

Disadvantaged Communities Criteria Development Frequent Questions

1. Q: What is a disadvantaged community?

A: To ensure New York State’s investments and actions to advance the Climate Law benefit all communities and address climate inequities, the State’s Climate Justice Working Group is releasing draft criteria to identify disadvantaged communities. DACs are those that bear the burdens of negative public health effects, environmental pollution, impacts of climate change, and possess certain socioeconomic criteria, or comprise high-concentrations of low- and moderate- income households. The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) required the Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG) to establish criteria to identify disadvantaged communities statewide.

2. Q: How did the CJWG identify disadvantaged communities?

A: The CJWG assessed available data and information on environmental burdens, climate change risks, population characteristics, and health vulnerabilities at the community level and then developed a methodology for scoring communities based on these indicators. The draft criteria contain 45 indicators, please refer to Section 4 of the Draft Disadvantaged Communities Criteria Technical Documentation for more detail.

3. Q: Were additional indicators considered?

A: The CJWG identified and considered 150 indicators while developing the draft disadvantaged communities criteria. After assessing the available data, including quality, level of granularity, and correlation to other indicators, the CJWG settled on 45 indicators for the draft criteria. Please refer to Section 8 of the Draft Disadvantaged Communities Criteria Technical Documentation for more detail.

4. Q: Will the disadvantaged communities list be updated? Will the CJWG consider new or additional data in their reviews?

A: The CJWG will review the disadvantaged communities’ criteria on an annual basis and make updates where necessary. During annual reviews, the CJWG will examine available data to determine if the disadvantaged communities’ criteria and list census tracts require modifications. Any changes to weights or the criteria, or availability of new data will be reviewed by the CJWG and State agency staff.

5. Q: Why is (or isn’t) my community listed as a disadvantaged community?

A: Communities covered by the draft disadvantaged communities criteria were identified through a process that considers “Environmental Burden and Climate Change Risks” as well as “Population Characteristics and Health Vulnerabilities,” to align with the Climate Act guidance. To be identified as a draft disadvantaged community, a census tract needs to have a moderate-to-high score on both components, or a high score on one component and moderate score on

the other component. Therefore, some communities that may have relatively high sociodemographic, economic or health vulnerabilities, but low scores for environmental burdens and climate change risks, and vice versa, are not identified as draft disadvantaged communities. More detail on how each census tract ranks with respect to the environmental burden, climate change risks, population characteristics, and health vulnerabilities can be found in the Appendix to the Technical Documentation.

In addition to the communities that are designated as disadvantaged communities, low-income households are included in the criteria only for the purpose of allocating, tracking or reporting clean energy or energy efficiency investments. Additional details on the process for identifying disadvantaged communities can be found in the Draft Disadvantaged Communities Criteria Technical Documentation.

6. Q: What is a Census Tract?

A: Census tracts are geographic units defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Census tracts are relatively small units that are statistical subdivisions of counties. On average, there are about 4,000 people and 1,500 households per census tract. The geographic sizes of census tracts vary, and the size is generally dependent on the population density of an area. For more information on what a census tract is please visit the U.S. Census Bureau Glossary [here](#).

7. Q: How are disadvantaged communities different from potential environmental justice areas (PEJAs)?

A: PEJAs are U.S. Census block groups of 250 to 500 households each that, in the Census, had populations that met or exceeded at least one of the following statistical thresholds:

1. At least 52.42% of the population in an urban area reported themselves to be members of minority groups; or
2. At least 26.28% of the population in a rural area reported themselves to be members of minority groups; or
3. At least 22.82% of the population in an urban or rural area had household incomes below the federal poverty level.

Pursuant to the Climate Act, disadvantaged communities are identified at the census tract level and based on geographic, public health, environmental hazard, and socioeconomic criteria, which includes:

1. Areas burdened by cumulative environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative public health effects;
2. Areas with concentrations of people that are of low income, high unemployment, high rent burden, low levels of home ownership, low levels of educational attainment, or members of groups that have historically experienced discrimination based on race or ethnicity; and
3. Areas vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.