

**Advancing Climate Justice in California:
Guiding Principles and Recommendations
for Policy and Funding Decisions
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Prepared by the Climate Justice Working Group

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Climate Justice Working Group: Origin and Objectives

In Fall 2016, the Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG), including environmental justice, public health, and climate equity leaders, convened to develop recommendations for ensuring that the 2017 update of *Safeguarding California*—California’s climate change adaptation strategy—is responsive to environmental justice and climate equity concerns. As part of its work, CJWG reviewed past “implementation action plans” developed by state agencies pursuant to Governor Brown’s 2015 executive order on climate change, and developed detailed and comprehensive recommendations for state adaptation and resilience priorities. CJWG’s work covered the following sectors: agriculture, biodiversity and habitat, emergency management, energy, forestry, land use and community development, oceans and coastal resources, public health, transportation, and water. CJWG shared its reviews and recommendations with the California Natural Resources Agency, California Department of Health, and Governor’s Office of Planning and Research for consideration in the 2017 update of *Safeguarding California*.

Building on these efforts, CJWG developed definitions of key concepts—including climate justice and climate vulnerability—as well as guiding principles and recommendations for California leaders to consider in future development and implementation of climate change adaptation policies and funding decisions. Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) supported the development of this briefing paper so that CJWG’s work can be shared with the public.

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Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change in California

In California and around the world, average temperatures are warming and the climate is changing as a result of ongoing anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. With California leading the way, significant efforts are underway to reduce GHG emissions and prevent the worst-case scenarios of climate change and its effects on people and the environment. Continuing leadership and action are imperative in this regard.

At the same time, California's people are already experiencing the effects of climate change caused by past GHG emissions, and even under the best-case scenarios of future emissions, we will continue to experience changes to our environment, communities, and way of life. California's leaders—including its public officials and its community and business decision makers—must take effective action *now* to address the social, economic, and environmental impacts of climate change and strengthen our resilience to anticipated future impacts.

What is Climate Justice?

Climate justice requires California leaders to ensure that the people and communities who are least culpable in the warming of the planet, and most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, do not suffer disproportionately as a result of historical injustice and disinvestment.

Frontline communities that experience continuing injustice—including people of color, immigrants, people with lower incomes, those in rural areas, and indigenous people—face a legacy of systemic, largely racialized, inequity that influences their living and working places, the quality of their air and water, and their economic opportunities. Climate justice requires California leaders to acknowledge that these frontline communities are experts in creating solutions to protect and preserve our air, water, land, and communities, despite their historical exclusion from decision making and from public resources and services. Climate justice requires California leaders to provide public resources and services to frontline communities to engage and assist them in developing technologies, policies, professions, services, and projects for addressing the causes and impacts of climate change and healing from historical injustices.

Why Climate Justice?

While all Californians are impacted by climate change, climate change does not affect all people in the same way. These frontline communities are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate and environmental changes because of decades-long, pervasive socio-economic conditions that are perpetuated by systems of inequitable power and resource distribution. Those systems, in turn, are the result of intentional decisions by people in positions of power and deeply institutionalized racism and class bias. These conditions and systems have left California's frontline communities with unsafe, unhealthy neighborhoods and limited access to quality education, public services, and economic opportunities.

Frontline communities have also long been excluded from the policy and funding decisions and processes that can be used to address climate change and support a transition to healthy, resilient, and sustainable communities. These communities are starting from a place far worse than that held by their more affluent, white counterparts, and accordingly have fewer resources to prepare for, adapt to, and recover from the effects of climate change. As a result, frontline communities are often the first and worst impacted by climate disruption and extreme weather events (e.g., Hurricane Katrina), which in turn increase already-present health and economic disparities.

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The systematic and structural inequities experienced by frontline communities require an immediate, extraordinary, and sustained increase in public resources to these communities to build and ensure their resilience. Investments and services aimed at reducing disparities in training, employment, income, wealth, housing conditions, health, and political empowerment, and preventing displacement, will help to reduce frontline communities' vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Moreover, such investments and services must seek to help vulnerable individuals and communities do more than "bounce back" from climate change-related harms: instead, they must support efforts to "bounce forward" to achieve full participation in an equitable, regenerative, and sustainable economy marked by inclusive engagement in decisions that affect daily life, with adequate resources to thrive before, after, and despite climate change impacts.

Climate Vulnerability and Climate Resilience

For purposes of this document, **climate vulnerability** describes the ways in which a person, community, or social system (a **receptor**) is susceptible to sustaining harm or damage (**impact**) as a result of climate change. Climate vulnerability is a function of (i) climate-related changes in conditions that are experienced by a receptor; and (ii) the receptor's sensitivity to experiencing impacts as a result of those changing conditions. **Climate resilience** describes the receptor's ability and capacity to cope with or adapt to impacts caused by climate change.

Climate vulnerability is related to physical factors (e.g., whether a community is likely to experience increases in the frequency of dangerously high heat events, or to be flooded during more frequent or intense storms) as well as social and economic factors including:

- Inequities in access to and benefits of education, economic investment, social capital, health protection initiatives, and/or government services;
- Institutionalized bias or exclusion with respect to political and decision-making power;
- Disparities in environmental and living conditions; and
- Disparities in individual, family, and community health status.

Urban, suburban, and rural communities experience climate vulnerability, but may be vulnerable in different ways, depending on the context and on the relative presence or absence of the above factors. An individual or community may be vulnerable with respect to multiple factors of vulnerability at once. The cumulative effects of these factors may contribute to heightened vulnerability.

