

# Core Module #7: Climate Change

Engagement Module





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## Climate Change

### Engagement Module

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#### Themes

1. Humans play a large role in climate change, historically and now.
2. Climate change is a collective problem that requires collective solutions.
3. The negative impacts of climate change disproportionately impact communities of color.
4. Advocacy and policy change are critical to reducing climate change impacts.

#### Background

Climate change poses a threat to the environment in New Jersey, from sea level rise to more and more extreme flooding, heat waves, and storm events. The earth's average temperature has been on the rise with an increase of 1.5°F over the past century. It's projected, with variations due to the human response to climate change, that temperatures will rise another 0.5 to 8.6°F over the next hundred years.<sup>1</sup>

Our ability to grow food and live in the places we've inhabited for thousands of years is rapidly changing. Glaciers have shrunk, ice on rivers and lakes is breaking up earlier, and we are witnessing mass species extinction at a rate our planet has not witnessed in its 4.5 billion-year history. There is growing acceptance of what science has told us for more than a half century: humans are causing the climate crisis, and we are at a tipping point. We absolutely must reduce the use of fossil fuels and the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions causing climate change so that we can continue to inhabit the Earth and sustain its water, climate, and biological systems.

Climate change not only impacts the "natural" environment but has direct impact on social justice and human rights. It is a critical and urgent threat.<sup>2</sup> We have a moral responsibility to those already dealing with the impacts of the climate crisis and future generations to address this threat immediately.

#### The Good News

We humans have both created and solved phenomenally difficult environmental challenges before. We no longer have rivers and lakes that glow orange or spontaneously combust, as we once did. While the ozone layer may be thin in some places on the globe at certain times of the year, the ozone hole no longer poses an existential threat. Perhaps, the climate crisis being our greatest shared challenge may help us solve it collectively. We can work together to address the climate crisis!

1. "Climate Basics," NJDEP | Climate Change, accessed September 26, 2022, <https://www.nj.gov/dep/climatechange/basics.html>.  
 2. "Climate Justice," WE ACT for Environmental Justice, October 5, 2017, <https://www.weact.org/whatwedo/areasofwork/climate/>.

## Impacts

The climate crisis disproportionately impacts urban communities and communities of color who are already experiencing higher cases of asthma and other health problems caused by pollution from diesel traffic, power plants, and other industrial operations in their midst. Sea level rise has already forced some to move to higher ground. More recent disastrous storms have resulted in people dying as well as more damage to homes, businesses, and wildlife.

## Benefits from Local Action

Local action on the climate crisis can be powerful in creating positive change. In New Jersey, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) has consulted with environmental commissions and climate scientists to develop a shortlist of the most pressing climate actions municipalities can take right now to address the two most urgent climate issues:

1. Reducing GHG emissions to stop the impacts from growing exponentially worse. Switching to electric vehicles and electrifying homes and businesses can help make a difference right away.
2. Improving resiliency to prepare our communities for the unavoidable impacts.

All NJ municipalities must now conduct climate mitigation hazard assessments for inclusion in their land use plans in accordance with new requirements signed into law by Governor Murphy in 2021. ANJEC worked to develop resources to help towns perform this assessment with the [NJ Office of State Planning](#). Environmental commissions (ECs) should ask their local elected officials and land use board members about when and how the municipality will proceed and ask to have a representative participate in the assessment.

Environmental commissions and citizens can review local zoning and land use ordinances to ensure enhanced flood hazard area protection. [NJFloodmapper.org](#) and the recently announced Protecting Against Climate Threat rules from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) provide data that accounts for sea level rise and increased flooding. State and local zoning needs to prohibit inappropriate development in flood areas to stop putting people in harm's way.

## More Good News!

New Jersey's move to clean energy will benefit the economy and create thousands of new jobs, according to research from the Applied Economics Clinic, which provides analysis on energy and the environment. The organization found that New Jersey could add up to 11,000 new jobs annually and about \$1.3 billion in economic activity with its dedicated efforts to transition to clean energy by 2050, which is a goal of Governor Mark Murphy's administration.<sup>3</sup> Advocates want to make sure job creation is inclusive, saying clean energy creates a big opportunity for low-income and minority communities.

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3. "New Jersey's Clean Energy Transition Could Generate \$34.1 Billion in Statewide Economic Activity, Nearly 300,000 Job-Years by 2050," Insider NJ, June 8, 2022, <https://www.insidernj.com/press-release/new-jerseys-clean-energy-transition-could-generate-34-1-billion-in-statewide-economic-activity-nearly-300000-job-years-by-2050/>.

## Advocacy

We must speak loudly and often to our elected officials about the need to work together to replace "dirty energy" with clean sources, like wind and solar, while also decreasing our overall energy use. Citizens can call and email their local, state, and congressional officials to urge them to work as hard as they can to stop the climate crisis. You can join a group to do action calls together, which can make it fun. Voting for elected officials who care about climate change is powerful.

### Facilitation Questions:

1. When you hear the words climate change, what comes to mind?
2. If climate change is such a big problem, what can an individual person do about it?
3. What opportunities do you see in your community to address climate change?
4. Who can you ask for help with educating your community about the threats from climate change?
5. Why aren't more people taking action to stop climate change?

### Additional Resources:

- The NJ Department of Environmental Protection has many resources available about climate change.
- [The 2020 New Jersey Global Warming Response Act 80x50 Report](#) was written in response to the mandate in the Global Warming Response Act, to reduce New Jersey's GHG emissions by 80% from 2006 levels by 2050. This report evaluates our state's emissions from both energy and non-energy systems, providing guidance, policies, and regulatory and legislative recommendations to meet the State's GHG emission reduction goals.
- [We Act for Environmental Justice](#) - WE ACT's mission is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low-income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. WE ACT envisions a community that has informed and engaged residents who participate fully in decision-making on key issues that impact their health and community; strong and equal environmental protections; and increased environmental health through community-based participatory research and evidence-based campaigns.
- [A Look at Why Environmentalism is so Homogeneous and How Organizations Might Cultivate Genuine Diversity](#)
- [The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commission's Spring Report](#) – They have speakers available and many other resources about climate, clean energy, and creating a healthy environment.
- [The League of New Jersey Conservation Voters](#) grades elected officials and candidates running for office on their environmental record.
- Green energy will boost jobs, [nonprofit group says](#)