

Navigating the Goals & Strategies

Goals

The Climate Justice Plan (CJP) contains 12 universal goals that together create a guiding constellation of outcomes by which we can chart our course to a stable climate and a more just community. The goals are big-picture ideas we want everyone in our community to experience, and they frame a collective vision for climate justice.

Each goal lays out a facet of our collectively envisioned future state that will benefit everyone in our community. The goals are meant to be self-evidently good — even if achieving them can seem daunting and faraway — so that even partial progress toward reaching them will make the community stronger and healthier. In this way, these goals aim to reflect future states grounded in universal agreement.

1 Goal: Lists one of the 12 universal goals.

2 Description: Outlines why this goal is important and what impact the subject has had on our community.

3 How we measure impact: Specific indicators that will be used to measure progress over time. Some indicators can help us understand overall trends, while others can tell us how certain groups are represented in the data and help track environmental justice impacts. This section includes a description of each indicator, as well as the most recent data for that indicator.

1 Goal: Every community member breathes clean and healthy air.

2 Description

Clean air is a fundamental right regardless of one's neighborhood or socioeconomic status. We all have to breathe, but we seldom have a choice in the quality of the air we breathe. Where we live, where we work, and what other people do has a big impact on the quality of the air we are exposed to from day to day.

Air pollution has substantial health impacts that can lead to sickness and even early death. Multnomah County is the most urban county in Oregon and its residents are subject to high pollution exposure from fossil fuel combustion, industry, and even residential and commercial wood burning. These sources of pollution expose people to elevated levels of fine particulate matter (soot), nitrogen oxide, ozone, diesel particulate matter, and other air toxics. Smoke from wildfires, exacerbated by a heating climate, is also an emerging threat resulting in worsening air quality across the U.S. West after decades of improvements.⁶

Air quality is an environmental justice issue. Although air pollution affects everyone in Multnomah County, it puts communities of color at greater risk. Analysis has shown that Black and Latinx communities tend to live in areas with the highest concentrations of diesel particulate matter (a highly toxic soot from diesel engines) and residential wood smoke (which also produces soot and other pollutants).^{7,8} Indoor air quality is also impacted from a wide variety of sources — including household cleaners, tobacco use, pets, pests, mold, gas stoves,⁹ wood stoves, and dust — and is often less healthy than outdoor air. Elevated levels of carbon monoxide or radon may also pose serious health risks for indoor air quality.



3 How we measure impact

Indicator 1: Number of days that the Air Quality Index is 50 or above, or “moderate (yellow)” level, in Multnomah County.

Description: Think of the Air Quality Index (AQI) as a yardstick that runs from 0 to 500. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concern. AQI is a composite measure of several air pollutants, including particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, and ozone. The desired outcome in Multnomah County is to have zero days with an AQI over 50, also known as “moderate (yellow)” level — the level at which air quality begins to become unhealthy for sensitive populations.

Current data: In recent years, there have been more days with unhealthy- to hazardous-air quality and more frequent consecutive days of poor air quality. In 2024, there were **55 days** when the AQI was 50 or above.

Data source: [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#)

Indicator 2: Number of emergency department (ED) or urgent care (UC) visits for breathing-related illness per 100,000 people in Multnomah County, and associated demographic data about those seeking care.

Description: This indicator measures the number of visits to hospital emergency departments and urgent care clinics (ED/UC) made by people with non-infectious respiratory illnesses. The indicator excludes data for respiratory illness caused by communicable disease such as COVID-19 and the common cold.

Current data: After a notable decrease in 2020, ED/UC visits for asthma-like illness have returned to pre-2020 levels in Multnomah County. **In 2024 the rate was 1,732 visits per 100,000 people.** Asthma-like illness ED/UC visitors are more likely to be female, older adults (ages 45-64), and/or Black than other ED/UC patients.

Data source: [Regional Climate and Health Dashboard](#)

Strategies

Each goal is assigned supporting strategies; each strategy is meant to advance the community toward the overall goal. Strategies are primarily focused on communities who are presently kept furthest from the goal by systemic inequities and injustices.

Strategies may also overlap across goals — each strategy appears only once, associated with one specific goal, even though it may support multiple goals.

We also recognize that inequalities exist in our community, many of which are the result of systemic issues that have disadvantaged certain groups of people, sometimes for decades or centuries. These systemic inequalities, often enforced by the government through laws or practices, will not be solved without deliberate approaches. We cannot achieve climate justice for everyone without being intentional about solving systemic injustices caused by racism and other forms of identity-based discrimination. The CJP asserts that supporting groups furthest from the goal moves the entire community faster and further toward the type of community we want for our future.

- 1 Strategy:** Lists a strategy meant to advance the overall goal.
- 2 Why does this matter:** A description of the strategy and how it has impacted our community.
- 3 Putting this into practice:** In the development of the CJP, community members asked questions about how work on a specific strategy could start. To help demystify the policy making process, this section outlines potential next steps for activating that strategy.

- 4 Authorizing Agencies or Lead Department(s):** Identifies the government entities that can take action. Throughout the development of the CJP, community members expressed confusion and concern about what government entities could implement various priorities. The CJP tries to create clarity by identifying the entities that can make change happen.

Authorizing agencies: When authority for a strategy lies outside of Multnomah County's direct jurisdictional control, or when authority/responsibility is mixed or ambiguous, the report identifies potential government bodies that can change laws or implement new policies.

Lead department(s): When a strategy can be led by Multnomah County — in whole or in part — the report identifies a lead department or departments.

- 1 Strategy:** Develop nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions standards for gas appliances that are vented to the outdoors.

