HOW NEW YORK IS ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

POLICY MODEL  |  NEW YORK STATE’S CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES (CSC)

INTRODUCTION
This briefing shows how New York State is integrating climate adaptation action across different levels of government. It is part of The Climate Group’s States & Regions Policy Innovation program, which brings together pioneering state and regional governments to enable in-depth global peer learning on innovative climate adaptation approaches through its Adaptation Peer Forum.

Led by the Government of South Australia and working with the governments of Bavaria, British Columbia, Catalonia, Connecticut, KwaZulu-Natal, Lombardy, New York State, Ontario, Québec, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Victoria and Wales, the Adaptation Peer Forum accelerates global learning, builds strong relationships and identifies emerging adaptation policies to boost climate resiliency across these states and regions.
“IN THE CASE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, DENIAL IS NOT A SURVIVAL STRATEGY. CLIMATE CHANGE IS A REALITY, AND NOT TO ADDRESS IT IS GROSS NEGLIGENCE BY GOVERNMENT AND IRRESPONSIBLE AS CITIZENS.”
- Governor Andrew Cuomo

NEW YORK STATE’S FUTURE CLIMATE BEGINS TODAY

At our last Adaptation Peer Forum in April, sub-national government practitioners virtually gathered to listen to New York State’s approach on local action to adapt to – and combat – climate change.

An extremely warm few months in 2016 seem to be following the record-setting heat of the two previous years — 2014 and 2015 — and scientists warn that the combination of global warming with the El Niño-Southern Oscillation could make extreme weather patterns more intense, setting the world on course for an even more dynamic weather system. Urgently implementing climate actions will help stabilize atmospheric greenhouse gases (GHGs) at manageable levels, and altering the built and natural environment in anticipation of predicted climatic changes will further alleviate the risks.

During our Adaptation Peer Forum in April, Mark Lowery, Climate Policy Analyst at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, presented the government’s Climate Smart Communities Program, to explain how the state is acting to better coordinate and support local governments and communities as they undertake efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change.

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW YORK STATE

ELECTRICITY GENERATION MIX¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural gas</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hydroelectric</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹ Data from the State Policy Opportunity Tracker for Clean Energy

GOVERNOR
ANDREW CUOMO (D)

ASSEMBLY COMPOSITION
HOUSE MAJORITY PARTY (D)
SENATE MAJORITY PARTY (R)

POPULATION
19.8 MILLION (2015)

COAST FEATURES
2000 MILES OF OCEAN COAST AND 60% POPULATION NEAR OCEAN

GDP
US$1.5 TRILLION
MODEL: NEW YORK STATE HAS SET UP A NETWORK OF COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT THEM TO REDUCE GHGS AND IMPROVE CLIMATE RESILIENCE. THE PROGRAM, CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES (CSC), ASSISTS AND COORDINATES PARTICIPANT COMMUNITIES IN ROLLING OUT ACTIONS THAT MINIMIZE THE RISKS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND REDUCE ITS LONG-TERM COSTS.

BENEFITS
- Free technical assistance.
- Climate Smart Community Coordinators.
- Guidance on energy efficiency, renewables and preparing for severe weather.
- Extensive website.
- Monthly webinars, email listserv, decision-support tools, manuals.
- Networking: learn with like-minded community leaders.
- Savings: reduced GHG emissions, energy use and costs.
- Funding: better positioned to compete for funds.

CERTIFICATION SCHEME
A CSC Certification Manual describes about 130 specific actions (among which 13 are priority actions) that CSCs can complete to earn points toward certification or one of the higher levels: bronze, silver or gold. The certification was launched in 2014 as a means to track and reward local actions.

RECOGNIZED LEADERSHIP
Adoption of the pledge and awarded certification points demonstrate the community’s commitment to a complete local climate program. The pledge elements are very general, allowing each community to focus on local priorities.

