



Climate Equity Compendium

A resource document to advance climate equity

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CLIMATE EQUITY COMPENDIUM

A RESOURCE DOCUMENT TO ADVANCE CLIMATE EQUITY

INTRODUCTION

The Climate Equity Compendium provides resources for local planners in the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) region to advocate for and implement equitable and actionable solutions for their jurisdictions' climate adaptation efforts. To develop this resource document, SCAG reached out to 62 local jurisdictions with both SB 535 Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) and prior climate engagement to understand the challenges they faced in incorporating climate equity into the planning process and drafted the compendium based on the concerns communicated from the responses. The compendium focuses on the major concerns for local agencies: providing resources to address and assist with lack of staff capacity and funding and difficulties with finding relevant data and conducting outreach. The document is a dynamic document that will change depending on arising needs to advance climate equity.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines *climate equity* as the goal of recognizing and addressing the unequal burdens made worse by climate change, while ensuring that all people share the benefits of climate protection efforts. Climate equity is necessary because it protects those most impacted by the ramifications of climate change while also receiving the least support. The federal government has affirmed a focus on climate equity through Executive Order 14008 and the Justice 40 Initiative, which is an effort to send 40 percent of certain federal climate funds to disadvantaged communities. Throughout this report, SCAG refers to environmental justice (EJ), a term closely related to climate equity, but defined by the EPA as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

This document begins with a summary of available federal and state data resources and tools to explain the context of climate issues and identify the most prevalent hazards communities face. The next section includes relevant legislation and funding resources, provided to help agencies needing guidance or lacking capacity to research funding opportunities. Lastly, this report highlights model policies of successful climate adaptation efforts throughout the region and best practices for outreach to empower residents throughout the process.

CONTEXT

DATA RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Data resources are critical in establishing a deeper understanding of the people and environments facing the effects of climate change. This background information is necessary for procuring grants, informing planning efforts, and prioritizing engagement efforts. Several organizations manage data related to climate equity, and it can be difficult to know when to use each resource. This section summarizes the most relevant and complete data resources, including the nature of the information provided.

FEDERAL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

[EJScreen](#) is an environmental justice mapping tool developed by the EPA based on nationally consistent data. EJScreen combines several environmental and socioeconomic indicators, along with EJ and supplemental indices, to provide a full range of information for a geographic area. The tool may help users identify areas with (1) people of color and/or low-income populations, (2) potential environmental quality issues and (3) a combination of environmental and demographic indicators that are greater than usual, along with other potential factors. The 13 EJ indices, which are created by combining environmental and socioeconomic information, include Particulate Matter 2.5, Ozone, Diesel Particulate Matter, Air Toxics Cancer Risk, Air Toxics Respiratory Hazard Index, Toxic Releases to Air, Traffic Proximity, Lead Paint, RMP Facility Proximity, Hazardous Waste Proximity, Superfund Proximity, Underground Storage Tanks and Wastewater Discharge.

As directed by Executive Order 14008, described later in this report, the Council on Economic Quality developed the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) (CEJST), a geospatial mapping tool that identifies disadvantaged communities facing burdens, such as climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater and workforce development. Each indicator has a certain threshold for what is considered burdened, and census tracts are displayed on the map if they meet each metric and are at or above the 65th percentile for low income. Census tracts are considered burdened for climate change if they are at or above the 90th percentile for expected agriculture loss rate, expected building loss rate, expected population loss rate, projected flood risk, or projected wildfire risk. Additionally, census tracts are considered disadvantaged for energy if they are at or above the 90th percentile for energy cost or PM2.5 levels.

STATE RESOURCES AND TOOLS

[CalEnviroScreen](#) is a tool created by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment to map pollution burden and population characteristics across the state of California. The indicators include public health metrics, environmental hazards, geographic features and socioeconomic factors. The [Disadvantaged Communities map](#) designates communities with the highest CalEnviroScreen scores, calculated as a combination of their pollution burden and population characteristics. This tool allows cities to identify the communities facing the highest pollution burden, so that further efforts can be focused where the effects will be most valuable. Most state grant programs request information on disadvantaged communities per CalEnviroScreen for funding opportunities.

