser & Ekstrom, 2010), but fewer outline what quality climate change planning entails.

In **[“Seven Principles of Strong Climate Change Planning”](#)**, Dr. Meerow and I outline seven principles to produce high quality climate change plans: **Goals, fact base, strategies, public participation, coordination, implementation and monitoring, and uncertainty.**

GOALS



Climate change plans should have well-defined outcomes and measurable objectives to achieve these goals (Baker et al., 2012; Woodruff & Stults, 2016). The primary goal of climate change planning has expanded from mitigation to include adaptation. Adaptation is “the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects” (IPCC, 2014b). Mitigation plans have a clearly defined goal of reducing GHG emissions, in comparison, the goals and outcomes for adaptation planning have been more difficult to define.

FACTBASE



To effectively combat climate change, cities need data on current conditions, future projections, and modeled impacts (Baker et al., 2012). For mitigation planning this typically entails a detailed GHG inventory, for adaptation planning the fact base usually consists of a vulnerability assessment (Bassett & Shandas, 2010; IPCC, 2014a).

STRATEGIES



Given the simultaneous need to mitigate and adapt, strong climate change planning will require a range of different strategies. These should include policies that address underlying causes of vulnerability and address the broad reaching impacts of climate change.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION



Research suggests that CAP and adaptation planning processes are dominated by elites and technocrats (Bassett & Shandas, 2010; Haverkamp, 2017). Greater attention needs to be dedicated to improving procedural equity, or fair participation in decision-making processes (Schrock et al., 2015; van den Berg & Keenan, 2019).

COORDINATION



Climate change cuts across traditional sectors and jurisdictional scales, requiring collaboration. Strong climate change planning requires broad internal support within city government but also engagement of diverse representatives from the community.

IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING



A major implementation gap remains in climate change planning. Many climate mitigation and adaptation plans exist, but few are put into practice and monitored, or even outline clear steps for doing so (Moser et al., 2017; Woodruff & Stults, 2016). Plans should include details to facilitate implementation, such as responsible parties and timelines.

UNCERTAINTY



As the current pandemic demonstrates, the future will hold surprises. We cannot anticipate all the impacts and consequences of climate change, but we can create plans that are flexible and adaptable. Climate plans should also aim to create robust and flexible programs, infrastructure, and systems.

Planners' ability to think long-term, handle uncertainty, integrate across systems, and bring together diverse actors aligns well with skillsets required for climate action (Berke & Lyles, 2013; Crane & Landis, 2010; Mitchell & Graham, 2017). Indeed, adaptation plans prepared by planners have been found to have stronger goals, strategies, implementation and monitoring, and coordination than plans prepared by other actors (Woodruff and Stults 2016). Urban planners must continue to work towards better climate change planning, and we believe that focusing on the seven principles discussed in this paper is a good way to start.

Citations

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