



# **CARBON NEUTRAL CITIES ALLIANCE**

## **Mobilizing Transformative Climate Action in Cities**



**Strategic Plan**  
**2021 - 2023**

November 2020

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CNCA thanks The Kresge Foundation and Barr Foundation for supporting the development and implementation of this Strategic Plan.

CNCA thanks the members of the 2020 Strategic Planning Committee for the significant time and thoughtfulness invested in leading the development of this Strategic Plan:

Jørgen Abildgaard, City of Copenhagen  
Brad Badelt, City of Vancouver  
Fernando Carou, City of Toronto  
Chris Derksema, City of Sydney  
Kim Havey, City of Minneapolis  
Kate Johnson and Maribeth DeLorenzo, Washington DC  
Brett KenCairn, City of Boulder  
Esa Nikunen, City of Helsinki  
Anselm Sprandel, City of Hamburg

CNCA also thanks the members of the Climate Justice Committee for their time and leadership in developing the CNCA Climate Justice Statement and recommendations for embedding the principles in CNCA programming:

Michele Crim, City of Portland  
Michelle English, City of Adelaide  
Juliane Kürschner, City of Amsterdam  
Kim Le Cerf, City of Melbourne  
Doug Smith, City of Vancouver  
Aline Xavier and Pedro Rolim, City of Rio De Janeiro

Additionally, we thank the Vibrancy Network for helping guide discussions along the way, including Rute Silva, Ana Cláudia Gonçalves, Luisa Pereira, and Sandra Candeias.



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# MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA) is a collaboration of leading global cities working to achieve carbon neutrality before 2050 – the most aggressive greenhouse gas reduction targets undertaken anywhere, by any city. We were founded on the knowledge that carbon neutrality requires transformative, systemic changes. If the climate vanguard members of CNCA can't do this, nobody can.

But the challenge has never been tougher. Global emissions are higher than ever and growing. National governments are still failing to lead with the courage and commitment necessary to turn the tide on emissions quickly. And as 2020's COVID-19 pandemic, global economic crisis, and protests calling for an end to racial inequity have shown us, the harmful systems we've had in place for decades are failing us.

We've realized that a few things must change. First, the pace of actual emissions reduction must rapidly accelerate to address the urgent targets set by the scientific community. Second, the number of cities involved needs to increase dramatically. And third, we must tackle the very roots of the harmful, extractive systems that have exploited natural resources at unsustainable levels and perpetuated the oppression of people.

To achieve this, we need to mobilize more ambitious, transformative climate action in cities. Incremental change focused on technical solutions won't get us where we need to be. To meet our bold goals, we need transformational actions – actions that shift the fundamental attributes of the systems that have created these crises. CNCA calls these transformational actions “Game Changers.”

By focusing over the next three years on these Game Changers, and our role as a global agenda setter for ambitious urban climate action, innovation lab for urban carbon neutrality solutions, accelerator of action and results, and catalyst for systemic change, CNCA can help mobilize the transformative climate action needed to create cleaner, healthier, more equitable, more resilient, regenerative cities in which we all want to live.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Partin'.

Johanna Partin

Director, Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance



# INTRODUCTION

Since our first Strategic Plan in 2016, significant global changes have occurred, including accelerating impacts from a changing climate and scientific analyses indicating that societies have approximately ten years to avert climate catastrophe.

Discussions are growing among CNCA members about how to respond to the urgency and magnitude of reductions needed. We are reexamining the path to net zero emissions and developing strategies to go beyond eliminating emissions by drawing down carbon from the atmosphere, and focusing beyond community boundaries in setting goals and tracking progress to achieve systems level change.

In fall 2019 we convened a nine-member Strategic Planning Committee and six- member Climate Justice Committee to delve into these issues and develop CNCA's next three-year Strategic Plan. We started by articulating a new Shared Purpose Statement for CNCA:

**Mobilize transformative climate action in cities in order to achieve prosperity, equity, resilience and better quality of life for all on a thriving planet.**

We then defined seven Strategic Goals for mobilizing transformative, game-changing climate action over the next three years:

1. **Mobilize transformative climate action** by funding the development, adoption and implementation of game-changing climate policies in cities.
2. **Exert collective influence** on and advocate for policies from other decision-makers to reduce emissions not directly controlled by cities.
3. **Advance methodologies, standards and governance tools** for carbon neutrality planning, implementation, impact measurement and continuous improvement.
4. **Foster peer learning** among climate vanguard cities, so they can learn from each other and go further and faster together.
5. **Cultivate transformational leadership** so city sustainability directors can excel in their roles as change-makers.
6. **Help cities communicate more effectively** to advance their carbon neutrality work.
7. **Prioritize a just carbon neutral future** by integrating climate justice into ambitious climate action.

