A Climate Action Plan (CAP) is a roadmap for lowering greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to meet specified target emissions. A CAP – under this Sustainable Jersey action - establishes a timeline for achieving specific emission reduction goals, identifies key strategies and steps for achieving these goals, and tracks progress through the use of measures or indicators. A CAP can also help prioritize the allocation of funding and resources, and analyze the costs and benefits that result from implementing new strategies.

The CAP is part of a comprehensive process to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) that begins with developing a baseline inventory of (GHG) emissions (see Municipal Carbon Footprint and Community Carbon Footprint actions) and establishing quantitative targets for reducing emissions. Specific indicators and targets should be created for the municipal government and for the community as a whole. A CAP includes strategies to address climate change at these two different levels. Municipal strategies focus on improving efficiency in municipally managed facilities, infrastructure, operations, and services. Community actions will require joint efforts of the public and private sectors, and include policy changes that will affect the lives of residents and operations of local private businesses.

Since the CAP aims to reduce existing levels of GHG emissions, the inventory of those emissions (the Municipal and Community Carbon Footprint actions) must be completed before, or as part of a CAP process. Each of these Carbon Footprint actions will earn 10 points toward certification. An additional 10 points will be awarded for completion of a Climate Action Plan.

The CAP must have been completed or reexamined from within 5 years of the June submission deadline.

Why is it important?

The scientific community has established that human activities, primarily the combustion of fossil fuels for energy, industrial processes, and transportation, have significantly increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These increased emissions cause climate instability characterized by severe weather events such as storms, droughts, floods, heat waves, and sea level rise. Considering that increased GHG emissions threaten quality of life, municipalities should take the necessary steps to reduce emissions, reducing the risks associated with climate change. Such reductions will also protect air quality and public health, improve energy efficiency, and promote sustainable business practices while cutting costs. Through the development of Climate Action Plans, municipalities can identify feasible and effective policies to reduce their GHG emissions and gain these benefits.

Climate Action Plan vs. Sustainability Plan

It’s important to understand the difference between a Climate Action Plan and a Sustainable Community Plan. A Climate Action Plan focuses exclusively on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), though it sometimes includes strategies for adapting to climate change. A Sustainable Community Plan addresses all aspects of making a community more sustainable within the three pillars of sustainability - people, prosperity and environment. A Sustainable Community Plan may include aspects of a Climate Action Plan, such as GHG reduction, but a Climate Action Plan goes into much more detail and should be a separate document.
Who should lead and be involved with this action?

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires coordinated activity among many different municipal departments and members or the community. Therefore, it is necessary to involve leaders and staff from all entities that will likely need to implement the CAP or agree to support it.

A task force or committee consisting of representatives from each of the following departments and groups could be in charge of completing the Climate Action Plan. One person could be designated as the CAP coordinator or chairperson and serve as a liaison between departments, the administration, and community representatives:

- Green Team
- Environmental Commission
- Mayor and staff
- Governing body
- Planning Department
- Engineering Department
- Department of Public Works
- Purchasing Clerk
- Community groups
- Business representatives
- Leading citizens

As many of the actions in a CAP require public participation, the coordinating person or entity should also consider how to include stakeholders such as residents, local business representatives, builders, housing associations, local nonprofits, and other community groups.

Timeframe

Assuming that the Carbon Footprint actions have been completed, the time needed to create and adopt a CAP can be completed in as little as a few months, depending on how many people are working on it, and how public input is solicited. The best plans often take considerably longer.

Once the plan is complete, implementing it and tracking progress should be ongoing. For resubmission, the municipality must demonstrate regular monitoring of progress (annual evaluations), as well as re-evaluation of the CAP to ensure that the actions are being implemented and are up-to-date with current technology and the best methods available.

Project Costs and Resource Needs

While municipalities could hire a private firm or organization, such as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), a quality CAP can also be created in-house for the cost of staff or volunteer time. The staff time required will vary depending on the availability of existing data and the staff’s prior experience with planning, energy policy, and targeting investments for achieving the plan’s goals. Some experience with spreadsheets and simple formulas will be necessary. The cost also will vary depending on the size of the municipality and complexity of the plan being developed.

Consultants can charge as little as a few thousand for a basic CAP to upwards of a million dollars for a detailed plan for a large city. Most NJ municipalities should expect costs to be closer to the lower end of the scale.

What to do, and how to do it (“How to”)

This section provides guidance and recommendations for implementing the action. A municipality does not need to follow this guidance exactly as long as it meets the requirements for earning points for this action.

A CAP has three essential components:

1. A baseline inventory of current greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for both government operations and community at
large, expressed as a carbon dioxide equivalent. This is also called a “Carbon Footprint.” For detailed instructions on preparing the carbon footprint, see Sustainable Jersey actions: Municipal Carbon Footprint and Community Carbon Footprint.

2. A target for reduction of GHG emissions that aligns with global and state targets or is more aggressive.

3. A series of detailed policies and strategies designed to achieve the target for GHG emissions reduction.

The following steps can be used to complete the Climate Action Plan:

1. Designate a committee, green team, or task force comprising various department and public representatives. This entity will be responsible for developing the initial plan, as well as ongoing implementation and revision of the CAP. The Green Team created for the Sustainable Jersey program, or a sub-committee of the Green Team, is a likely candidate.