- 2 Why does this matter?**

Natural gas — which is mostly methane, a strong greenhouse gas — produces a variety of pollutants when combusted.* Combustion pollutants include nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), trace amounts of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), and particulate matter (PM).¹⁵ According to 2020 National Emissions Inventory data for Multnomah County, natural gas contributes approximately 1,197 tons of the anthropogenic NOx pollution in Multnomah County annually (8.6% of the total). Most of those emissions are attributed to residential and commercial space heating, along with water heating and industrial processes, with residential use making up nearly half of the total. Together, use of natural gas represents the third-largest source of NOx in Multnomah County, with the majority coming from on- and off-road diesel equipment and passenger vehicles. Emissions from these other sources are being addressed through pollution control requirements for new vehicles, registration requirements for the tri-county region, and electrification.

In California, the South Coast Air Quality Management District adopted Rule 1146.2 that requires new and existing residential and commercial buildings to transition to zero-emission water heaters. The rule applies to natural gas-fired pool heaters, larger water heaters, small commercial water heaters, boilers, and process heaters, requiring zero-emission NOx standards when the equipment is replaced. Also in California, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District adopted Rules 9-4 and 9-6 that restrict the sale of gas furnaces, water heaters, and boilers. Both air districts anticipate substantial pollution reductions. As with any new regulations, it's important to ensure they are matched with sufficient time, technical assistance, flexibility, and incentives to allow regulated entities to successfully comply.

*Uncombusted gas leaks also pose serious health and safety concerns.

- 3 Putting this into practice**

- Study the applicability of similar rules in California to Oregon and Multnomah County.
- Promote non-emitting alternatives for space and water heating.

- 4 Authorizing agencies**

Oregon Legislature; Oregon Environmental Quality Commission; Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Lead department(s)

Office of Sustainability

STRATEGY CATEGORY
☐ County Strategy
☐ Investment Opportunity
☒ Community Leadership

STRATEGY TYPE
☒ Advocate ☐ Research
☐ Convene ☐ Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY
☐ Existing ☐ Additional ☒ New

COUNTY CONTROL

Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE

Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY

Low Med High

- 5 Strategy Category (Ownership Matrix):** Organizes each strategy based on who is best positioned to lead and what resource capacity and constraints exist.
- **County Strategy:** *High County Ownership* — The County is the primary lead with the jurisdiction and/or capacity to execute.
 - **Investment Opportunity:** *External Catalyst* — An opportunity that could be led by the County, the community, or another partner but requires an outside catalyst of funding or other support to move forward.
 - **Community Leadership:** *Community-led Vision* — The community drives the execution and vision. The County acts as a supportive partner, providing resources and removing institutional barriers when possible.
- 6 Strategy Type:** Categorizes the type(s) of tool(s) that can be used to advance a strategy.
- **Advocate:** Deploying legislative presence to lobby state/federal entities to pass legislation or remove legislative barriers.
 - **Convene:** Operating as a regional anchor to assemble community partners, private industries, and cross-sector advocates.
 - **Research:** Engaging in data gathering, community storytelling, and feasibility studies to resolve design uncertainties.
 - **Implement:** Direct operational rollout using County infrastructure, staff execution, and dedicated institutional funding.
- 7 County Capacity:** Assesses the internal County capacity to move a strategy forward, including staffing levels, in-house technical knowledge, administrative bandwidth, and existing capital budgets.
- **Existing:** The policy directive can be completely handled within current staffing levels and resource baselines.
 - **Additional:** The policy directive requires targeted resource expansions or minor budget scaling to properly execute the scope.
 - **New:** The policy directive demands entirely fresh funding sources or grant funds, or the creation of brand new programs.

5

STRATEGY CATEGORY

☐ County Strategy
 ☐ Investment Opportunity
 ☒ **Community Leadership**

6

STRATEGY TYPE

☒ Advocate
 ☒ Research
 ☐ Convene
 ☐ Implement

7

COUNTY CAPACITY

☐ Existing
 ☐ Additional
 ☒ New

COUNTY CONTROL

Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE

Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY

Low Med High

- 8 County Control:** Measures the level of direct decision-making authority held by Multnomah County. This dimension defines whether the County can immediately mandate an outcome or if it is constrained by external legal boundaries.
- **High:** The County possesses well-established legal authority or operational jurisdiction, or already heavily regulates the target program area.
 - **Medium (Med):** There is shared or overlapping jurisdiction with municipal, regional, or state bodies, requiring multi-agency collaboration.
 - **Low:** Indicates legal preemption by state or federal governments, limiting the County's capacity to directly legislate.
- 9 County Influence:** Assesses the County's levered potential to persuade, incentivize, or spearhead alignments with external decision-makers (such as the state and *local governments*, private industry, and community partners).
- **High:** The County is already a leader, with powerful regional leverage and strong advocacy ties.
 - **Medium (Med):** Moderate partnership capacity; depends heavily on voluntary regional coordination or coalition building.
 - **Low:** Extremely limited external leverage or alignment options with third-party stakeholders.
- 10 County Priority:** Evaluates how cohesively an advocated strategy builds upon current strategic frameworks, mission statements, departmental mandates, or already-established Board goals within Multnomah County operations. *The level of county priority does not reflect the value or importance of the strategy to the community.*
- **High:** Fully maps onto existing department plans, budget narratives, strategic plans, or Board resolutions.
 - **Medium (Med):** Tangentially fits current operational tracks, requiring slight scope expansions of existing programs.
 - **Low:** Completely novel operational focus that strays outside the currently established County focus areas.

STRATEGY CATEGORY

☐ County Strategy
 ☐ Investment Opportunity
 ☒ **Community Leadership**

STRATEGY TYPE

☒ Advocate
 ☐ Convene
 ☐ Research
 ☐ Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

☐ Existing
 ☐ Additional
 ☒ New

COUNTY CONTROL

8

Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE

9

Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY

10

Low Med High