The [California Healthy Places Index: Extreme Heat Edition](#) maps the percentile ranking of the number of days per year of extreme heat, defined as days above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, between 2035 and 2064. Percentiles are based on the median number of extreme heat days, 79.9 days, for communities in California. Agencies can search by jurisdiction to find the specific number of average days above 90 degrees Fahrenheit projected to occur in a year. This knowledge can build the understanding of the efforts needed in the future to mitigate extreme heat, and where funding, technology and climate action should be focused now.

SCAG RESOURCES AND TOOLS

The [Racial Equity in the SCAG Region](#) StoryMap is based on SCAG's Racial Equity Baseline Conditions Report (2022), which explains the demographics of Southern California and details the disparities and inequities facing the region. This StoryMap provides regional level information on several equity indicators that agencies can use to understand the condition of their communities and why an emphasis on climate equity in planning is consequential.

SCAG's [Regional Data Platform](#) provides data and tools that guide planning at all levels and strengthen collaboration between jurisdictions and partners across Southern California. Users can find data resources in the categories of land use, environment, planning and transportation. The tool also gives planners the ability to request technical assistance directly from SCAG for one-on-one training, support with data analysis or feedback on the tools.

SCAG hosts regular [Regional Planning Working Groups](#), including the Equity Working Group, Sustainable & Resilient Communities Working Group, and Natural & Farm Lands Conservation Working Group. These working groups offer an open public forum for information sharing and often share resources relevant to climate equity.

Toolbox Tuesdays are SCAG-hosted trainings that invite local planners, community members and academics from the planning field to offer planning knowledge on various topics, such as equity, environmental justice, traffic safety, housing and transportation. Toolbox Tuesdays are offered on a monthly basis and are eligible for AICP Certification Maintenance credits.

CALIFORNIA CLIMATE EQUITY LEGISLATION

California has passed several laws that require local governments to take climate action. To ensure that climate action is implemented equitably, SCAG and other organizations developed resources to help jurisdictions with limited capacity meet requirements. Laws relevant to climate equity include Assembly Bill (AB) 32, Senate Bill (SB) 375, SB 535, SB 1000, and SB 379.

[AB 32](#) (Nunez, 2006), the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, was the nation's first law to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with the goal to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. In 2016, California strengthened its goal to reduce GHG emissions to [40 percent below 1990 levels](#) by 2030 (CARB, 2022). AB 32 directed the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to collect fees from major sources of GHG emissions to fund the state's GHG reduction programs. [SB 535](#) (De Leon, 2012) required that at least 25 percent of these Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds go to projects benefiting disadvantaged communities, with at least 10 percent of projects located directly within the communities. Disadvantaged communities are defined by the previously referenced CalEnviroScreen metrics. To meet AB 32 targets, [SB 375](#) (Steinberg, 2008), also known as the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, directed CARB to set regional goals for automobile and light truck emissions, and required the integration of transportation, land use and housing planning between regions to encourage more efficient communities. In addition, SB 375 required regional metropolitan planning organizations, like SCAG, to create Sustainable Communities Strategies, which are long range plans that integrate local transportation and land use planning for the purposes of meeting the regional greenhouse gas emissions targets set by CARB. SCAG updates its Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy, currently referred to as Connect SoCal, every four years.

SB 1000 (Leyva 2016) requires local jurisdictions in California with identified disadvantaged communities (per the SB 535 definition) to address environmental justice in their general plans by developing an environmental justice element or by integrating environmental justice into the goals, policies and objectives throughout their general plan. There are several resources for implementing SB 1000, including the California Environmental Justice Alliance's [SB 1000 Toolkit](#) and a [list of tools, resources and examples](#) from the California Office of the Attorney General.

