

Why Is Climate Justice Important?



Climate change affects all New Yorkers, but not all New Yorkers experience environmental burdens or climate change vulnerabilities equally across the State. Climate change is a threat multiplier, and is further exacerbated by additional factors or stressors that can add increasing burdens to communities.

- **Pollution, extreme weather events, and rising temperatures** have a disproportionate impact on historically marginalized communities, including people of color, indigenous populations, low-income wage earners, and women.
- **Structural disadvantages**, like accessing clean air and water, affordable energy and housing, and quality employment opportunities, means that Disadvantaged Communities are more vulnerable to climate risk.

How New York's Climate Act Prioritizes Climate Justice

The Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG), a 13-member group comprised of rural and urban environmental justice community representatives and various State representatives, played a key role in elevating the considerations of Disadvantaged Communities for incorporation in the Scoping Plan recommendations. The CJWG provided feedback on recommendations by all seven Advisory Panels and the Just Transition Working Group.

The CJWG also led efforts to identify Disadvantaged Communities. The [draft criteria](#) include 45 indicators that measure climate-related risks, health vulnerabilities, and socio-economic factors. Using this draft criteria, 35 percent of New York census tracts are considered Disadvantaged Communities, with geographic distribution across all 10 regions.

Charting an Equitable Path Forward

To address inequities and past discrimination, New York will advance climate justice by ensuring that Disadvantaged Communities directly participate in, and benefit from, the State's climate actions and the transition to a clean energy economy.

The Scoping Plan outlines several strategies to ensure vulnerable populations and communities are protected from the impacts of climate change and create quality jobs for all New Yorkers in a thriving clean energy economy. The implementation of this holistic plan will create a model where achieving a high standard of economic well-being and health in every community is the baseline condition of climate action.

Directing Benefits to Disadvantaged Communities

The Climate Act requires that Disadvantaged Communities receive a minimum of 35 percent, with a goal of 40 percent, of benefits on spending on clean energy and efficiency programs and investments in housing, pollution reduction, transportation, workforce development, and other key sectors.





Reducing Emissions and Pollution

- **Prioritizing emissions reduction in Disadvantaged Communities** will improve air quality and public health and ensure that decarbonization in these communities addresses existing disproportionate burdens in communities across the state. State government will lead by example in prioritizing emissions reductions from its building operations and vehicles in these communities.
- **Investing in Clean energy and energy efficiency** will advance health, environmental, and economic benefits for Disadvantaged Communities. This includes energy bill savings from home efficiency improvements, enhanced air quality from decarbonizing buildings, transportation, and power generation, workforce development and employment opportunities, and the remediation or redevelopment of underused sites, such as brownfields, abandoned commercial sites, landfills, or otherwise dilapidated land.
- **Ensuring Community Engagement:** State entities will work to improve engagement with residents and representatives of Disadvantaged Communities to better incorporate climate justice in State decision-making.
- **Implementing the Scoping Plan** will be informed by recommendations from the [Barriers and Opportunities Report](#). To achieve this, State entities will assess their policies and programs to ensure inclusive processes, streamlined program access, and that emerging issues are addressed.
- **Improving transparency and accounting through ongoing progress reports** addressing disproportionate climate impacts faced by Disadvantaged Communities and achieving the Climate Act's requirement to direct at least 35 percent of benefits to these communities.

Climate Justice in Action

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is overseeing a community air monitoring initiative in ten priority Disadvantaged Communities facing disproportionate air pollution. A fleet of zero-emission vehicles equipped with air quality sensors have been deployed across the ten communities to collect and measure air pollution for one year. The vehicles take measurements block-by-block, at different times of day, and throughout the year to provide comprehensive, community-level air quality assessments.

The results from the ten communities will inform DEC's monitoring practices and strategies to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Local efforts will have a central role, with \$3 million in grants directly supporting capacity building and development of community-led air monitoring initiatives.

Air monitoring in the Bronx, Buffalo/Niagara Falls/Tonawanda, Capital Region, and Manhattan launched in June 2022, while the other communities including Rochester, Syracuse, Mount Vernon/Yonkers/New Rochelle, Queens, and Long Island launched in September 2022.



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