Climate Action KC Equity Committee created a guide to assist businesses, organizations, and municipalities in ensuring that climate action plans and investments identify and protect the most vulnerable populations. This guide can be used alongside any decision-making process to improve equitable outcomes.

**Climate Action KC Equity Statement**

*Climate Action KC* believes the success of any climate action will only be achieved if there is equitable access to the benefits among the entire population of the metropolitan area without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, income, age, disability, or any other classification. Impacts of climate change have put a spotlight on the widening inequities of people in cities across the nation, so any vision for a sustainable, long-term transformation toward a healthier region must include a proactive approach toward equity in all aspects.

*Climate Action KC* is committed to ensuring everyone in the region has fair and equitable access to opportunities and solutions. This commitment will be acted on in the following ways:

*Climate Action KC* will consider the legacy of historical injustices and biases, as this legacy provides a critical context for relating to, and elevating, affected populations. Without this context, and resulting efforts to rectify unjust systems, those systems may be perpetuated under a false impression of equitable access to opportunity.

*Climate Action KC* will work at the intersection of equity and climate to approach this work in a holistic manner. Potential future injustices will also be evaluated to prevent vulnerable communities from bearing disproportionate harm because of climate change. These communities must be equipped with intentional strategies, methods and resources to successfully implement climate action.

*Climate Action KC* will strive, not only to include diverse perspectives in its membership, but create an environment of inclusion and belonging that removes barriers to sharing and hearing of those perspectives in the pursuit of equity for all.
Equity Checklist

The questions on this checklist are designed to help focus climate planning and discussions on potential impacts, both adverse and beneficial, to vulnerable populations.

✓ How are vulnerable communities affected by this strategy/goal/recommendation?

✓ Which vulnerable populations may be impacted by or could benefit from your policy, initiative, program or budget?

✓ Have you identified these populations based on population characteristics, location, or both?

✓ What are the existing barriers to access and implementation?

✓ Will your proposed action (e.g. policy, design, program) create or remove barriers to access and implementation?

✓ How may the policy, initiative, program or budget increase racial equity?

✓ What mechanisms will you use to assure particular benefit to low-income or otherwise vulnerable populations?
  For example:
  • Provide extra financial incentives, investments, or resources
  • Provide higher levels of service
  • Provide capacity building or training
  • Provide jobs

✓ What unintended consequences may result for vulnerable populations and how will you address them?

✓ How will you evaluate the equity impact of your program or policies?

✓ How will you communicate progress to all stakeholders?
Vulnerable Populations

The following information provides descriptions of how some populations are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change than others. While it is not an exhaustive list, the published evidence suggests that these groups of people face existing inequities and tend to suffer worse outcomes associated with climate-related events.

Who is most impacted?

There is a broad array of chronic health conditions which could be exacerbated due to climate change, including asthma, autoimmune disorders, diabetes, obesity, heart disease or cardiovascular diseases. People who have such chronic conditions and who meet one or more of the criteria below may be at an increased risk of health impacts from climate change:

- Elderly individuals of 65 years or older
- Individuals without access to stable and reliable healthcare
- Individuals with multiple health conditions or disabilities
- Elderly women, low socioeconomic status, or of African American race.

Social Vulnerability Index

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Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Definition of Impacts on Vulnerable Populations

The glossary and definitions below were developed by members of the Climate Action KC Equity Committee. An overview of common terms and concepts regarding vulnerable populations and social equity is intended to deepen community discourse and understanding about the equity-focused strategies in this plan.

**Children:** Injury, death, infectious diseases, malnutrition, and posttraumatic stress are more common in children than adults after extreme weather events. Children are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because of (1) their growing bodies; (2) their unique behaviors and interactions with the world around them; and (3) their dependency on caregivers.

**Health Insurance:** Excessive heat exposure, elevated levels of air pollutants, and extreme weather conditions are expected to cause direct and indirect health impacts, particularly for vulnerable populations with limited or no access to health services. Health insurance enables access to care by connecting people to health care providers and by protecting persons against the high and often unexpected costs of medical care.

**Older Adults:** Older adults are vulnerable to climate change-related impacts for several reasons. One reason is that normal changes in the body associated with aging, such as loss of muscle and bone mass and agility, can limit mobility.

**People with Low Incomes:** Economic factors including income, poverty, and wealth, are collectively one of the largest determinants of health. From the poorest to richest ends of the income spectrum, higher income is associated with greater longevity in the US.

**People with Mental Illness:** Climate change is bringing a range of more frequent, long lasting and severe adverse environmental changes, which can affect the severity and incidence of mental health problems.

