



Salt Lake City, Utah

A White House Climate Action Champions Case Study

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Executive Summary

Salt Lake City has a robust set of ambitious climate goals that target reducing emissions while simultaneously prioritizing ways to become more resilient in the face of current and future climate impacts. These goals cover transportation, building energy, food systems, water systems and citizen engagement, among other things. Executive Orders, ordinances, strategic plans and many other tools have been leveraged by Mayor Becker to address climate change during his seven years with Salt Lake City.

Our flagship program, Climate Leaders, was created in response to a need for enhanced participation from all City departments in order to achieve these goals. Staff from the Division of Sustainability, with support and direction from the Mayor's Office, launched the program as a way to build internal capacity for an informed, employee-led response to climate change. The Climate Leaders graduating class will be an empowered set of employees ready to apply lessons learned and inspire others in the City to lead our community towards a low-carbon, resilient future. There are 26 City employees, representing every major department, enrolled in Climate Leaders and participating in monthly 90-minute workshops.

The goal of this project is to transform the relative importance and priority of climate change in the minds of participants while simultaneously delivering practical tools for reducing emissions and enhancing resiliency on a department-level and Citywide basis. Climate Leaders program participants represent a diverse cross-section of government employees and also society at large. From firefighters to police officers to City planners to technology staff, all departments will now have in-house Climate Leaders who can inspire their colleagues and inform a new, transformative approach to addressing climate change.

Climate Action Champion

As a progressive municipal government in a conservative Western state, Salt Lake City is a model for climate-centric leadership, and its strong and ongoing commitment to the implementation of innovative sustainable practices and deployment of technologies showcases its distinctive standing as a Climate Action Champion. The City has a goal to reduce GHG emissions from City operations by 20% below 2008 levels by 2020 and in the community by 17% by 2020.

Major accomplishments include:

Joint Resolution To Reduce Carbon Footprint. Mayor Ralph Becker and the Salt Lake City Council signed a joint resolution in 2008 committing the City to reduce its municipal carbon footprint 20% below the 2005 level by 2020; 50% below the 2005 level by 2040; and, 80% below the 2005 level by 2050.

Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory. The City completed its first community GHG inventory in 2009, which quantified 4.75 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions - or 26 metric tons per person – and prompted the City's commitment to eliminate 1.3 million metric tons of CO₂e by 2020.

Clear the Air Challenge. The City created the Clear the Air Challenge to engage citizens in voluntary reductions in vehicle miles traveled, resulting in the elimination of over 9.5 million single-occupant vehicle miles traveled and reducing more than 7.5 million pounds of GHG emissions between 2009 and 2014. (<http://cleartheairchallenge.org>)

Salt Lake City Sustainable Code Revision is a ground-breaking initiative to incorporate sustainability provisions into zoning and subdivision ordinances.

(<http://www.slcgov.com/slccgreen/coderevisionproject>)

Project Implementation

The Salt Lake Climate Leaders program is in its first year of operation. The program was launched in February 2015 in response to a growing need for in-depth engagement with municipal employees on climate issues. A total of 26 employees are participating in the first year of curriculum. Salt Lake City will review results after 2015, improve the program experience and continue to offer Climate Leaders training to new groups each year moving forward. Community participation is also being considered.

Climate Leaders curriculum incorporates climate science and its local context, training on evaluating emissions impacts alongside daily decisions, guidance on effectively communicating climate change, applied lessons in systems-level thinking, the sharing of internal stories, and employee networking. We accomplish this through in-house presentations, guest speakers and the continuous use of applied exercises that challenge staff to consider climate change and think in a leadership capacity. The first year curriculum of Climate Leaders lowers future program implementation demands and creates a starting point for scaling to also include community members and outside organizations going forward.

Though often depicted as a single component in a Society-Economy-Environment sustainability Venn diagram, climate change really represents a cross-cutting, foundational challenge to all of these areas. Through its focus on system-level changes within City operations, the Climate Leaders program delivers the array of positive impacts and co-benefits associated with any holistic response to climate change. The program inspires critical thinking that considers impacts across all of these areas and prepares decision-makers throughout our City organization to independently and thoughtfully pursue climate solutions.

