

## CHAPTER 2



Sarah Dance, the chair of the Environmental and Climate Justice Committee for the local chapter of the NAACP, believes that communication is the key to helping everyone become better ambassadors to the planet. Through discussions with lawmakers and key decision makers, as well as partnering with local groups to hold informational community events, she is working to overcome access and education barriers so that the investments made to combat climate change are equitable.

“We don’t want laws and changes and protections just for people who can afford it,” Dance says. “It’s important to have in place not only the funds, but an accessible and attainable process to do what’s right. We don’t need plans to be put in place without us knowing, so it’s important for us to be heard and for everybody to be treated fairly at the same level.”



# Climate Justice

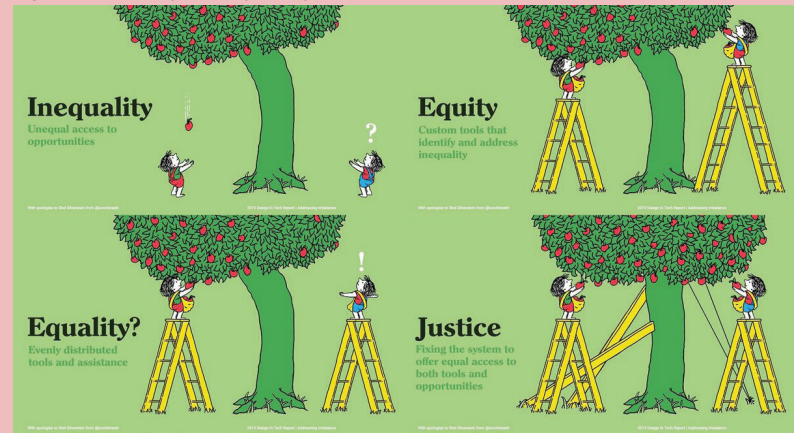


**C**limate Justice refers to acknowledging and addressing how climate change has disproportionate, adverse impacts on the social, economic, and public health of historically disadvantaged communities (DACs) such as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and low-income communities.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, these frontline communities have historically been excluded from the environmental decision-making process and had limited opportunities for participation. Long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies can help address these impacts to achieve climate justice.

A Just Transition from fossil fuel-based energy sources to renewable, sustainable ones “is one that builds connections, creates opportunity, and ensures a good quality of life” for all.<sup>12</sup> A Just Transition process is another important concept that recognizes that if the shift of society away from fossil fuels is not implemented in an equitable manner, climate injustice will be exacerbated. For example, it is important to make sure that displaced workers from fossil fuel industries are retrained and able to obtain good jobs in clean energy industries.

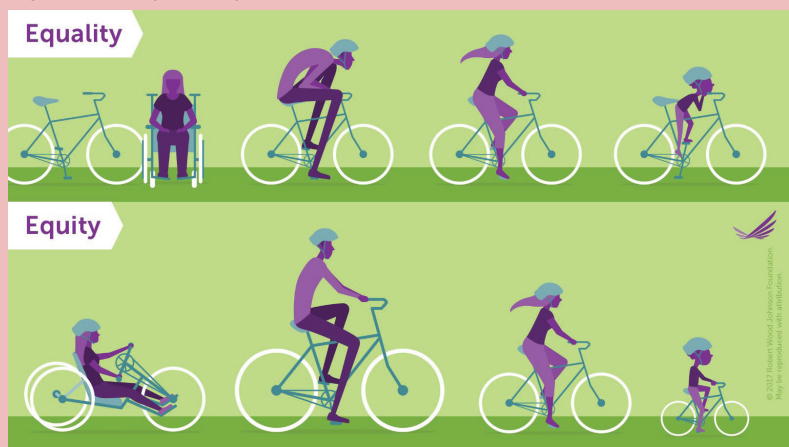
This Plan has been developed with an equity focus. It is common to confuse the difference between equity and equality. The key difference between equity and equality is that with equality, everyone receives an equal amount of support, while equity involves helping those with the type and amount of support to meet an individual’s needs (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). To ensure equity was consistently applied throughout the CCAP’s de-

**Figure 8** Inequality, Equality, Equity, and Justice



Tony Ruth, *Addressing Imbalance*, 2019, graphic, Design in Tech Report, <https://achievethecore.org/2021/05/defining-equity-equality-and-justice/>

**Figure 9** Equality vs. Equity



Joan Barlow, *Equality vs. equity*, 2022, graphic, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, <https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/blog/2022/11/we-used-your-insights-to-update-our-graphic-on-equity.html?channelid=xi&cid=1003444>

velopment, the Racial Equity Impact Analysis Tool was referenced by each Working Group, which provided questions to reflect on while they drafted the chapters (Figure 10).

Additionally, the Plan’s Climate Justice Working Group reviewed all the outputs of every chapter with a justice lens and made suggestions where equity considerations were missing. The inclusion of this additional layer helped to ensure that the equity focus was not lost while putting together the Plan’s Goals, Strategies, and Action Items. Mindful inclusion of equity and justice when developing climate change solutions is essential to achieving climate justice.