[SB 379](#) (Jackson, 2015) requires local governments to integrate climate adaptation into their general plans. This includes setting objectives and policies based on the specific vulnerabilities of each jurisdiction, as identified in a vulnerability assessment, and listing implementation measures. Depending on whether the local agency has a Local

Hazard Mitigation Plan, upon the next revision of the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan or the next revision of the General Plan, the Safety Element of the General Plan must be updated to include climate adaptation and resiliency strategies. SCAG provides several resources for implementing SB 379, including [a presentation](#) and [recording](#) from the February 2022 Toolbox Tuesday training on SB 379 compliance, the [SB 379 Compliance Curriculum for Local Jurisdictions](#) (June 2021) and the interactive [Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Tool](#).

FUNDING-RELATED LEGISLATION

The lack of capacity and funding can majorly impede climate action. [EPA reports](#) show disadvantaged communities are both hit hardest by climate hazards and located in jurisdictions that lack funding, support and staffing to address these impacts. Climate- and equity-related grants can help to bridge the gap and ensure that all communities can take climate action. As a result of state and federal legislation, many grants specifically target jurisdictions that include disadvantaged communities and support partnerships between community-based organizations, nonprofits and local governments.

[Executive Order 14008](#), signed in 2021, asserted the federal government's goal to center the climate crisis in policy. Notably, the order created the [Justice40 Initiative](#), requiring that 40 percent of certain federal investments in climate change, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution and the development of critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure go to disadvantaged communities that are overburdened by pollution.

[The Inflation Reduction Act](#), passed in August 2022, provided the funding for several new grant programs related to climate action, equity and justice. The first of these programs is the [Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program](#). Under this program, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, states and municipalities are eligible for grants for the removal, replacement or retrofitting of freeways, capacity building to increase community involvement in transportation planning, efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of transportation facilities on humans or the environment and general planning and capacity building in disadvantaged communities. The program has \$3 billion in total funding over five years, including \$117 million for fence-line air monitoring, \$50 million for ambient air quality monitoring and \$20 million for methane monitoring.

Another funding program created by the Inflation Reduction Act is the [Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grants](#). These grant funding activities benefit disadvantaged communities in overcoming climate pollution issues. Activities can include community-led air and pollution monitoring, prevention and mitigation as well as investments in low emission technology, urban heat and wildfire mitigation, climate resilience and adaptation and increased engagement of disadvantaged communities in public processes. Groups eligible for Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grants include community-based organizations or nonprofits, partnerships between community-based organizations and partnerships between tribes, local governments, academic institutions and community-based organizations. There is \$3 billion in funding available over five years, with \$2.8 billion meant for grants and \$200 million meant for technical assistance.

The California Strategic Growth Council's [Community Assistance for Climate Equity Program](#) includes both the Regional Climate Collaboratives Program (RCC) and the Partners Advancing Climate Equity Program (PACE). The RCC Grant Program provides funds in three-year terms for community-based capacity building and supports partnerships across various sectors to encourage climate action in their regions. As of round two funding, the RCC Grant Program has \$8.5 million available, with small grants between \$500,000-\$999,999 each, and large grants between \$1 million and \$1.75 million each. These grants are available to California Native American Tribes, community-based organizations and nonprofits, local public agencies, small businesses and other organizations with experience in community-based outreach and technical assistance. Round one grantees include the [Gateway Cities Regional](#)

[Climate Collaborative](#), which will use the grant and collaboration opportunity to help cities create climate action plans and community-driven responses to climate change in underserved communities.

SCAG provides a regularly updated list of grant opportunities through the Grant Opportunities webpage. Stay informed on current grant opportunities by joining the [Money Monday mailing list](#).

IMPLEMENTATION

DEFINING CLIMATE EQUITY

The term *equity* is widely used across different professional fields and organizations; thus, it is imperative for agencies to define the term specific to their unique context. This definition should be developed with the community to properly diagnose resident and community concerns and seek solutions that correspond to the community's goals. In the context of climate planning and adaptation, community involvement can include just and fair inclusion in the planning process, where everyone can equally participate and prosper under climate change mitigation and adaptation practices.

Climate change and resiliency planning should not just center around carbon emission goals and a set of numerical targets but should also prioritize the human experience of climate change, particularly for residents of historically marginalized communities. Given the historical disadvantages, certain communities require different mechanisms to reach equality given the dissimilar starting foundations.