2. Publicize the municipality’s intent to create a Climate Action Plan and solicit participation. You may want to have your green team (or others) engage group of diverse stakeholders in the process, including municipal staff, residents, business representatives, and other community groups to get input on the plan. If you are also developing a Sustainable Community Plan, you should combine the two efforts and just have “Climate” be one of the issues addressed in the Sustainable Community Plan.

3. Based on data collected in the Carbon Footprint actions, as well as feedback from the stakeholder group, establish emissions reduction target goals for both the municipal government and the community as a whole. The targets should spell out specific reductions to be achieved, and a timeframe for achieving them. The targets should be reflective of other credible targets such as those contained in New Jersey Global Warming Response Act of 2007 and the UN Paris Agreement.

4. Develop a strategic plan with detailed policies and programs that will achieve the target reductions within a specified timeline. The CAP should set specific goals for the municipal government as well as the community and outline actions to achieve those goals. Many Sustainable Jersey actions will help reduce a community’s carbon footprint and can be included and/or referenced in the CAP. Click here to view examples of actions to implement to reduce GHG emissions and prepare for the effects of climate change.

5. The municipal task force or committee must determine which department(s) or community groups will be responsible for accomplishing each specific action in the Climate Action Plan so that an accountable lead is identified for each task. The plan should also include a strategy by which it will be evaluated on a regular basis to track progress toward goals and incorporate revisions as technologies and best practices change.

6. Present the draft to the stakeholder group, the public, and municipal agencies for review. Incorporate revisions to craft a final plan based on community input. Methods of funding (if necessary) can be determined and presented at the same time.

7. The municipality should formally adopt the plan and charge a group of individuals, a body, staff, or department, with overseeing implementation and annually reporting the results and updating the Carbon Footprints and progress toward the targets.

8. In addition to annual reporting, the CAP should be reexamined at least every five years. During this reexamination, the municipality should evaluate actions that have been implemented and consider the progress being made toward the emission reduction targets. Feedback should be solicited from stakeholders and the action plan should be revised as necessary.

What to submit to get credit/points

In order to be approved for this action the municipality must be approved for the Municipal Carbon Footprint and the Community Carbon Footprint actions and the Climate Action Plan (CAP) meet the following standards:
• The CAP must have been completed or reexamined from **within 5 years of the June submission deadline.**

• The CAP must include both the municipal carbon footprint and community carbon footprint of baseline emissions, a target for reducing emissions that aligns with global and state targets, and a detailed action plan for achieving the reduction target and adaptation.

• The CAP must be officially adopted by the governing body of the municipal government.

Please submit the following documentation to verify these standards have been met:

1. **Description of Implementation** – In the text box provided on the submission page for this action provide a short summary that includes how the plan was developed, implementation plans and the potential impact it has or will have on the community.

2. **Upload:** The municipality’s Climate Action Plan (CAP) that includes the required components listed below, along with verification that it was completed or reexamined from **within 5 years of the June submission deadline.** The CAP must include:
   - the municipal carbon footprint of baseline emissions
   - the community carbon footprint of baseline emissions
   - a target for reducing emissions that aligns with global and state targets
   - a detailed action plan for achieving the reduction target and adaptation.
   - documentation that the CAP was officially adopted by the municipal government.

**Resubmission Requirements**

This action is valid for five years from the date of the CAP was officially adopted by the municipal government. For resubmission, the municipality must demonstrate regular monitoring of progress (annual evaluations), as well as re-evaluation of the CAP to ensure that the strategies are being implemented and are up-to-date with current technology and the best methods available. The resubmission must include a listing of all short-term strategies in the CAP, and for each strategy include 1) the progress made in the 5 years of the plan; 2) obstacles in implementing the strategy and steps for overcoming the obstacles; 3) recommended revised targets and/or CAP strategies, if any; and, 4) the adoption of the amended CAP, if applicable, to include any revised targets and/or strategies.

**Approved Action Expiration Date**

This action will expire in 5 years of the date the CAP was officially adopted by the municipal government.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 30 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended.

All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

**Spotlight: What NJ municipalities are doing**

Trenton’s Climate Actions Plan  

Woodbridge Sustainable Community Plan and Climate Action Plan  

**Resources**

The following resources may be helpful in completing this action.

**National Examples**
Chicago’s Climate Action Plan
http://www.chicagoclimateaction.org/

City of Oberlin’s Climate Action Plan

Portland’s Climate Action Plan
https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/49989

General

Center for Climate and Energy Solutions
https://www.c2es.org/category/policy-hub/state/

Center for Climate Strategies
http://www.climatestrategies.us/

Climate Mayors
http://climatemayors.org/

Compact of Mayors
http://impact.compactofmayors.org/

Georgetown Climate Center - Adaptation Clearinghouse
http://www.adaptationclearinghouse.org/

Guiding Principles for City Climate Action Planning

Introduction to Climate Action Planning (Online Course)
https://courses.planetizen.com/course/introduction-climate-action-planning

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability USA (ICLEI USA)
http://icleiusa.org/

Local Climate Action Planning (Book)

U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit
https://toolkit.climate.gov/

Potential Funding Sources for Planning

Sustainable Jersey Small Grants
http://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/grants-resources/

Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities
https://www.fundersnetwork.org/partners-for-places/

Potential Funding Sources for Implementation

NJ Clean Energy Program:
http://www.njcleanenergy.com/renewable-energy

EPA National Clean Diesel Funding Assistance Program
https://www.epa.gov/cleandiesel

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