



Office of Sustainability Climate Justice Screening Tool Guide

[I. Introduction to Climate Justice](#)

[II. Climate Justice Screening Tool Use](#)

[III. Climate Justice Case Studies](#)

[IV. Glossary of Key Climate Justice Terms](#)

I. Introduction to Climate Justice

Defining Climate Equity and Justice

***Climate Equity** is having access to information, relationships, land, and resources needed to have sovereignty and self-direction in response to climate crisis events and long-term sustainability that is community-led, deeply informed, organized, prepared for rapid response, and well-resourced.*

***Climate Justice** is the commitment to ensuring that all Asheville communities, especially Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, are able to achieve Climate Equity, and the recognition that these communities are disproportionately impacted by structural and environmental racism and are most vulnerable to climate crisis events.*

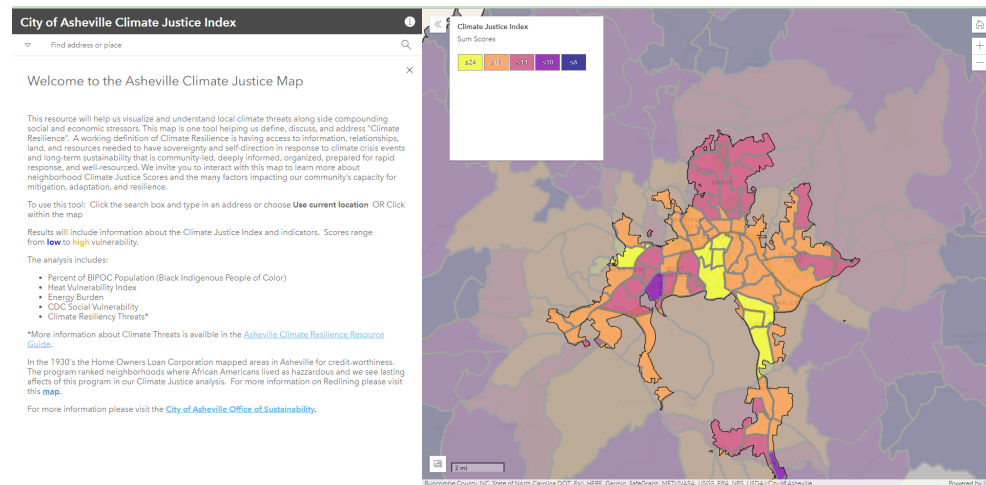
Asheville Climate Threats & Affected Neighborhoods

Asheville's primary climate threats are flooding, landslides, wildfire, and extreme heat. Other areas of climate vulnerability include water shortage, flooding, runoff and erosion, and supply chain threats. Addressing these threats requires mitigation, adaptation, and resilience building; examples of these options can be found in the City's [Climate Resilience Assessment](#).

Building community resilience happens on the individual, household, and community level. Examples of strategies to help residents become more resilient to extreme weather impacts are outlined in the [Climate Resilience Resource Guide](#).

Which areas are most vulnerable? Who is most affected?

The City's [Climate Justice Data Map](#) was created to visualize local climate threats alongside compounding social and economic stressors. This map helps to identify how neighborhoods are impacted by climate threats and non-climate stressors.



Frontline Community Perspectives on Climate Justice

The following community-defined understanding of climate resiliency and concerns about climate crisis response emerged through a series of interviews and story circles with BIPOC leaders living and working in and with City of Asheville's frontline communities, conducted by Tepeyac Consulting in collaboration with the Office of Sustainability in 2020.

Community Resilience is the presence of the "three pillars" that make a community self-sustaining:

- Economic power;
- Healthy environments; and,
- Strong social networks.

Concerns about Climate Crisis in BIPOC and Frontline Communities were:

- Displacement of Black communities;
- Inequitable evacuation plans and emergency responses;
- Impacts of structural racism on environmental inequities and exposure to pollution;
- Access to healthy food and transportation during a climate crisis;
- Lack of conversation within BIPOC communities about how to prepare and respond; and,

- Lack of awareness of the direct impacts of the climate crisis on BIPOC homes and neighborhoods.