Understanding the history of a community can aid in the development of an equity definition and goals for a community. The region's historical policies, community relations, baseline conditions for residents, environmental landscape and how it all relates to climate change are important aspects to consider. Examples include community tree coverage and how it correlates to the heat island effect, or air pollution and its disproportionate effect on low-income communities of color. A concerted effort to engage with local communities through outreach strategies can also help bridge the gap between the unequal power dynamic of residents and decision makers. Working with local community-based organizations with roots and trust in the area can help the process organically. The City of Long Beach Office of Equity lays out their process in defining equity in their [Equity Toolkit](#), located on health and human services webpage, and can serve as a model for other cities.

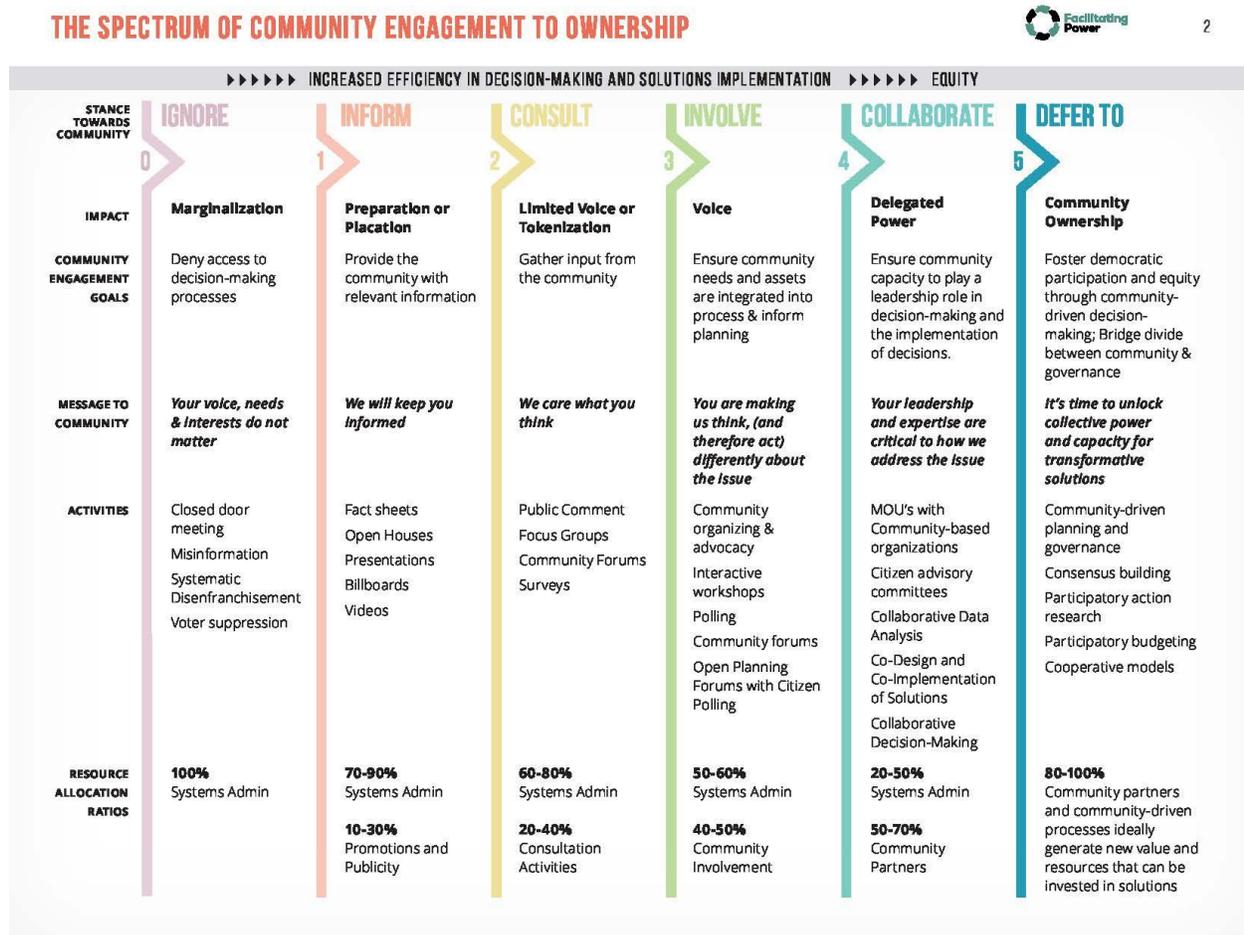
Once properly defined, it is imperative that plans and executive decisions be analyzed under a lens that considers climate equity. The City of Austin's [Climate Equity Plan](#) holds seven important considerations for new planning developments which include health, affordability, accessibility, just transition, cultural preservation, community capacity and accountability. This tool provides a scorecard for new ideas in the planning sector, assigning a numerical value to equity impacts on local communities, such as a +1, 0, or -1. Plans with a negative or 0 score are considered to have diminishing or neutral impact on a given plan and would need to be revised to avoid perpetuating injustices.

