

Washington State Climate Resilience Strategy

Appendix C:

A step-by-step breakdown of
our engagement process

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Ecology led engagement efforts with individuals and communities across the state to:

- Identify climate justice priorities.
- Center climate justice through actions and goals.
- Help Ecology and other state agencies address disparities exacerbated by climate change to build a more resilient future for all Washingtonians.

Step 1: Our early engagement work

While an interagency team developed this draft strategy, Ecology leads the overall process, including outreach and engagement activities. At the start, Ecology developed an engagement plan to guide engagement activities with frontline communities, vulnerable populations, Tribal governments and communities, and the public.

We also developed an extensive list of potentially interested parties with input from our staff and staff from nine other agencies. Ecology maintains a comprehensive contact list of Tribal leaders and natural resources staff from all federally recognized Tribes in Washington. Together, we used these contact lists to share information about the strategy update process and engagement activities, and to direct individuals to sign-up for Ecology's email list.

Our initial engagement efforts focused on:

- Gathering input on the primary climate impacts and associated challenges facing communities.
- Successes and challenges communities experienced in building climate resilience.
- Their vision for a more climate resilient future.

We used information from initial engagement activities to help develop the strategy's goals, strategies, and actions.

Engagement activities

We held listening sessions

- We held three listening sessions in December 2023. Over 180 individuals participated across the sessions. We posted recordings of each session on the Ecology website.
- We didn't collect information about the participant's geographic distribution and representation. However, based on the comments we received, participants joined from across the state and represented Tribal governments, county and city governments, academic institutions, business interests, and nonprofit organizations.

We surveyed Washingtonians

- We opened an online survey from mid-November through mid-January as a companion to the listening sessions to provide another way for individuals to share thoughts and ideas.
- Ecology received over 700 unique responses to the survey. These responses do not reflect a representative sample of communities in Washington. Yet, Ecology recorded survey responses from all parts of the state.

We held an environmental justice document review

Ecology staff reviewed documents and reports related to environmental justice that various community-based organizations in Washington produced.

We met with Tribal governments and communities

- Ecology staff provided targeted outreach to Tribal governments and communities through meetings with:
 - Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs – State-Tribal Climate Roundtable
 - Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
 - Pacific Northwest Tribal Climate Roundtable
 - Puget Sound Partnership’s Tribal Co-Management Council

We were invited to share information and solicit feedback from other groups

- Ecology staff received invitations and requests to present information about the strategy from groups across the state. These included county and city governments, utility providers, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, representatives from museums and cultural institutions, and private sector organizations.
- Ecology staff also shared information about the strategy update process to the Environmental Justice Council.

Step 2: We introduced the draft to Tribes and overburdened communities

To advance engagement with overburdened communities and vulnerable populations, Ecology staff gave Tribal leaders, Tribal staff, and representatives from overburdened communities the chance to review and offer feedback on the draft actions proposed by agencies. This was done before the official public comment draft was released to give these groups a chance to share their thoughts with Ecology and have them incorporated into the strategy before the public comment period.

What we heard from overburdened communities

Ecology partnered with Front and Centered, a coalition of organizations and partners that represent the needs of frontline communities, to convene community leaders from around the state. They used the state’s Environmental Health Disparities map to select leaders from communities who are disproportionately affected by climate change, pollution, and environmental hazards. The group of leaders completed a visioning exercise about climate resilience from the perspective of the populations and geographies they represent. After this visioning exercise, community leaders reviewed and provided feedback, and recommended changes to the list of actions that agencies proposed in the draft.

Overall, the process revealed a strong desire by frontline communities to be involved in decision making processes related to planning, implementation, and evaluation. Community representatives also noted the need for more explicit equity considerations. Additionally, participants said language describing strategies and actions should be more accessible so overburdened communities see themselves reflected in the work of agencies, particularly for highly technical topics. These leaders also highlighted the importance of continuing greenhouse gas emissions reduction efforts and the need to address structural inequities and socioeconomic disparities to support community resilience.

What we heard from Tribes

In late April and early May, Ecology held two listening sessions for Tribal leaders and staff. These listening sessions provided an opportunity for Tribes to share information and feedback on the draft actions proposed by agencies. We emailed information about the listening sessions to Tribal staff and leaders using a distribution list compiled by Ecology's Executive Advisor for Tribal Affairs.