This Climate Justice screening tool incorporates the concerns raised in those interviews and story circles, and highlights practical ways the City of Asheville can support community resilience.

II. [Climate Justice Screening Tool](#) Use

What? This screening tool was developed by the Office of Sustainability in collaboration with Tepeyac Consulting to help City staff and City Council members identify and understand the Climate Justice implications of the City's work, budgeting, and legislative decisions. The questions in the tool are based on interviews and story circles with frontline community members conducted by Tepeyac Consulting in 2020. The tool was designed to be used alongside the GARE Racial Equity Toolkit, but can also be used as a stand-alone planning tool.

Why? To ensure that Climate Justice issues are proactively considered in the development and execution of City of Asheville projects, and to help sharpen the City's use of Climate Justice considerations in its decision-making. With consistent use of the tool, City policy makers and implementers will be better able to identify, make, and explain policy choices that build climate resilience in Asheville's BIPOC communities.

When? Use this tool, ideally alongside the GARE Racial Equity Toolkit, when considering any new proposal or project, when designing a new project, when developing budgets, as a mid-stream check in, and/or to evaluate a program. Successful use of the tool will shape planning decisions, point toward any needed mid-point course corrections, and highlight any oversights that may inadvertently detract from realizing the City's vision for Climate Justice.

How? Review and complete as much of the screening tool as you are able, ideally at the very beginning of your planning process. At any point, check in with your assigned Office of Sustainability coach with questions, for feedback, and guidance on next steps. Reach out to the Office of Sustainability if the questions do not seem relevant to your project, if you are not sure that you are on the right track, or if the tool does not effectively highlight the Climate Justice issues that seem most salient to you. The tool will be refined based on feedback from those who use it, so your input is critical!

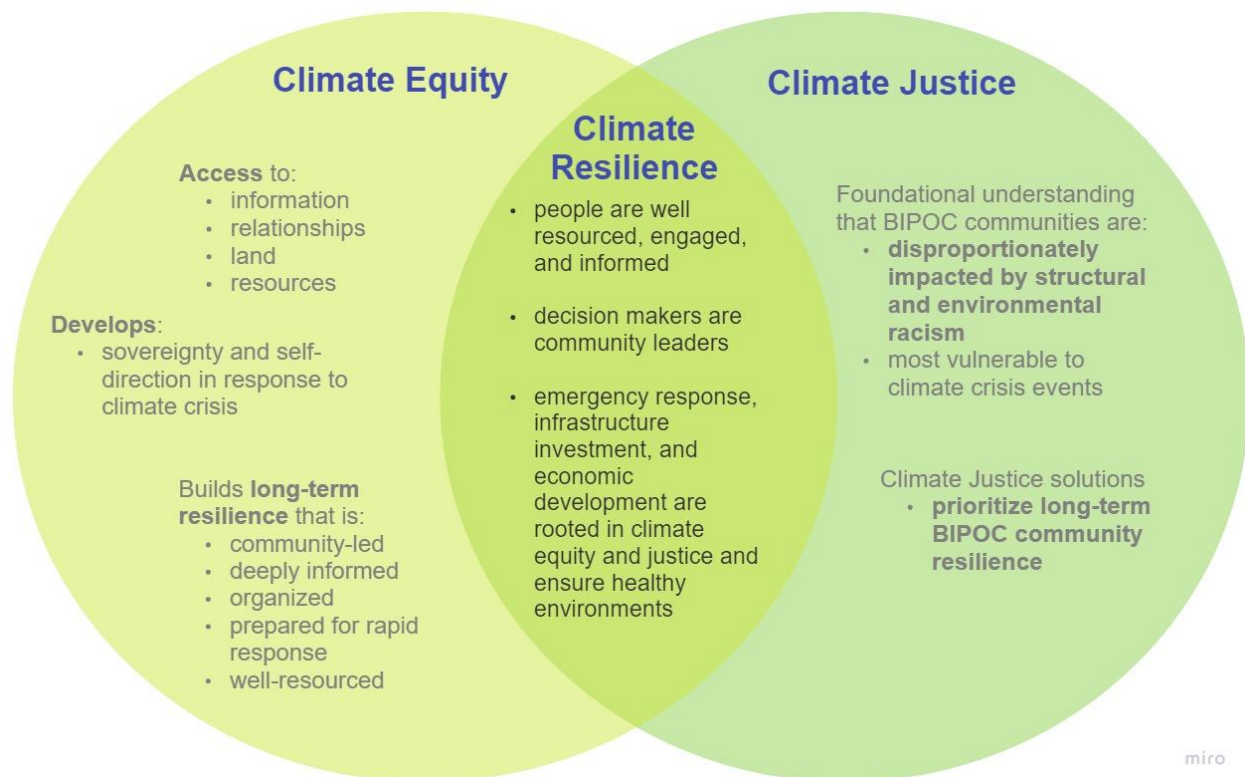
Using the tool in tandem with GARE Racial Equity Toolkit will yield a richer picture of the Climate Justice issues at play in your initiative. Try applying the screening tool to smaller projects or with your Boards & Commissions when making decisions and next steps.