City-Wide Partnerships

The Climate Leaders program challenges its participants to become more proactive champions for climate solutions and positive, transformative change within their departments. A major co-benefit is that staff learn critical thinking skills, communication techniques and how to personally forge their path as a leader within the organization. Climate Leaders participants will not only contribute to our City's climate change goals, but also are better prepared to grow professionally and contribute to their departments and City operations in innumerable other ways.

Climate Leaders has also been a catalyst for new employee working relationships across City departments. Participants better understand the operations and goals of other City departments, particularly as these relate to climate change, and have developed new personal connections that improve Citywide coordination and build an enhanced team-oriented culture at the City. Climate Leaders represents both a breakthrough climate action program and a viable employee development opportunity.

Due to its rigorous nature, and the reliance on hands-on, in-person workshops, it is not possible to train all City staff simultaneously. However, Climate Leaders participants will implement a "Climate Week" project each year that engages all City employees and includes customized programming that each participant takes back to resonate with their specific department needs and culture.

Measuring Success

Salt Lake City's climate goals include reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050 on both municipal and community-wide levels. To accomplish this, a sizable portfolio of energy, transportation, waste & recycling, food systems, and other related projects have been implemented or are on the horizon. These prescriptive projects all have quantifiable impacts and specific target date outcomes related to emissions reductions and in some cases enhanced resiliency.

Climate Leaders aims to support all of these projects, while simultaneously inspiring new and transformative solutions driven by employees across all City departments. Identifying a specific carbon reduction target for Climate Leaders would be both challenging and limiting as program outcomes are intended to accelerate emissions reductions and orient all project outcomes towards the 80 X 2050 goals.

Impacts from this project address all elements of the City's climate goals. Decisions from related staff impact emissions at both the government and community-wide levels, while also dictating how we adapt to rapid climate change. The long-term goal is to train a new class of climate leaders each year and eventually become a beacon of hope for human-led climate change action that invests in, and relies upon, an organization's most important asset: its people.

Next Steps

Salt Lake City intends to continue the Climate Leaders program and scale its reach each year going forward. In order to grow the program while still maintaining its character and impact, the City will continue to recruit roughly 25-40 new municipal participants annually. These participants will commit to 10 monthly 90-minute workshops totaling 15 hours of classroom style engagement during the year.

The Bigger Picture

Climate Leaders reflects a human-led response to a distinctly human-caused problem. Renowned systems thinker Dr. Donella Meadows wrote that the most powerful place to intervene in an

organizational system is through influencing the paradigm from which that system manifests. However, paradigm-shifting approaches are far too often avoided due to the complexity and uncertainty associated with this path. Climate Leaders takes on this challenge and through provoking program curriculum and a participatory focus that has inspired new leaders throughout City government.

Lessons Learned

Salt Lake City recently revisited our municipal and community climate action plans and devised a systems-level approach to embed transformative, enduring improvements across all City departments. This work was documented in our 2014 Climate Response Plans that highlighted opportunities for each department to further reduce emissions while simultaneously enhancing resiliency. Each department has its own tailored plan, but a core set of four systems levers were identified that apply to every department and are critical to climate success: Budgeting; Procurement; Data Access and Frequency; and, Employee Engagement.

Mayor Becker has inspired a culture where City staff across all departments are motivated to take action on climate change. However, this motivation is not always matched by a capability to evaluate climate-related decisions and make optimal decisions. Climate Leaders fills this gap as a robust training and empowerment program that has inspired a dynamic, employee-led response to climate change. The program has enhanced our human potential for addressing climate issues while building cross-departmental relationships and resiliency to employee attrition.

Resources/Learning More

www.slccgreen.com

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Project Impact

- This has inspired a culture where City staff across all departments are motivated to take action on climate change.
- Climate Leaders is a robust training and empowerment program that has inspired a dynamic, employee-led response to climate change.
- The program has enhanced our human potential for addressing climate issues while building cross-departmental relationships and resiliency to employee attrition.

Project Facts

Project Duration

- January – November 2015

Project Cost

- \$500 for food and some supplies; covered by internal staff time

Project Staff Required

- .10 FTE

Population Served

- 26 City Employees

Community Type

- City

Tools & Resources

- Lesson plans will be available in early 2016

Project Costs and Funding

The Climate Leaders program was funded through internal departmental funds, created and run by one staff member of the Sustainability Division, using less than 10% of his time over the course of the year. Our Communications Manager also contributed to the effort. The only outside costs were to provide food at the meetings, and a small amount for internal printing.