

State Approaches to Climate Change Planning January 2020

Background

In 2019, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers issued Executive Orders 38 and 52, directing state agencies to, among other things: assist the new Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy in developing and implementing a Clean Energy Plan to help the state adapt to and mitigate climate change; and assist the new Governor's Task Force on Climate Change in its work.^{1,2}

That year, Wisconsin also joined the U.S. Climate Alliance, committing to:

- implement policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025 per the Paris Agreement;
- track and report progress to the global community; and
- accelerate new and existing policies to reduce carbon pollution and promote clean energy deployment.

The U.S. Climate Alliance is a bipartisan coalition of governors committed to meeting the Paris Agreement goals. The Alliance focuses on the 24 member states helping each other accelerate climate solutions.

Wisconsin has significant room for growth in addressing climate change. To inform that effort, this brief summarizes policy research and interviews on how other states address climate change.

Findings

- **State approaches vary and depend** on the state's unique context.
- Legislation is the preferred **enabling framework** for effective, long-term action. However, states often use executive orders during divided government to set state priorities and goals, direct agencies, leverage partnerships, and set the stage for future legislation.
- States usually develop one or more **climate action plans** (or recommendation reports) and subsequent updates to address mitigation, adaptation and/or resilience.
- Thirty-four states have developed state climate action plans/recommendations in recent decades.³ At least 24 states are actively addressing climate change.⁴
- At least **eight states lead** the way on adaptation and/or mitigation: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon and Washington.⁵
- Effective approaches use **science**.
 - Some examples include emissions modeling, downscaled climate modeling, estimating costs of strategies, and using emissions data to measure the effectiveness of initiatives.
- Some **notable characteristics** of state approaches to climate change include:⁶
 - meaningful **public engagement**, especially with disadvantaged communities;
 - a **comprehensive** scope spanning such topics as public health, energy, transportation, resilience, climate finance, natural and working lands, green jobs, etc.;
 - more recently, a focus on **environmental justice**;
 - an **ambitious** long-term state emissions target (80-90% below 2005 levels by 2050) and one or more less ambitious short-term targets to gauge progress;
 - regulatory **statutes**, greenhouse gas **emissions mandates**, and extensive programmatic actions;
 - implementation plans that **clearly identify** responsible entities;

- stringent **monitoring and reporting** or evaluation; and
- participation in **multi-state climate initiatives**.
- **Progress can be intermittent** and affected by the leadership and support of agencies and lawmakers.
- **Communities of color and low-income communities** disproportionately experience the negative impacts of climate change.⁷
 - These communities and **First Nations**⁸ have historical knowledge and experience that can inform state climate planning and implementation.
- Addressing climate change is a **race against time**. Consider starting to implement what is possible now, while developing longer-term, comprehensive plans to implement later.
- Consider building solutions at the **local level**.
 - This helps address community needs directly and leverages local governments' ability to direct resources to solutions on the ground on matters often beyond the state's purview.
- Other details **specific to state agencies**:⁹
 - An agency, executive office or governor-appointed entity often leads **climate planning** in partnership with external consultants and agency staff. State agencies then implement, monitor, and report on the plan's initiatives.
 - Agencies form **coordinating teams** inside each involved agency and across agencies.
 - Some states have three or more **staff** dedicated to climate planning, monitoring and reporting, while other states spread the work across existing staff.
 - Some states dedicate **funding** for plan development, up to \$2 million for a plan or report.
 - It tends to take one to two **years to develop** an effective plan, updated plan, or monitoring report.
 - It tends to take a year to publish a **greenhouse gas emissions inventory**.
 - Each state uses a combination of national and state-specific tools and data sources.
 - States then update the inventory annually, often with one to three full-time staff dedicated to this work.
 - Agencies can make considerable impact by addressing the ways they and their partners **subsidize fossil fuels**.
 - Collaborating with the **private sector** can maximize impacts.

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¹ https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/executive_orders/2019_tony_evers/2019-38.pdf

² https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/executive_orders/2019_tony_evers/2019-52.pdf

³ Center for Climate and Energy Solutions: [U.S. State Climate Action Plans](#).

⁴ U.S. Climate Alliance: [Inventory of Climate and Clean Energy Policies](#).

⁵ Based on: a) Georgetown Climate Center's [State and Local Adaptation Plans webpage](#); and b) Alexander, Serena E., "From Planning to Action: [An Evaluation of State Level Climate Action Plans](#)," 2016, ETD Archive, 918.

⁶ This list includes many findings from Alexander.

⁷ NAACP. Environmental and Climate Justice. <https://www.naacp.org/issues/environmental-justice/>

⁸ Tribal Adaptation Menu Team. 2019. Dibaginjigaadeg Anishinaabe Ezhitwaad: A Tribal Climate Adaptation Menu. Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Odanah, Wisconsin. <https://www.glifwc.org/ClimateChange/TribalAdaptationMenuV1.pdf>

⁹ From the compilation of findings and the executive summary of the Wisconsin DNR-DHS informal survey on state climate planning, finalized January 2020. In late 2019, Dominic Holt collaborated with Jon Meiman and Colleen Moran at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) on interviewing staff from the executive branches of Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Washington State on state climate planning. These states are or have been leaders in addressing climate change.