III. Climate Justice Case Studies

- **Lessons from COVID:** COVID-19 hit the United States in mid-March 2020, overwhelming healthcare systems, shutting down schools and many workplaces, interrupting supply chains and access to needed social services, and exposing entrenched social, economic, and racial disparities. City emergency response staff had to rapidly develop and implement an “all-hazard” response that reflected the pandemic’s systemic impact. City staff reflected on “a thousand” ways that first responders assisted, pitched in, and innovated – from using 3-D printers from Asheville schools to make masks for healthcare workers to ensuring that truckers bringing critical supplies to mountain communities along I-40 and I-26 could feed themselves with restaurants closed. Forced to adapt, City staff learned key lessons about community engagement, including a recognition of how many communities lack access to City resources, the importance of bringing those resources into the places where people are most comfortable, and that providing information in multiple mediums, formats, and languages improves community access. Staff also pointed to the City’s clear articulation of public health values and decisive action in terminating employees who did not abide by COVID-19 protocols as a model for how the City can demonstrate and enforce its commitment to racial and climate equity values.
- **Shiloh Sidewalks & the Value of Community Engagement:** In 2020, the City of Asheville received a grant to work with the Government Performance Lab at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government using a race equity lens to examine which Asheville communities have most benefited from City investments in sidewalk upgrade, replacement, and repair. The top 10 neighborhoods identified for sidewalk infrastructure investment by that process were the same as those that City staff had already identified as priorities, reinforcing the sense that staff understand where the community infrastructure needs are most acute. One of the streets identified for a sidewalk extension by both the Kennedy School and the City was Brooklyn Road in the historically African-American Shiloh neighborhood. However, when City staff reached out to the Shiloh community, they learned that the planned extension would have dramatically reduced residents’ front yard space, and that Shiloh residents had created their own list of sidewalks in need of repair, upgrade, and replacement years ago – which did not include those on Brooklyn. Further engagement with Shiloh residents resulted in Public Works extending the sidewalk in front of City-owned property in the neighborhood, rather than in front of privately-owned homes, reducing the negative community impact.

- **The Tree Ordinance:** In September 2020, the Asheville City Council adopted the tree canopy ordinance, in response to a 6.4% reduction in Asheville's tree canopy in the decade between 2008 and 2018. Reduction in tree canopy increases vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding – and does not affect all City residents equally. City staff observed that when a tree map is placed over the City, the heat islands overlay almost exactly with historically BIPOC or low-income neighborhoods. The ordinance requires developers who remove trees to replace them, but it does not distinguish between more affluent areas of the City that already have a robust tree canopy, deforested neighborhoods most at risk of flooding and extreme heat, or open spaces like parks. In order to ensure that the ordinance successfully reduces the worst effects of climate change for all Asheville residents, City staff suggested targeting program resources and strategies toward those communities and neighborhoods most directly harmed by the loss of tree canopy, increasing flexibility in the ordinance for City parks or other open space, and amending the ordinance to reflect the different tree canopy need in different parts of the City. Suggestions for amending the ordinance included increasing the number of trees to be planted in more vulnerable areas, changing the manner in which they are planted, offering a City "match" of additional trees for development that include an affordable housing component, using the "fee in lieu" paid by wealthier developers to subsidize tree planting in more vulnerable areas, and incorporating a framework that recognizes the disparate environmental and social risk facing BIPOC and low-income communities.