This Plan describes these Strategic Goals and our strategies for achieving them.

# MOBILIZE TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE ACTION

Achieving carbon neutrality requires a fundamental transformation of the systems that have caused the climate crisis. Cities need support to implement these systems-scale solutions.

- WHAT** Mobilize transformative climate action by funding the development, adoption and implementation of game-changing climate policies in cities.
- WHY** The window to take action is rapidly narrowing. If we don't move more quickly, and at scale, we won't halve emissions by 2030 and completely eliminate them by 2050 or sooner. By focusing on game-changing policies and inviting proposals from cities around the world, CNCA's new fund will help build cities for the 22nd Century – cities that will not only survive climate impacts but thrive far into the future.
- HOW** CNCA will launch a new Game Changer Fund to support the development, adoption and implementation of policies that aggressively shift the fundamental attributes of the systems that have caused the climate crisis toward carbon neutrality. To do this, CNCA will:
1. Determine the policy actions (Game Changers) eligible for funding over the next three years through a member-driven process.
  2. Prioritize projects that address root causes and systems-change approaches.
  3. Integrate climate justice and just transition goals into funding criteria.
  4. Make funding decisions in Game Changer Committees composed of leading cities and global thought leaders.
  5. Continue to prioritize funding for CNCA members, but open funding to other cities and Indigenous Peoples governments around the world.
  6. Maintain a smaller pot of funding for emerging topics.
  7. Enhance peer learning and lesson-sharing channels for funded projects.
- WHO**
- CNCA members will select Game Changers and implement transformational projects.
  - Other cities may apply for funding.
  - Global thought leaders will advise CNCA members on Game Changers.
  - Other global and regional city networks will help CNCA identify candidate cities.





# EXERT COLLECTIVE INFLUENCE

Cities have little direct control over certain emission sources. Reducing emissions at scale requires working with a range of other decision-makers. Working together, cities can have greater influence.

**WHAT** Exert collective influence on and advocate for policies from other decision-makers to reduce emissions not directly controlled by cities.

**WHY** City action is limited by regulations that constrain their authority, a lack of incentives or requirements for private industry to decarbonize, and an economic system built on unsustainable resource extraction. Cities are thus dependent on other levels of government, regulatory agencies and industry to achieve their carbon neutrality goals. By pooling their collective influence and resources, cities can more effectively advocate and motivate other actors to accelerate a shift in their operations toward zero emissions.

**HOW** CNCA will support advocacy and partnership building where the mobilization of a range of actors is needed to advance climate policy. To do this, CNCA will:

1. Use a member-driven approach to prioritize critical policy areas where cities are held back because of policies or political dynamics at other decision-making levels.
2. Develop and implement a collective influence campaign for each priority area.
3. Identify which actors we wish to influence and train members to more effectively influence them.
4. Require all CNCA-funded projects to identify the actors critical for reaching their desired project outcomes and how they plan to influence them.

**WHO**

- CNCA members will determine the collective influence campaigns to be undertaken.
- Private sector and non-profit partners will help mobilize action.
- Academic partners will help CNCA better understand multi-level decision-making in specific policy areas.
- Systems-change experts will help us unlock particularly challenging road-blocks.



# ADVANCE METHODOLOGIES, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE TOOLS

While there are significant technical challenges, climate change is fundamentally a change management challenge. New governance tools need to be applied and new structures put in place to transform systems.

- WHAT** Advance methodologies, standards and governance tools for carbon neutrality planning, implementation, impact measurement and continuous improvement.
- WHY** Governments are large, complex entities working to support a wide range of community needs. They are organized into departments with their own priorities and desired outcomes. The climate challenge is interdisciplinary in nature; thus, working across these divisions is essential if we are to address it effectively. Methods and tools that spread responsibility across the city administration will enhance accountability and advance systems-scale outcomes.
- HOW** CNCA will prioritize the adoption of two types of governance tools over the next three years: climate budgets and climate justice tools (including just transition approaches). We will:
1. Map existing climate budget work and the use of climate justice tools in member cities.
  2. Evaluate emerging methodologies for integrating climate action accountability across government functions and tracking climate action and progress toward adopted emission reduction targets. (Note: CNCA will work with cities for whom ‘climate budgets’ are not suitable to determine more locally appropriate approaches for achieving the same results.)
  3. Help cities develop and apply locally appropriate climate justice tools.
  4. Help city sustainability staff advocate for citywide adoption of these tools.
- WHO**
- Cities already successfully deploying climate budgets and climate justice tools will share their approaches.
  - Subject matter experts will further develop key concepts and identify critical elements of prioritized methodologies.
  - Other networks will help ensure scale.
  - Local and regional social and environmental justice organizations will help ensure that climate justice tools reflect an appropriate understanding of the needs of and ways to engage underserved communities.





