

Climate Resilience Workshops Jumpstart Coordinated Action

Alameda County developed a replicable model to prepare communities for impending climate impacts like wildfire and extreme heat. Our half-day workshops catalyze targeted resilience projects.

Challenge: Impacts from climate change are happening now. Counties must confront challenges such as extreme heat, flooding, wildfires, groundwater quality issues, and new disease-bearing insects. These unprecedented climate impacts directly affect our communities and can prevent us from providing the services we are mandated to deliver. But understanding, preparing for, and responding to a wide range of climate impacts can be overwhelming and requires additional coordination. Climate plans and vulnerability assessments are crucial components of resilience, yet too often we do not have sufficient resources at hand to create, implement, and operationalize them. Though concerned about climate impacts, Alameda County – like many California counties – had not yet been able to conduct a comprehensive vulnerability assessment or long-term resilience planning effort. Therefore, to address this urgent challenge, we developed a half-day workshop model that helps county programs identify specific actions they can take now to reduce impacts on their clients and prepare the community at large.

Solution: Alameda County's Sustainability Office tapped into the on-the-ground experience and knowledge of County staff to position them to start taking action quickly. We facilitated two climate resilience workshops, one with the Community Development Agency's Planning Department to address rising temperatures and one with the Public Health Department to address wildfire smoke impacts. To ensure that the workshop designs were relevant and engaging for department staff, we formed staff planning teams to co-design them. The planning teams identified the most pressing climate threats facing the communities they serve and secured executive support for implementation.

In both cases, the workshops began with succinct, high-impact presentations explaining how heat and smoke directly affect communities and county service delivery, to enable attendees to identify the implications to their work. These presentations were followed by an uplifting guest speaker from the participants' field, who shared actions the speaker's community had taken to address the specific climate impact; this segment helped participants shift to thinking about solutions. Participants were then divided into facilitated breakout groups to brainstorm and discuss potential solutions that would fit into the department's existing goals. Each breakout group reported the findings from their discussion to the larger group so that other participants could provide feedback and pose questions. The workshop planning teams consolidated the input and shared actionable recommendations with executives for implementation. Project leads were supported to use action plans to ensure initiatives were advanced.

Innovation: The facilitated workshop model draws on the collective experience and knowledge of front-line staff to quickly identify solutions and initiate coordinated action to prepare for local climate impacts. Coordination – both within a department and across departments and agencies – is one of the greatest challenges that local governments face for resilience projects. The workshop model initiates a fast, targeted approach that prioritizes community needs. The workshops provide a constructive forum where staff in different roles can combine their expertise to identify realistic next steps to address climate change, creating more informed and aware teams. A number of counties have engaged in planning and assessments, but we don't know of other counties taking this implementation-focused approach to climate resilience. For this reason, the State Coastal Conservancy provided in-kind support through their Climate Ready program to develop, pilot, and share this model. Because each workshop launched projects and created teams that secured new funds for resilience work, we consider the model a success worth sharing with our peers.

Results: The heat and smoke workshops have resulted in near-term solutions to address climate impacts. The Planning Department secured a \$140,000 state grant to fund a tree planting program and heat education campaign in heat-vulnerable communities. The Public Health Department workshop resulted in the development of a flyer and related communications in six languages outlining how residents can protect their health when there is unhealthy air quality due to wildfire smoke. A \$70,000 grant was secured from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, jointly with the City of Austin, to develop replicable community-informed messaging protocols for wildfire smoke advisories with focus on the County's most vulnerable residents. The Sustainability Office is partnering with the Alameda County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, the Fire Department, the Public Health Department, and other internal and community partners to apply the workshop model to this countywide cross-functional challenge.

Replicability: The Alameda County Office of Sustainability has developed a user-friendly planning guide for public agencies wishing to use the workshop model to design their own resilience workshops. The guide includes step-by-step instructions, tips, and templates for agendas and breakout group activities. The guide is available on our [website](http://acsustain.org) (acsustain.org) and has been shared broadly with other jurisdictions throughout the country. The model has already been used by California cities including Albany, Los Angeles, and San Diego to inform the planning of their own resilience workshops. We have reached dozens of local government climate leaders directly through presentations, trainings, and webinars through the California Adaptation Forum, City of San Leandro, ICLEI, and National Adaptation Forum. The guide has been featured as a resource on leading national and state climate resilience clearinghouses.

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