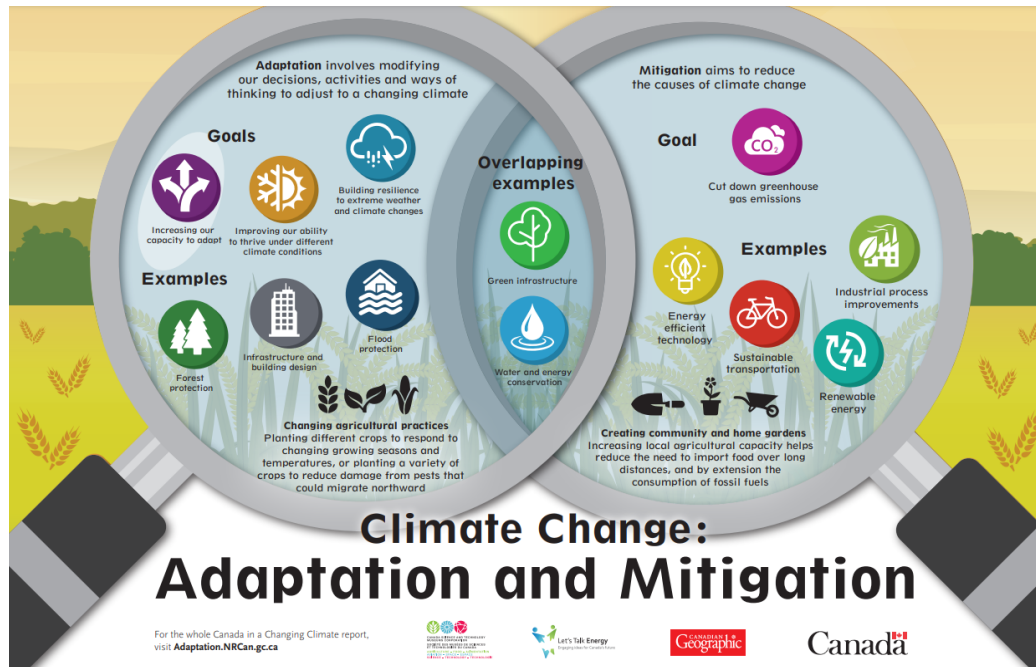
IV. Glossary of Key Climate Justice Terms



Climate Equity is access to information, relationships, land, and resources needed to have sovereignty and self-direction in response to climate crisis events. Climate Equity builds long-term resilience that is community-led, deeply informed, organized, prepared for rapid response, and well-resourced.

Climate Justice is the commitment to prioritizing Asheville's Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities as solutions are sought to address present and future climate crisis impacts. Climate Justice recognizes that BIPOC communities are disproportionately impacted by structural and environmental racism and are most vulnerable to climate crisis events.

Climate Resilience is actualized when people are well resourced, engaged, and informed. Decision makers are community leaders and emergency response, strategic infrastructure investment and economic development are rooted in climate equity and justice and ensure healthy environments.



Mitigation is the process that can reduce the amount and speed of future climate change by reducing emissions of heat-trapping gasses or removing them from the atmosphere.

Adaptive capacity is the ability of a person or system to adjust to a stressor, take advantage of new opportunities, or cope with change.

Resilience is the capacity of a community, business, or natural environment to prevent, withstand, respond to, and recover from a disruption.

From Tepeyac Consulting:

Equity Choice Points are areas where an equity issue has been named and the organization has an opportunity to make a choice to adapt towards deeper equity work. These can include:

- **Opportunities** to expand or grow equity in programs and services, constituencies, or in some other way improve the organization's ability to achieve its mission
- **Evolution** towards deeper alignment with its mission, values, partners, and communities
- **Equity analysis** of the systemic and root causes of inequities experienced within your community that demand a strategic pivot in your work
- **Challenges and harm** that have impacted the health of a community and/or organization