**People who are Physically or Socially Isolated:** Resilience to climate change impacts decreases in isolated populations (e.g. elderly, immigrant populations or rural communities), due to decreased access to resources, and delayed or limited assistance in crises. Climate change-related impacts are currently affecting rural communities. These impacts will progressively increase over this century and will shift the locations where rural economic activities (like agriculture, forestry, and recreation) can thrive.

**People Experiencing Homelessness:** Homelessness can be defined as individuals who use shelters to sleep as well as individuals who sleep outdoors or in other places not intended for human habitation. Homeless populations are more likely to live in poverty, lack access to health care services, and have multiple baseline conditions, including poor physical and mental health, which may be exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

**Indigenous People, Native Americans and Tribal Nations:** Certain tribal lands are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, and some coastal tribal communities in the U.S. have begun to relocate due to sea level rise. Native American health and welfare statistics are startling. Tribes face disproportionate disparities for economic issues (poverty, education, and employment), social issues (violence, trauma) and health disparities and mental illness. The age-adjusted death rate for adults exceeds that of the general population by almost 40%, with deaths due to diabetes, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, and accidents occurring at least three times the national rate, and deaths due to tuberculosis, pneumonia and influenza, suicide, homicide, and heart disease also exceeding those of the general population.
**Immununants and Refugees:** Many immigrants and refugees have been displaced due to climate change impacts and have already suffered trauma or disaster. These groups are vulnerable to impacts of climate change because they tend to be overrepresented among the poor but underrepresented in public benefits enrollment. Many immigrants lack the rights of citizenship so are often afraid to ask for help or call the police. In the future, Kansas City may face increased level of immigration due to climate change.

**Impervious Surfaces and Tree Canopy:** Temperatures in most urban areas are significantly higher than less urbanized areas because pavement and building materials absorb sunlight and heat. This is known as the urban heat island effect. The most intense effects are often in neighborhoods where impervious paved surfaces predominate, and trees, vegetation, and parks are less common. For example, a study using national data found that African Americans were 52% more likely, Asians 32% more likely, and Hispanics 21% more likely than whites to live in areas where impervious surfaces covered more than half the ground and more than half the population lacked tree canopy.

**Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Populations:** Climate change is responsible for increasing the frequency, intensity and duration of natural disasters. Climate-related natural disasters are not always predictable, so it is important to make emergency preparedness and evacuation plans ahead of time. In the development and preparation for evacuation plans in the face of climate-related natural disasters the incarcerated population is often left out.

**LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer) Communities:** Some LGBTQ people, especially youth, are more likely to possess characteristics that have been linked to higher risk from climate change impacts. These risks include higher rates of poverty, homelessness and mental illness.

**Linguistically Isolated People:** A household is linguistically isolated when all persons 14 years of age or older speak a language other than English and no one speaks English very well. Climate change and resulting natural disasters and extreme temperatures pose a serious public health concern for people who are linguistically isolated. Many immigrants are linguistically isolated.

**Outdoor workers:** Outdoor workers are often among the first to be exposed to the effects of climate change. A review of miners, construction workers, farm workers, first responders, and military personnel emphasized that heat-related illness may be the most common cause of nonfatal, environmentally caused emergency department admission in the United States. Climate change is likely to affect the health of outdoor workers through increases in temperature, poor air quality, extreme weather, diseases transmitted by ticks and mosquitoes, industrial exposures and damage to infrastructure. Outdoor workers affected by climate change include farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers; commercial fishery workers; foresters; construction workers; military personnel; miners; refinery workers; paramedics, firefighters, police and other first responders; hazardous waste site workers and transportation workers.

**People of Color:** Some communities of color are more likely to reside in areas with greater flooding threats and more heat-absorbing surfaces. These populations also experience disproportionately high levels of vulnerabilities to climate change including lower income, less formal education, poorer physical health, multiple chronic conditions, language barriers, more elderly living alone, occupational exposures such as outdoor environments and less access to air conditioning. With clear causal pathways linking the experience of racism, socio-economic status and poor health outcomes, differences in vulnerability may be attributed to social and economic disparities rather than, or as well as, ethnicity.
People with Existing Chronic Health Conditions: People with existing chronic health conditions (such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and asthma) are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change through an array of intersections. This includes heat waves, extreme weather events, unreliable or unavailable access to medical care, tenuous interpersonal support networks, and simply having fewer resources to relocate, adapt, or otherwise manage climate change impacts.