OUTREACH

The goal of outreach is to reflect the needs and voices of impacted communities in the policies as clearly as possible. In the past, local government measures have had disproportionate negative effects on disadvantaged communities, creating a sense of distrust. To move into a more equitable future, engagement with communities needs to be meaningful, transparent and centered around the communities being impacted. Throughout the planning process, there are roles for staff in various positions to assist in equitable planning and implementation. Community-based

organizations can create a sense of community and educate residents, local government staff can increase the community’s voice in the planning process and philanthropic partners can ensure that there are adequate resources for community plans. When the whole community is involved in the planning process, outcomes are more equitable and desirable for everyone.

[The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#) tool, created by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, outlines valuable strategies to center the voices and experiences of the communities directly impacted by planning and implementation decisions. The spectrum outlines how to transition from a position of ignoring disadvantaged communities to informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and, finally, deferring to them.



Source: [Facilitating Power, The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, 2019](#)

BEST PRACTICES FOR OUTREACH

According to the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, the following actions can be taken by local government staff at varying points in the planning process to increase equitable outcomes:

- Co-fundraise with community-based organizations.
- Attend and sometimes co-plan community-based events and activities.
- Host capacity-building workshops to support community-driven policy development.
- Translate community priorities into policy.

- Co-develop equity metrics (or planning to implement pre-existing metrics).
- Conduct equity assessments of policy proposals.

Several cities in California also provide great examples of equitable outreach and community engagement:

- **Host a Community Conversation.** The City of Culver City initiated [conversations](#) with community voices to discuss individual, institutional and systemic racism, understanding how it impacts interpersonal interactions and institutional structures. The City of Long Beach hosted community conversations that engaged community members to help identify policy solutions that can economically benefit marginalized communities.
- **Build Community Partnerships.** The City of San Jose partnered with community-based organizations to ensure that community members' voices were reflected into [final policy recommendations](#) during their charter review process. To best reach a more diverse set of voices, they paired culturally appropriate community-based organizations with each community they aimed to reach and detailed specific goals for outreach to each group.

It is important to ensure that outreach events are accessible to the communities they are intended to reach. The following practices can be considered for more equitable outreach outcomes:

- Conduct multi-lingual outreach in the languages most prevalent in the region; this includes providing translation and interpretation services at meetings as needed.
- Ensure reading materials are written in simple language to accommodate people unfamiliar with policy work.
- Keep in mind the timing, location of events and accessibility by public transportation.
- Consider holding events in familiar community spaces.

For more equitable outreach strategies, see [SCAG's Disadvantaged Communities Planning Initiative](#), [Outreach Best Practices and Equity Framework](#) and the Engage and Co-Power section of SCAG's [Equity Resource Guide](#).

MODEL POLICIES

The model policies provided in this section highlight successful climate adaptation efforts throughout the region and best practices for outreach to empower residents throughout the process. As mentioned previously, the [SB 1000 Toolkit](#), created by the California Environmental Justice Alliance, focuses on helping local jurisdictions comply with SB 1000 requirements by developing an environmental justice element or incorporating environmental justice goals, policies and objectives into their general plans. The toolkit includes model policies and practices that tie equity into climate planning in general.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Climate change produces significant adverse impacts to many communities, especially disadvantaged communities. The SB 1000 Toolkit includes a specific section on addressing climate change impacts on vulnerable populations because they often incur disproportionately adverse impacts. The following policies highlight model practices related to climate and EJ:

Examples of policies for climate hazards:

1. Plan emergency responses to climate disasters, such as fire and smoke, that consider the impacts on vulnerable communities and how emergency supplies, such as respirator masks, will be distributed equitably.