**Cities are creating models and lessons that can help other cities go further and faster. But we don't just learn from each other based on prior experience; we learn together when there is no prior example.**

**WHAT** Foster peer learning among climate vanguard cities, so they can learn from each other and go further and faster together.

**WHY** The results of thousands of hours of peer learning in projects, meetings and workshops make clear that peer learning and collective problem-solving leads to better policies and accelerates innovation. We are nowhere near the speed and scale needed to reach the 1.5 degree target. Even the leading cities often find themselves in unknown territory. The need for a safe space for leading cities to exchange ideas and resolve issues is more important than ever.

**HOW** Because of the critical role of peer learning in CNCA's work, we will incorporate it into all Alliance activities and will:

1. Host in-person annual meetings (when feasible) for all members.
2. Host virtual meetings using the latest technology for online collaboration.
3. Organize peer reviews of cities' climate action plans.
4. Establish learning cohorts for cities implementing Game Changer Fund projects, and require funded projects to share lessons through videos, webinars, articles and conference presentations.

**WHO**

- CNCA members and Fund grantees will share lessons with each other.
- Other international, regional and national city networks will help share lessons to as many cities as possible.



# CULTIVATE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Cities have been focused on the ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ of carbon neutrality work. We’ve found that a key missing piece is the ‘who’.

**WHAT** Support city leaders’ transformational leadership development needs so they can excel in their roles as change-makers.

**WHY** Now, more than ever, sustainability directors and senior staff must be effective change makers and managers. Transformational change requires a unique skill set that is not often cultivated in government officials. But strong leadership skills are critical if we are to spur transformative action.

**HOW** CNCA will strengthen its Transformational Leadership Development Program to support members’ leadership skills through the following steps:

1. Assess members’ leadership strengths and needs, and identify common structural, technical and political barriers to implementation.
2. Develop a curriculum of experiential, transformative development and skills building.
3. Integrate climate justice principles and practices throughout the training.
4. Organize peer leadership cohorts for members.
5. Support city staff to build out their role/voice as storytellers, using communication tips, techniques and training opportunities to amplify individual leadership and storytelling.

**WHO**

- CNCA members will participate in training programs and serve as peer coaches.
- Innovative leadership development and change management partners will work with members to assess their needs, and help develop a training program to build the desired skills.





# HELP CITIES COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY

Cities have an ability to win hearts and minds given their proximity to and trust with the public. We know the solutions. We need the public and political will to enact them.

**WHAT** Help cities communicate more effectively to advance their carbon neutrality work.

**WHY** Sound policies won't get implemented in a lasting way unless the public and decision makers support it. That's why impactful communications strategies and campaigns to build public and political will are so necessary. Cities need help communicating effectively with the stakeholders they are trying to influence so they can implement the game changing policies necessary for achieving their ambitious goals.

**HOW** CNCA will help cities become more powerful communicators through these steps:

1. Offer trainings that provide members and other leading cities the opportunity for regular communications practice and updates on behavioral science for use in campaigns.
2. Publish a thought leadership report and/or series that tells the written story – a “how-to” – of the game changing policies advanced through the Game Changer Fund.
3. Build skills among members and funded projects to tell a visual story, via video, of their innovative approaches and lessons learned.
4. Organize a campaign series that provides internal peer review and sharing of campaign strategies.
5. Support a market research agenda that benchmarks climate attitudes and behaviors.
6. Integrate a climate justice focus that builds equity messaging and more inclusive partnerships.

**WHO**

- Members and grantees will drive the creation of communications content.
- City communications teams will distribute and disseminate content.
- External design partners will be employed when necessary.



# PRIORITIZE A JUST CARBON NEUTRAL FUTURE

To achieve carbon neutrality, climate action must work for everyone. By designing actions to support those who have the greatest obstacles to meeting their needs, we can advance climate action at the needed scale and in accordance with our values of fairness and justice.

**WHAT** Prioritize a just carbon neutral future by integrating climate justice into ambitious climate action. (See CNCA's Climate Justice Statement on the next page.)