People with Physical Disabilities: People with disabilities are a broad and diverse community, and their needs differ depending on individual circumstances like their age or ability to live independently within their communities. In general, however, climate change-related health impacts may affect people with disabilities more than others. Approximately 1 in 5 people in the United States has a disability. This includes about half of all-American adults 65 and older and about 17% of Americans age 21-64. Many people with disabilities experience high rates of social risk factors that contribute to poor health, such as poverty, unemployment, and lower education. For example, people with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed than those without disabilities.

People Without Life-supporting Resources: Life-supporting resources are essential to one’s resilience in the face of climate change. There are many of these resources: secure housing, food and other sustenance, means to stay cool during extreme heat events, reliable transportation (for evacuating or navigating natural disasters), and access to necessary services including healthcare. Health, well-being and resilience during climate change-related events are closely related to the number and amount of these resources; individuals who lack one or multiple (i.e. those who are food-insecure, the uninsured, people who lack adequate or quality housing or are tenants or renters, and the poor) are especially vulnerable.

Pregnant People: Pregnant people are more vulnerable due to health impacts of pregnancy, and limitations on health interventions during pregnancy. Pregnant people are more susceptible to heat intolerance, and other disruptions.

Vehicle Ownership: Vehicle ownership is a measure of mobility and access to transportation. Transportation is a critical resource for evacuation and survival during heat waves and other extreme weather events. For example, access to a vehicle is important during flooding which may require emergency evacuation of populations living in coastal and low-lying areas and may also require adequate sheltering for displaced populations.
Glossary of Equity Terms

**Acculturation:** in which there is an adaptation to a different culture but retention of original identity.

**Adaptation:** adjustment in natural or human systems to a new or changing environment. Adaptation to climate change refers to adjustment in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities. Various types of adaptation can be distinguished, including anticipatory and reactive adaptation, public and private adaptation, and autonomous and planned adaptation.

**Assimilation:** being absorbed into the cultural tradition of the dominant society and consequently losing one’s historical identity.

**Climate Justice:** recognition of climate change’s disproportionate impacts on historically marginalized communities who also contribute the least to climate change and benefit the least from fossil fuel consumption both locally and around the world. Climate justice aims to level these impacts.

**Climate Resilience:** CAKC’s vision of climate resilience takes a holistic view of the challenges our communities face and pursues solutions to climate change at the intersection of people, the environment, and the economy. Climate resilience requires implementing “whole-systems” solutions.

**Community:** is a social unit with commonality such as norms, religion, values, customs, or identity.

**Culture:** refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

**Discrimination:** is the act of making distinctions between human beings based on the groups, classes, or other categories to which they are perceived to belong.

**Disparity:** when communities exposed to a combination of poor environmental quality and social inequities have more sickness and disease than wealthier, less polluted communities.

**Diversity:** refers to the traits and characteristics that make people unique while inclusion refers to the behaviors and social norms that ensure people feel welcome. Diversity encompasses the range of similarities and differences everyone brings to the workplace, including but not limited to national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures.

**Energy Justice:** initiatives that provide everyone, regardless of race, gender, etc. with safe, affordable, and sustainable energy.

**Environmental Equity:** protection from environmental hazards as well as access to environmental benefits, regardless of income, race, and other characteristics.

**Environmental Justice:** the fair and equal treatment of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, or income level, etc. in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
Environmental Racism: refers to the way in which minority group neighborhoods (populated primarily by people of color and members of low socioeconomic groups) are burdened with a disproportionate number of hazards, including toxic waste facilities, garbage dumps, and other sources of environmental pollution and foul odors that lower the quality of life.

Equality: the quality or state of being equal. Ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity.

Equity: justice according to natural law or right specifically; freedom from bias or favoritism.

Equitable Development: is an approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant.

Equitable Representation: something that is equitable is fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone.

Health Equity: when every person has the opportunity to “attain his or her full health potential” and no one is “disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances.”

Health Inequities: are reflected in differences in length of life; quality of life; rates of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment.

Implicit Bias: is the unconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain social group.

Impacts: consequences of climate change on natural systems and human health. Depending on the consideration of adaptation, we can distinguish between potential impacts and residual impacts:
- **Potential impacts** are all impacts that may occur given a projected change in climate, with no consideration of adaptation.
- **Residual impacts** are the impacts of climate change that can occur after adaptation.

Inclusion: is a state of being valued, respected and supported. It’s about focusing on the needs of every individual and ensuring the right conditions are in place for each person to achieve his or her full potential.

Inclusive Diversity: a set of behaviors that promote collaboration amongst a diverse group.

Institutional Racism: the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color.

Justice: the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness.

Marginalize: is to treat a person or group as unimportant, insignificant or of lower status.