**Figure 10** Racial Equity Impact Analysis

## Racial Equity Impact Analysis

1. Are all racial/ethnic groups who are affected by the policy/practice/decision **at the table**?
2. How will the proposed policy/practice/decision **affect** each group?
3. How will the proposed policy/practice/decision **be perceived** by each group?
4. Does the policy/practice/decision **worsen or ignore** existing disparities?
5. Based on the above responses, **what revisions** are needed in the policy/practice/decision under discussion?

The Race Matters Institute of JustPartners, Inc., Racial Equity Impact Analysis, 2019, The Race Matters Institute of JustPartners, Inc., <https://www.mchnavigator.org/documents/REIA.pdf>

## NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act

Erie County modeled this Plan’s climate-justice-focused review structure after the New York State Climate Action Council, which developed a Scoping Plan to reach the goals of the New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA or “Climate Act”). The state is seeking to ensure that the “transition to a clean energy economy works to address the structural disadvantages that have caused historically marginalized communities (e.g., people of color, indigenous, low-income, and women) to bear a disproportionate burden of the impacts of climate change and pollution.”<sup>13</sup>

### Disadvantaged Communities Definition Development

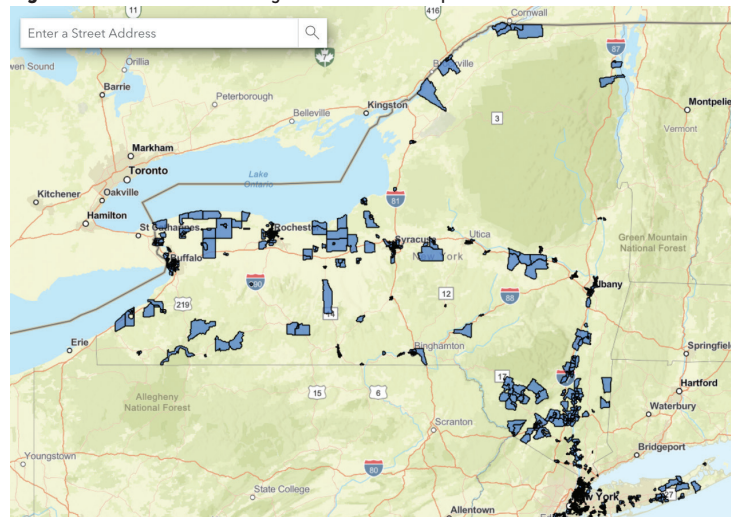
To identify disadvantaged communities (DACs) in New York State, NYSERDA’s Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG) “assessed data and information on environmental burdens, climate change risks, population characteristics, and health vulnerabilities at the community level and then developed a methodology for scoring communities based on these indicators.”<sup>1</sup> The CJWG originally identified and considered 150 indicators as they developed the DACs criteria.<sup>2</sup> After evaluating the quality, level of detail, and correlation to other indicators for the available data, the CJWG decided on 45 indicators for the draft criteria to identify DACs.

Sources and Notes:

1 NYSERDA Climate Justice Working Group, “Disadvantaged Communities Criteria Development Frequent Questions,” New York State, 2023, <https://climate.ny.gov/-/media/Project/Climate/Files/Disadvantaged-Communities-Frequently-Asked-Questions.pdf>.

2 To learn more about NYSERDA’s Disadvantaged Communities criteria, go to <https://climate.ny.gov/resources/disadvantaged-communities-criteria/>

**Figure 11** NYSERDA Disadvantaged Communities Map



NYSERDA Climate Justice Working Group, Disadvantaged communities map, 2023, map, NYSERDA, <https://www.nyserdera.ny.gov/ny/Disadvantaged-Communities>

It is important to note that while the mapping shows census tracts and municipalities that qualify as DACs, it does not illustrate the

low-income households that also qualify for the 35-40% of direct clean energy and energy efficiency investments.

The County shares New York State’s goal to address the inequities in our communities and will use New York State’s definition of “disadvantaged communities” to ensure that these communities are not left behind again. Through the Climate Act process, New York State has identified disadvantaged communities as “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.”<sup>14</sup>

Erie County recognizes that the term “disadvantaged communities” is a term that the communities themselves may not appreciate. However, to align with the Climate Act and reflect historic inequities, the term “disadvantaged communities” will be used.

Disadvantaged communities have not received equitable investment in infrastructure or amenities due to historic race and class-based land use and development policies, such as redlining, exclusionary zoning, and incentivizing sprawl.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, to achieve equity, it is

important that disadvantaged communities are prioritized to receive assistance. Through the Climate Act, disadvantaged communities will “receive no less than 35% of benefits [of clean energy and/or energy efficiency investments], with a goal of 40% of benefits.”<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the map of disadvantaged communities from NYSERDA does not directly map individual low-income households. Even though those households are not shown on the map (Figure 11), they will be included as beneficiaries of the Plan.

## Local & Regional Examples

Throughout this chapter are case studies highlighting many local and regional examples of projects and programs that are addressing inequity while also reducing GHGs and/or preparing for the impacts of climate change. These stories help us imagine solutions to our current crisis that also improve quality of life beyond thinking about climate change.