Before the listening sessions, Ecology gave participants a summary document that provided a high-level overview of the strategy topics and their accompanying actions. Ecology was specifically interested in whether actions aligned with Tribal climate resilience priorities. We also wanted to understand the opportunities for ongoing engagement and consultation with Tribes as we implemented the strategy.

Specific feedback included discussing other hazards that exacerbate climate impacts such as elevated water temperature and impacts on salmon, as well as ocean acidification and its impacts on shellfish and marine vegetation. On implementation and governance, participants noted the importance of coordinating engagement and consultation with Tribes across agencies, given the increasing requests for Tribal comment on environmental issues. Additionally, participants considered making use of existing tribal forums such as the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission to provide updates and seek feedback on implementation of the strategy actions.

Step 3: We held a public comment period

Ecology released a draft of the strategy for public comment from June 11 to July 11, 2024. We posed four questions to help solicit feedback:

- Do the actions presented align with the highest priority climate resilience needs of your community? If not, how can they be improved?
- Are any climate resilience priorities for your community missing from the strategy?
- How would your community best like to be engaged under our proposed governance and implementation structure?
- What challenges has your community faced during engagement with the state on related issues? What could be improved moving forward?

We accepted comments online using Ecology's SmartComment tool. We also hosted three virtual listening sessions as a different format to share feedback. In total, Ecology received 38 written comments and 104 individuals joined the virtual listening sessions. Comments and feedback covered a wide range of topics, mirroring the breadth of information contained within the strategy.

What did we hear about the most?

Engagement, outreach, and governance

- Several commenters noted important and specific engagement considerations for implementing the strategy, as well as interest in engagement on particular actions and topics. Some comments noted specific groups to engage with such as watershed enhancement committees, agricultural support organizations, regional fisheries enhancement groups, utility providers, and local public health districts. Others highlighted broad engagement suggestions, such as focusing on education and two-way knowledge sharing between communities and state agencies.
- Other comments noted the importance of focusing engagement efforts on the issues most important to different communities. For example, the primary concerns of people in urban areas will differ from those in rural parts of the state.
- Comments noted the importance of ongoing and recurring engagement efforts as opposed to one-off opportunities.
- Commenters also highlighted the importance of coordinating engagement efforts across state agencies to reduce burdens placed on communities.

Coordinate with local governments and partners

Specific suggestions included opportunities to improve grant application processes to reduce burdens on local partners, share climate data and projections, increase funding to support local resilience actions, and consider the economic impacts from climate change on businesses.

Several comments also noted the importance of coordinating and partnering with utility providers when we implement actions related to grid resilience and water management.

Beaver management

Multiple comments spoke to the value of beavers, particularly in water management and connections to drought resilience and wildfire mitigation. Related comments noted the nuanced nature of beaver management in Washington and associated challenges.

Regulations and enforcement

Many individuals noted the importance of regulatory approaches to climate resilience as well as the need for enforcement of existing laws. Commenters noted that more robust enforcement of current regulations would lead to resilience benefits.

Floodplain management

Comments focused on floodplain management and connections to climate resilience efforts. Suggestions include coordinating a statewide approach to voluntary acquisition and buyout programs to support flood risk reduction, and enhanced support for existing programs to increase regulatory efficiency and permitting timelines.

Ongoing state efforts to build climate resilience

Comments raised topics and suggestions related to actions that agencies are already doing. We added information about these efforts to existing agency work examples and added new examples of agency work when possible. For example, some commenters noted limited information about water quality included. We added information to existing work examples and action descriptions, and WDFW added another work example focused on stream temperature mapping to support salmon recovery and protection.

How did we address comments?

We addressed comments in a variety of ways.

- If a comment noted simple suggestions or context additions, we added it to the strategy.
- If a comment noted gaps in the examples state agencies are already doing to support climate resilience, we provided more examples or revised to include more information.
- If a comment provided suggestions and recommendations to support agencies implementing these actions, we added a new section – Implementation and Future Considerations – to the tables in Appendix B. As agencies move toward implementing the actions, these considerations will help guide agency efforts.
- If a comment raised meaningful and valid suggestions for work beyond the proposed actions, we identified them as part of the range of topics that require additional conversations and more evaluation beyond the strategy’s Sept. 30, 2024, publish date. These ideas included potential future actions, expanding the scope or scale of proposed actions, and proposed adjustments to state regulatory approaches. Many had suggestions for entirely new grant programs. We organized these suggestions in the strategy under the ‘What’s Next’ section. Agencies will consider these during the strategy’s implementation and further discuss potential opportunities for action on these topics.