FRAMEWORK
Local governments are invited to register as Climate Smart Communities by passing a municipal resolution with these 10 pledge elements:
1. Pledge to be a Climate Smart Community.
2. Set Goals, Inventory Emissions, Plan for Climate Action.
3. Decrease Community Energy Use.
4. Increase Community Use of Renewable Energy.
5. Realize Benefits of Recycling and Other Climate-Smart Solid Waste Management Practices.
6. Reduce GHG emissions Through Use of Climate-Smart Land-Use Tools.
7. Enhance Community Resilience and Prepare for the Effects of Climate Change.
9. Inform and Inspire the Public.

POLICY TIP
Wherever possible, align certification actions with corresponding agency programs. By accepting identical documentation, you will reduce paperwork for both local governments and staff.

JOINT EFFORT
The program is jointly sponsored by six New York State agencies: Department of Environmental Conservation; Energy Research and Development Authority; Public Service Commission; Department of State; Department of Transportation; and the Department of Health.
**NEW YORK STATE’S CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES PROGRAM**

### WHAT IS THE POLICY AIMING TO SOLVE?

Uncoordinated climate action among different levels of government in the state can damage overall results. This program aims to consolidate a coordinated approach and assistance for communities. The state is already experiencing record increases in temperatures, sea-level rise, and extreme storms. In fact, the New York Office of Climate Change suggests that the devastating series of storms the state has suffered since 2010 are the reason for Governor Cuomo’s focus on reducing emissions and large investments in climate resilient infrastructure and other adaptive measures.

### HOW IS IT INNOVATIVE?

New York State recognized early on that local governments can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from sources under their direct control in municipally-owned buildings, facilities, and fleets, and from services provided to the community, such as wastewater treatment, solid waste management, and transit. The Office of Climate Change decided to focus specifically on local governments because they play a crucial role in facilitating the transformation to a low-carbon economy and are the first responders to extreme weather events. Providing safe, resilient, and livable communities is good for business and the local tax base.

### HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO IMPLEMENT?

New York State Office of Climate Change was created in 2007 and led the development of the CSC program. It’s a small team of eight people so collaboration with other state agencies was and still is key to achieving measurable results. The CSC program was launched in 2009.

### HOW IS THE PROGRAM FINANCED AND MANAGED?

While at the beginning no dedicated funding was provided, from 2013 through 2015, NYSERDA funded five contractors to serve as CSC coordinators, providing direct technical support to CSCs on GHG inventories, climate action planning, public education and staff training, identification of resources, and planning of local projects. The coordinators were funded by proceeds from the sale of Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative emissions allowances.

As part of the state budgeting process, the legislature and governor created a new category of spending for climate change and adaptation in the state’s Environmental Protection Fund, and included US$14 million for CSC grants, to be administered by the Office of Climate Change. Communities that completed at least some Climate Smart Community certification priority actions will be given priority access to grants.

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1. The Under2MOU initiative brings together ambitious states and regions that agree to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions 80% to 95%, or limit to 2 metric tons CO₂-equivalent per capita, by 2050.

2. First market-based regulatory program in the United States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. RGGI is a cooperative effort among the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont to cap and reduce CO₂ emissions from the power sector.
“THE PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REQUIRED BY THE CSC PROGRAM POSITION LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO BETTER COMPete FOR ADDITIONAl STATE FUNDS.”

- Mark Lowery, Office of Climate Change, New York State

BARRIERS TO LOCAL ACTION

During the presentation, Mark Lowery pointed out that local governments often lack the funding to pay up-front costs of measures that will save money over time. And few local governments in the state, especially in rural areas, have the staff to develop, coordinate and implement mitigation or adaptation measures, or to even apply for state or federal assistance.

RESULTS TO DATE

At least 179 communities have taken the CSC pledge, covering 6.6 million New Yorkers.

A Climate Smart Communities grant program was created specifically for climate adaptation and mitigation projects to allow municipalities to apply to the state for funding of projects. However, such funding shall not be more than 50% of the project cost or US$2 million.

LESSON LEARNED

A component of the program, the Climate Smart Resiliency Planning, which is a planning evaluation tool for New York State Communities, was developed building from New Jersey’s model “Getting to Resilience” model.

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