Oppression: deprivation of human rights or dignity to those who are (or feel) powerless to do anything about it.

Prejudice: unfair negative attitude toward a social group or a member of that group.

Racism: the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to physical appearance and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another.
**Resiliency**: the ability of something to return to its original size and shape after being compressed or deformed.

**Social Equity**: all people within a specific society or isolated group have the same status in certain respects, including civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights, and equal access to social goods and services.

**Social Justice**: is a concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society, as measured by the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity, and social privileges.

**Stereotype**: is the association of a person or a social group with a consistent set of traits.

**Structural Racism**: in the U.S. is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people.

**Transportation Equity**: access to reliable and affordable transportation is essential to addressing poverty, unemployment, obesity, and a variety of other social ills.

**Underserved**: refers to populations which are disadvantaged because of ability to pay, ability to access care, ability to access comprehensive healthcare, or other disparities for reasons of race, religion, language group or social status.

**Institutional Racism**: the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color.

**Vulnerability**: the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Vulnerability is a function of the character, magnitude and rate of climate variation to which a system is exposed, its sensitivity and its adaptive capacity.

**Vulnerable Populations**: are groups and communities at a higher risk for poor health as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability. Vulnerable populations often include those with low income, some communities of color, immigrant groups (including those with limited English proficiency), Indigenous peoples, children and pregnant women, older adults, vulnerable occupational groups, persons with disabilities, and persons with preexisting or chronic medical conditions.

For an expanded glossary of terms used throughout the larger Climate Action Plan, please see page 159 of that document.
Equity in Climate Action: Immediate actions local governments can take

Local governments can take simple actions now to address the urgent needs of vulnerable communities that lie at the heart of the climate crisis. Below are ten equitable resilience strategies for governments:

1. **Weatherization and Healthy Homes Programs**
   Governments can collaborate with utilities to promote and expand existing programs, and to launch new programs geared toward tenants, low-income communities, and public housing. Weatherization and healthy homes programming in tandem directly address issues of substandard housing, environmental health, and burdensome energy costs.

2. **Community Solar and Solar-Ready Roofs**
   Community solar opens the renewable energy market to low-income households, eliminating major cost barriers and enabling multi-family housing units and renters to use solar energy. Eliminating financial and regulatory barriers can incentivize growth of community solar locally. In addition, passing a solar-ready roof ordinance ensures that all homes can ultimately support solar.

3. **Tree Planting and Urban Heat**
   Tree planting and cool roofs can help reduce the urban heat island effect, which impacts many of our most vulnerable populations. Planting trees on residential properties, at transit stops and along streets can improve community resilience and mitigate some impacts of extreme heat. In addition, governments and utilities can establish incentives programs for urban heat abatement in vulnerable communities.

4. **Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture**
   Local governments can include community gardening in parks, and plant fruit-bearing trees to help create self-sustaining communities. In addition, governments can incentivize new community gardens by decreasing taxes for land used for urban agriculture.

5. **Expand Shelter Capacity and Warming/Cooling Centers**
   Extreme weather impacts of climate change are life-threatening for unhoused individuals. Expanding shelter capacity as well as increasing resources for temporary heating and cooling centers can provide life-saving shelter. In addition, these can provide expand infrastructure for populations displaced by climate-related natural disaster.

6. **Improve Biking and Pedestrian Infrastructure**
   Well-maintained sidewalks are critical for pedestrian safety and transit access, and disabled individuals are most impacted by poorly maintained infrastructure. Plentiful, accessible, and safe biking and walking infrastructure is critical for the pedestrians who rely on our sidewalks most and encourages zero-emission transportation habits.
7. Native Plants and Green Space
New park space can be identified to improve quality of life and environmental health of underserved communities. Increasing native plants on public land and reducing turfgrass acreage can boost local ecosystems. Ecological valuable and socioeconomically vulnerable areas should be prioritized. Governments also can use compost to restore soils in parks and for stormwater management.

8. Equitable Planning & Policymaking Practices
Diverse voices and leaders should be at the table from the very beginning when developing sustainability policies. Planning practices like adopting form-based codes, contractor requirements with workforce development provisions, reduction of parking requirements, and transit connectivity promote sustainability equitably.

9. Utility Assistance
Kansas City residents experience some of the greatest burden related to energy bills in the country. Utility assistance programs can be promoted and expanded to aid low-income families and ensure their access to basic needs like water, heat, and electricity.

10. Community Resilience
Community finance trusts, response teams, and resilience investment districts can ensure that underserved communities have access to the resources they need. Municipal codes should also be reviewed for disaster resilience. Resources and services must be communicated at the grassroots level, direct to residents.