

# HIGHER EDUCATION



*Colleges and universities are key players in urban settings, serving as community hubs, living labs, research centers, and training grounds for the workforce of tomorrow. Collaboration with higher education in climate action planning can help cities deploy climate technology, support community adaptation, develop innovative approaches, prepare students for clean economy jobs, and help shape climate goals through their community partnerships.*

With its vast reach and influence, higher education can be a critical partner to support city climate action plans. Higher education, like many large institutions, has significant resource needs that impact the environment. With about 19 million students enrolled, higher education manages approximately 210,000 buildings with 6.2 billion square feet of floor space and spends \$6 billion on energy annually. By decarbonizing campuses, institutions can lead by example and contribute to meeting city-level climate mitigation goals.

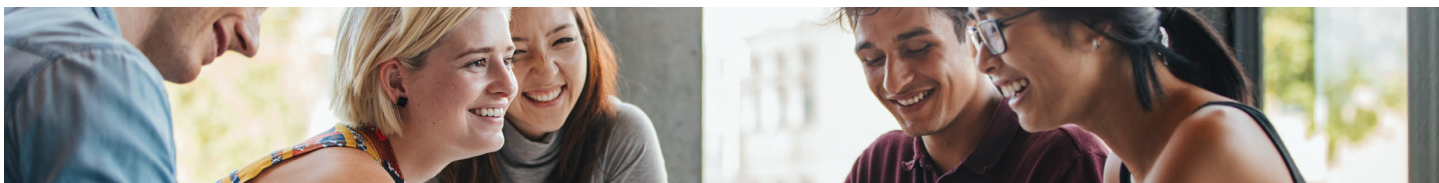
Higher education can also utilize its strengths as centers of learning, research hubs, and trusted community partners to further city climate action plans. Higher education has already served as a leader in researching climate change — its causes, consequences, and solutions. Beyond research, they also serve as a trusted resource for information and knowledge. Critically, the higher education sector, especially community colleges, is an essential leader in supporting workforce development representation on an advisory board or committee or as consultants.

Despite these strengths and opportunities, many colleges and universities are still only scratching the surface when it comes to their impact on city climate action. Cities can harness this untapped potential through partnerships, collaborations, and deeper integration into climate action planning to accelerate municipal climate solutions.

## FINDINGS

**OVERALL** 30 of the 35 CAPs included at least one mention of the postsecondary sector, most commonly noting its value in terms of expertise, resources, and proximity to members of the future workforce

- **Development:** 27 CAPs included higher education institutions in the development of the plan
- **Framing:** 26 CAPs described the important role of higher education in the framing of the plan
- **Substance:** 25 CAPs included at least one substantive partnership between the municipal government and the postsecondary sector as part of its overall climate action strategy



## **Development: 27 CAPs included higher education in the development of climate action plans**

Higher education was pivotal in formulating 27 of the 35 CAPs. This involvement spanned from representation in advisory committees to acting as specialized consultants. Specifically, nine CAPs underscored partnerships with universities and other postsecondary institutions during the plan's initial scoping phase. These collaborations harnessed the research strengths of local universities for two primary functions: (1) conducting rigorous emissions assessments or (2) creating comprehensive CAP management and tracking systems. Such partnerships allowed for cities to employ a data-driven approach in determining their environmental footprint and the resources at their disposal, and paved the way for highly-targeted and efficient climate initiatives.

## **Framing: 26 CAPs described the important role of higher education in the framing of the action plan**

26 of the 35 plans emphasized higher education in their framing, highlighting the value of tapping into the expertise of local academic entities, including local universities, community colleges, and other postsecondary institutions. The multifaceted role of higher education in the framing of the city CAPs tended to follow one of two narratives: some CAPs positioned universities and colleges as potential partners in achieving research or workforce development goals, while others focused on the need to continue the sector's role in promoting the overall economic and social health of the city, including implications for equity and climate justice.