### **PUSH BUFFALO - School 77**<sup>17</sup>

School 77 is an 80,000-square-foot former Buffalo Public School built in 1927, located on the West Side of Buffalo. School 77 was closed and abandoned for nearly six years. People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) Buffalo worked with the community to determine their needs and have now transformed it into solar-powered affordable senior apartments and a community center.



Photo credit: PUSH Buffalo



Photo credit: Rain Check Buffalo

### **Buffalo Sewer Authority Raincheck 2.0**<sup>18</sup>

Green infrastructure, which manages stormwater through nature-based solutions, makes our community more resilient to climate change. It also offers a wide range of co-benefits, such as directing public investment into neighborhoods, enhancing community aesthetics, supporting public health and recreation, improving public safety, and creating green job opportunities. Buffalo Sewer Authority’s Raincheck 2.0 is an extensive plan to implement green infrastructure across the City of Buffalo in a way that is equitable and leverages all of these co-benefits.

## Local & Regional Examples

### Providence Farm Collective<sup>19</sup>

Providence Farm Collective (PFC) is the only non-profit organization in Western New York that directly supports communities with access to rural farmland, farming and business education, technical assistance, markets, and the opportunity to farm for income. PFC has a mission to cultivate farmer-led and community-rooted agriculture and food systems to actualize the rights of under-resourced people.



Photo credit: Providence Farm Collective



Photo credit: Massachusetts Avenue Project

### Massachusetts Avenue Project<sup>20</sup>

Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) has a mission to nurture the growth of a diverse, accessible, and equitable local food system; promote economic opportunities; and empower youth through social change education. MAP imagines a community in which all youth and families have access to fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate food; people of all incomes have economic opportunities; vacant lots are transformed into productive green spaces; and youth and their families are engaged in their communities. MAP values inclusivity, diversity, equity, nourishment, and land stewardship.

### The Foundry<sup>21</sup>

The Foundry uses an inclusive approach to advancing individuals through hands-on learning, entrepreneurship, and exposure to possibilities. They facilitate youth opportunities through Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM) sessions in their shops and labs, training partnerships, part-time employment at the Foundry, job shadowing with Foundry entrepreneurs, and youth entrepreneurship programs.

The Foundry believes that creating opportunities and conditions necessary for self-sufficiency and economic stability promotes a healthier community. They primarily focus on working with low-income, minority, women-owned, and neighborhood-based businesses by providing affordable rental space, connections to mentoring, business classes and workshops, and connections to local support services.



Photo credit: The Foundry

## Local & Regional Examples

### Parks Adventure Bus<sup>22</sup>

In response to rider requests for improved public transit access to area parks and beaches, in the summer of 2022, the Niagara Frontier Transit Authority (NFTA) started the Parks Adventure Bus service, which provided free rides on Saturdays to County and State parks in Western New York. The first year of the NFTA Parks Adventure Bus was so successful that they expanded the program in 2023.



Photo credit: NFTA



Photo credit: Grassroots Gardens WNY

### Grassroots Gardens WNY<sup>23</sup>

Grassroots Gardens of Western New York is a dedicated group of community gardeners and activists. Their mission is to share knowledge, power, and resources to grow healthy food, heal systemic harm, and strengthen neighborhood connections through community gardens. The Grassroots Gardens WNY vision is a lasting network of land and people growing healthy communities. Grassroots Gardens WNY values equity & justice, community leadership, fostering connections, stewardship, and restorative practices.

#### FOOTNOTES: Climate Justice

11 Daisy Simmons, "What Is 'Climate Justice'?", July 29, 2020, <http://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/07/what-is-climate-justice/>.

12 NYS Climate Action Council, "New York State Climate Action Scoping Plan."

13 NYS Climate Action Council.

14 NYSERDA, "Definitions," NYSERDA, accessed August 2, 2023,

<https://www.nyserdera.ny.gov/All-Programs/Clean-Energy-Workforce-Development-and-Training/Resources/Definitions>.

15 To learn more about transportation accessibility, check out the Transportation chapter.

16 NYSERDA, "New York State Releases Draft Disadvantaged Communities Criteria to Advance Climate Justice," NYSERDA, March 9, 2022,

<https://www.nyserdera.ny.gov/About/Newsroom/2022-Announcements/2022-03-09-New-York-State-Releases-Draft-Disadvantaged-Communities-Criteria>.

17 To learn more about School 77 and PUSH Buffalo, go to <https://www.pushbuffalo.org/school-77/>

18 To learn more about Rain Check Buffalo, go to <https://raincheckbuffalo.org/benefits-of-green-infrastructure/>

19 To learn more about the Providence Farm Collective, go to <https://providencfarmcollective.org/our-impact/>

20 To learn more about the Massachusetts Avenue Project, go to <https://www.mass-ave.org/who-we-are>

21 To learn more about The Foundry, go to <https://www.thefoundrybuffalo.org/>

22 To learn more about Parks Adventure Bus, go to Erie County's website at

<https://www3.erie.gov/socialservices/press/parks-adventure-bus-service-nfta-offers-free-rides-wny-parks-summer>

23 To learn more about Grassroots Gardens WNY, go to <https://www.grassrootsgardens.org/>