Advancing Climate Justice Through California's Climate Change Adaptation Policy and Funding Decisions

In recent years, California has made progress in acknowledging and addressing the need for climate justice in its greenhouse-gas reduction policies and investments, although it has far to go to achieve success in that regard. However, California state and local leaders have done little to acknowledge and address frontline communities' climate vulnerability, or to help build their resilience to the ongoing and anticipated impacts of climate change. California must do more. Accordingly, **the Climate Justice Working Group offers the following vision, principles, and policy and funding recommendations to guide California's adaptation efforts through 2025.**

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Vision

By 2030, we envision a resilient California where our most vulnerable communities are ready to respond to the physical, environmental, economic and health impacts brought on by climate change, and thrive after climate events. California must proactively bring public and private investments into vulnerable communities to foster robust and thriving communities that are engaged, healthy, just, economically viable, and safe from environmental threats.

Guiding Principles

1. Actively engage frontline communities in research, planning, implementation, education, and decision making about potential climate change impacts and about the development, funding, implementation, and evaluation of adaptation and resilience policies. Create enabling conditions for frontline communities' early, continuous, and meaningful participation in the development of adaptation policy and funding decisions. Partner with local leaders and community-based organizations to enhance the effectiveness of adaptation research and innovation, education, decision making, and policy implementation. *This overarching principle applies to all of the subsequent climate justice principles and recommendations.*
2. Identify and reduce frontline communities' vulnerabilities to climate change, with a focus on physical, economic, and quality-of-life factors.
3. When planning for infrastructure investments, prioritize actions that increase the resilience of essential facilities and associated services that provide health care, food, drinking water, evacuation routes, and emergency shelter for frontline communities. Reduce community health and safety risks from potential damage to sensitive facilities such as water treatment plants, hazardous waste facilities, and power plants and transmission lines.
4. Promote adaptation policies, funding decisions, and implementation actions that increase training, employment and economic development opportunities among frontline communities. Where applicable, prioritize opportunities that advance a "just transition" from dependence on fossil fuels and further enhance community resilience to the impacts of climate change.
5. Promote and support regional and local adaptation efforts that generate multiple benefits across sectors.
6. During planning and implementation of land use and community development decisions, consider and avoid negative consequences of actions, including displacement, that could inadvertently increase frontline communities' and individuals' climate vulnerability.
7. Promote adaptation co-benefits of toxic chemical and greenhouse gas reduction policies by supporting those that also reduce frontline communities' climate vulnerability and enhance their resilience.
8. Ensure that adaptation policies, funding decisions, and implementation actions comply with relevant laws and policies that are designed to protect and advance civil rights and environmental justice.

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9. Promote local, regional, and state agency transparency, accountability, and adaptive management by developing and applying easy-to-understand climate justice metrics, data and information resources, and annual reporting protocols.
10. Identify needed funding, establish needed funding mechanisms, and allocate adequate funding to support adaptation policy development, implementation, and evaluation in frontline communities.

Policy and Funding Recommendations

- By 2020, California state agencies should complete regional cross-sector vulnerability assessments that:
 - Provide for frontline community members to participate meaningfully in processes of information-gathering, research, analysis, and review.
 - Identify and prioritize climate change-related threats to the region's frontline communities.
 - Assess how existing critical infrastructure and public services will handle changing conditions, and how the state can strengthen existing infrastructure and services, and develop new infrastructure and services, to enhance climate resilience and prevent displacement.
 - Determine how state agencies will integrate their climate justice policy development, planning, and implementation activities.
 - Provide direction and resources, such as funding and capacity building, to local and regional agencies on integrating climate justice in planning efforts, policy development and implementation, and distribution of resources. Ensure these local and regional agencies are also engaging frontline communities in their research, planning, implementation, and decision-making.
- By 2020, California state agencies should establish regional goals, targets, and implementation strategies for building climate resilience in frontline communities. These elements should be integrated into the state's 2020 climate change adaptation strategy. Areas of focus should include, but not be limited to:
 - Access to economic opportunities.
 - Access to public health facilities and services.
 - Access to safe and affordable drinking water and healthy food.
 - Access to affordable housing.
 - Access to natural resources, parks, and recreational opportunities.
 - Access to transportation.
 - Access to public funds and technical assistance.
 - Regional equity metrics that enable annual evaluation of progress toward resilience for frontline communities.
 - Estimates of funding needed to achieve climate justice for frontline communities in each region.

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- By 2020, based on the regional assessments, updated adaptation strategy, and funding estimates California should immediately identify additional funding and funding mechanisms needed to achieve climate justice and equity for frontline communities.
- By 2020, California should identify, raise, and invest at least \$1 billion, and by 2025, at least \$10 billion through appropriate funding sources to:
 - Ensure frontline community members are involved in all aspects of climate adaptation and resilience policy research, development, planning, decision making, implementation, and evaluation.
 - Complete, for each region, community emergency preparedness plans, including maps and strategies for providing relocation and community services to frontline communities in case of disasters.
 - Make critical infrastructure and public service improvements in frontline communities consistent with regional assessments, goals, targets, and implementation strategies.
 - Develop an adequate supply of affordable, energy efficient housing in low-income and frontline communities.
 - Support a just transition to a non-extractive, clean energy economy in ways that provide multiple benefits to frontline communities, including job training, targeted employment, and generation of wealth and health.

An electronic version of this report can be found at the Healthy World for All website, www.healthyworldforall.org/ClimateChange.