## **Substance: 25 CAPs included higher education in the substance of their climate action strategy**

Out of the 35 CAPs examined, 25 explicitly referenced the role of higher education in implementing climate strategies. The inclusion — or lack thereof — of academic institutions can reflect a city's approach to leveraging external expertise and its approach to a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder climate strategy. A smaller subset of just five CAPs referred to research agendas to monitor the implementation of the city's climate action strategies, either through ongoing research or by providing data analytics and visualizations.



### **BRIGHT SPOT: PHOENIX, AZ**

The City of Phoenix forged a partnership with Arizona State University (ASU) to define baseline emissions levels and create tracking and monitoring systems for the city's CAP. With ASU's ongoing advisory role, Phoenix benefits from academic expertise and rigorous scrutiny of their climate action strategies. Their continued relationship highlights the value of sustained partnerships for ongoing adaptation and evolution of Phoenix's CAP, allowing the city to more ably and sustainably manage its implementation.



### **BRIGHT SPOT: UTILIZING RESEARCH FOR TARGETED WORKFORCE ANALYSIS**

Research produced by postsecondary institutions can help cities strategically identify the clean economy jobs aligned with regional growth projections, climate action goals, workforce development capacity, and the talent needs of local businesses. Three cities — Phoenix, Oklahoma City, and Kansas City (MO) — referred to research out of local area colleges and universities in the framing of their clean jobs roadmap.

By taking this step, city governments and universities can better prioritize workforce development programs that support the talent needs of local businesses.





## BRIGHT SPOT: OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

In their climate action plan, Oklahoma City acknowledges their potential to be a major solar market and outlines the role of a trained, qualified workforce to meet this demand. To accomplish this, the plan recommends a partnership with local schools, colleges, and universities to establish solar training programs that will certify and train workers for solar occupations. The plan identifies community colleges and technology centers in particular as ideal starting points to develop and implement these programs.

## Opportunity

Often a trusted partner in communities, the higher education sector has an opportunity to further assist in the development and implementation of city climate action plans. A more comprehensive partnership between higher education and cities can result in the accelerated deployment of clean innovations, technology, and research, as well as a rapid transition to the clean workforce of the future. In particular, collaborations with Tribal Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and other Minority Serving Institutions can champion voices from communities most impacted by climate change and ultimately foster a more just, sustainable, and resilient future.



HIGHER EDUCATION IN CITY CLIMATE ACTION PLANS	DEVELOPMENT	FRAMING	SUBSTANCE
New York, New York	✓	✓	✓
Los Angeles, California	✓	✓	✓
Chicago, Illinois	✓		✓
Houston, Texas		✓	✓
Phoenix, Arizona	✓	✓	✓
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	✓	✓	
San Antonio, Texas	✓		
San Diego, California	✓	✓	✓
Dallas, Texas	✓		✓
San Jose, California		✓	✓
Austin, Texas	✓	✓	✓
Jacksonville, Florida		No finalized city CAP at the time of the review	
Fort Worth, Texas		No finalized city CAP at the time of the review	
Columbus, Ohio		✓	
Indianapolis, Indiana	✓		
Charlotte, North Carolina	✓	✓	
San Francisco, California		✓	✓
Seattle, Washington			✓
Denver, Colorado	✓	✓	✓
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	✓	✓	✓
Nashville-Davidson, Tennessee	✓	✓	✓
El Paso, Texas		No finalized city CAP at the time of the review	
Washington, District of Columbia	✓	✓	✓
Boston, Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓
Las Vegas, Nevada	✓		
Portland, Oregon			
Detroit, Michigan	✓	✓	✓
Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky	✓	✓	✓
Memphis, Tennessee	✓	✓	✓
Baltimore, Maryland	✓	✓	✓
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	✓	✓	✓
Albuquerque, New Mexico	✓		
Fresno, California		✓	✓
Tucson, Arizona	✓	✓	✓
Sacramento, California	✓	✓	
Mesa, Arizona		✓	
Kansas City, Missouri	✓	✓	✓
Atlanta, Georgia	✓	✓	✓
Omaha, Nebraska		No finalized city CAP at the time of the review	
Colorado Springs, Colorado		No finalized city CAP at the time of the review	