**WHY** Extractive social, economic and governance systems have resulted in disproportionate negative outcomes for communities of color, low-income communities, Indigenous Peoples, immigrants, refugees and other marginalized communities (priority communities) and the climate crisis. These systems exploit natural resources at unsustainable levels and perpetuate the oppression of priority communities. By working at the intersection of climate and social justice, we address the systems and advance restorative outcomes aligned with our values.

**HOW** CNCA will embed climate justice across programs through the following steps:

1. Develop locally relevant tools to support cities in advancing climate justice work, including just transition goals.
2. Integrate climate justice principles into the Game Changer Fund.
3. Increase priority community representation in CNCA and the field through fellowships and participation in CNCA activities.
4. Incorporate climate justice principles and practices into transformational leadership training.
5. Spotlight examples of climate justice in practice and include climate justice language in communications trainings and materials.
6. Convene a Climate Justice Committee to advise and periodically review CNCA's progress in meeting organizational climate justice goals.

**WHO**

- Cities already deploying climate justice tools will share their approaches.
- Other city networks and social justice partners will be key partners in building the carbon neutrality and climate justice fields of practice.
- Local and regional social and environmental justice organizations will add depth to members' understanding of local contexts, design locally relevant tools, and serve as implementation partners.

# CLIMATE JUSTICE STATEMENT

CNCA is committed to embedding climate justice in our work to support members in taking climate action at the scale needed to protect the planet and in ways aligned with our values of fairness and justice. We will continue to deepen our understanding of the issues and opportunities in fostering a just transition to a clean and carbon neutral future to improve the way we work as well as the language we use, and therefore consider this Statement as a work in progress. The statement is intended to guide CNCA in centering climate justice in our support to members and to inspire members to increasingly advance a just carbon neutral future.

**CNCA is committed to a just carbon neutral future that recognizes and redresses the disproportionate burdens and the disproportionate benefits of the fossil fuel economy by prioritizing climate action that advances the well-being of low-income people, Indigenous Peoples, communities of color, immigrants and refugees and other historically marginalized communities.**

We recognize that:

- Our collective global history of colonization and slavery have deeply impacted government policies and practices and continue to perpetuate inequities in the present.
- The benefits, such as wealth creation, and burdens, such as pollution, of our fossil fuel-based economy and the impacts of climate change affect people across our communities differently, typically based on income, citizenship status, race, gender, age, ability, or ethnicity.
- The causes of disproportionate negative outcomes for people of color, Indigenous Peoples, immigrants and refugees, low-income people, and other marginalized people (priority communities) and the climate crisis are both rooted in interlocking and extractive systems in our governments, economies, and societies that exploit natural resources at unsustainable levels and perpetuate the oppression of priority communities.
- There is a growing sense of xenophobia, nationalism, and related increasing oppression of recent immigrants and refugees as well as citizens from certain countries.
- Through their connection to the land, traditions, and perspectives rooted in their history and culture, Indigenous Peoples have unique knowledge vital to creating a more sustainable future.
- Carbon neutrality requires that climate solutions work for everyone and will be most effective if designed first to work for those who experience the greatest barriers to meeting their needs and thriving.



# CLIMATE JUSTICE STATEMENT

- A just transition to carbon-neutrality will require strategies to support priority communities as the energy, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors (among others) are restructured and workforce needs shift, as well as strategies to address increased costs of clean energy policies when they result.
- Priority communities are severely under-represented in positions of power generally, and specifically in climate action planning positions.
- Our fossil fuel-based economy and the institutional systems which perpetuate inequities are fundamentally broken and must be repaired to restore the well-being of our planet, communities and people.
- Science is a necessary foundation of our understanding of climate change and the resulting disproportionate burdens, and the design of effective climate action.

We will strive to:

- Implement just climate action that is designed first to work for those who experience the greatest barriers to meeting their needs and thriving, and who are often at the greatest risk from the impacts of climate change.
- Work in collaboration with priority communities to define the challenges and design and implement climate solutions, including fostering a just transition that addresses job losses and cost increases.
- Allocate the time and resources to collaborate with priority communities and resource their robust participation.
- Value the insights of people, especially priority communities, as much or more than traditional data sources.
- Be people-centered, including understanding the lived experiences and every-day challenges of people from priority communities and how climate action can improve quality of life and avoid or mitigate negative impacts such as increasing costs for low income people.
- Increase the representation of priority communities in the climate and sustainability field by supporting professional development and capacity building.
- Take a systems-based and reparative approach to climate action to advance health and economic and social well-being by collaborating with priority communities and across city departments, different levels of government, and sectoral boundaries.