2. Limit new development in hazardous areas such as the Wildland Urban Interface or landslide hazard areas to reduce community's exposure to climate disasters.
3. Prioritize hazardous material cleanup along the coast and in high flood risk areas to reduce contamination due to flooding.
4. Assess climate impacts on public facilities and community buildings.

Examples of policies for engaging disadvantaged communities:

1. Prioritize programs and partnerships that provide the most vulnerable populations with resources for increased energy efficiency and residential retrofitting for reduced or no cost.
2. Identify populations with limited access to emergency communication lines to assist planning for climate-related emergency events and to address access challenges during nonemergency times to build community adaptive capacities (i.e., improved transportation access and communication lines to underserved areas).
3. Improve emergency communication and transportation to vulnerable populations. Increase the community's capacity to respond to climate emergencies during non-emergency times.
4. Identify vacant lots and areas that can be turned into community gardens or city parks to increase green space in disadvantaged communities.

CLIMATE AND SAFETY

SB 379 requires that local jurisdictions incorporate climate planning into their general plans by updating the safety elements of their general plan. This can be accomplished through a vulnerability assessment, climate action plan and implementation goals.

A climate action plan is a detailed framework that specifies the actions a jurisdiction will take to combat climate-related risks. The Institute for Local Government provides [a list of climate action plans](#) of several California cities and counties that each include their own projects, programs and strategies. The following are examples of climate action plans within the SCAG region:

- The City of Santa Monica's [Climate Action and Adaptation Plan](#) uses an equity lens to prioritize climate equity in each of their goals and ensure equity in benefits to the community.
- The Gateway Cities Council of Governments Climate Adaptation Model General Plan Language Guide provides [model language](#) for use in general plans. Policies they suggest include:
 - Requiring capital improvement projects and other city plans to identify how they will support or address climate adaptation goals.
 - Collaborate regionally so that climate action plans include both local and regional information.
 - Ensure that climate adaptation strategies identify contributing causes of climate vulnerability, including why certain populations are at greater risk.

A vulnerability assessment identifies specific risks facing a jurisdiction. SCAG's Climate Risk & Vulnerability Assessment Tool provides technical assistance for jurisdictions looking to create a vulnerability assessment. SCAG's [SoCal Adaptation Planning Guide](#) references several best practices for creating vulnerability assessments as well. These include:

- Using participatory asset mapping for community input on the vulnerability assessment. This can be accomplished through posters or allowing public access to GIS maps.
- Creating a timeline of local hazards and natural disasters through community storytelling.
- Interviewing stakeholders to understand who is most exposed to the assessed risks.

For more general policies, SCAG's [Toolbox for Healthy Cities](#) recommends several approaches that emphasize healthy outcomes for the entire community. Many of these recommendations are relevant to climate equity and can be a good starting point to expanding the role that equity plays in city planning.

- Adopt Complete Streets policies that ensure that streets are safe and accessible for all modes of travel and transportation (ex: [October 2014 - Metro Complete Streets Policy - Metro Sustainability](#)).
- Introduce programs like the [Transit-Oriented Communities program](#) in the City of Los Angeles, which encourages building affordable housing near transit stations.
- Provide air filtration for homes near freeways.
- Develop heat response plans and local cooling centers; partner with community-based organizations to communicate plans and information to local communities.
- Require cool roofs and cool pavements for new buildings and development.
- Implement capacity building and technical assistance programs to strengthen the skills, knowledge, relationships, and power of communities to participate in decision-making processes related to climate resilience

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

SCAG has many resources for incorporating climate equity into the planning process. For further assistance please reference SCAG's [Climate Change](#), [Sustainability](#) and [Environmental Justice](#) webpages.