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Developing and Prototyping an Evaluation Framework for Justice and Equity in Climate Policy at the City of Vancouver

RECOMMENDATIONS + KEY FINDINGS

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DISCLAIMER:

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organizations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability and climate action across the region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of City of Vancouver staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Vancouver or the University of British Columbia.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The work on this project took place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy əh̓ (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, who have stewarded the air, lands, waters, and living kin that inhabit these spaces since time immemorial.

Any efforts to advance equity and justice in climate policy must fundamentally recognize the devastating and ongoing legacy of settler colonialism in the climate crisis, must recognize and mitigate the disproportionate burdens of climate change on Indigenous communities, and must recognize and accept Indigenous sovereignty as the foundation to climate justice in any and all paths forward.

We commit to honouring the laws, customs and values of the xʷməθkʷəy əh̓ (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, as well as upholding the rights of all Indigenous Peoples as per *the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and strive every day to work in ways that support true justice and meaningful reconciliation among all peoples.



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INTRODUCTION:

Many local governments in North America and globally - such as the City of Vancouver - are including justice and equity as stated priorities in climate policies or as cross-cutting themes in climate action plans or policy interventions.¹ However, many of these plans lack the complexity-based, culturally appropriate, and intersectional evaluation methodologies or approaches to not only accurately track progress towards these goals but to also measure and mitigate unintended and inequitable harms from climate policies. The result, according to Kayleigh Swanson of the University of Waterloo, is that “the efficacy of these plans for advancing social justice remains unclear.”²

The goals of equitable evaluation in municipal climate policy include but are not limited to improved evidence informed policy making³, including the evidence of lived experience⁴; improved public trust through increased transparency and accountability⁵; and mitigation of unintended consequences of both policy outcomes and policy processes.⁶

Fundamentally, equitable evaluation helps the City move towards better and less harmful ways of making, measuring, and implementing climate plans as well as to improve the quality and robustness of the plans themselves. The goal is to develop and continually improve policy interventions that are informed by community participation and collaboration; that advance justice and equity in tangible ways; that address potential gaps or unintentional negative consequences in planning, policy making, engagement, programs, and activities; and to facilitate reflection and learning about the integration of equity and justice goals into climate action in order to improve impacts and outcomes over time.

Evaluation as Learning and Engagement:

While the term Evaluation is the standard language of broad field of study and practice, including Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), the language of evaluation is seen by some as distinctly hierarchical and colonial in nature, privileging particular ways of doing, being, and thinking, while diminishing others. Thus, given the desire to move forward in ways that move towards justice, equity, and decolonization, we suggest that “evaluation” be more broadly conceptualized and articulated as Learning, Evaluation, and Engagement.

BACKGROUND:

Evaluating equity and justice in climate action is an implementation item in the City of Vancouver’s Climate Justice Charter (CJC), which calls for the use of both disaggregated quantitative data and the incorporation of stories to allow for a “meaningful understanding of progress” in climate justice and equity in the City. Further, it calls for an evaluation of process-related criteria, “because the way this work is done is as important as the outcomes”⁷. This project is part of the early phases of exploring meaningful approaches to this work.

Currently, the City’s climate plans, such as the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), include indicators that measure progress towards goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While metrics are important, additional methods are required to ensure that the evaluation process is rooted in justice and that the findings are used to improve conditions for vulnerable and made marginalized residents as well as the more-than-human members of community. As such, the evaluation process must consider the complex intersections of climate change, equity, justice, reconciliation and decolonization.

Evaluation frameworks range in scope and methodology, from more traditional monitoring and evaluation that envisions evaluation as the distinct and final step of a linear policy process, to more complex impact analysis approaches that aim to include and account for more intersectional social and structural considerations. The latter and other complexity-based approaches - such as democratic evaluation⁸, participatory evaluation⁹, developmental evaluation¹⁰, or evaluation that follows the principles and guidelines of the Equitable Evaluation Framework (EEF)¹¹ - tend to share some common themes: they are participatory, they focus primarily on the ways in which evaluation is conceptualized and conducted, they are relational and require varying levels of trust and relationship-building, and they centre mixed methods of gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. The aim in pulling together a broader evaluation framework then is not to pick a single one-size-fits all approach to evaluation, but to engage with a variety of methodologies that range in scope, scale, and in the kinds of questions they ask, ensuring that the chosen approaches are appropriate for each evaluation and specific (cultural, social, political, etc.) context.¹²

RESEARCH APPROACH:

This research for this project combined:

- (1) a system thinking iterative approach to a framework prototype¹³ that would act as an early draft for further feedback, expansion, and honing;
- (2) informational interviews with city staff and key community organizations about equity evaluation approaches, possibilities, and gaps to inform the values and priorities of such a framework;
- (3) exploration of the literature and best practices regarding evaluation approaches and methodologies that attempt to evaluate equity and justice focused policies or interventions; and,
- (4) comparative analysis of available municipal, regional, or other government or Indigenous-led climate plans that include concepts of climate justice, environmental justice, or equity with particular attention given to definitions and framings of equity and actions taken to evaluate progress towards these goals.

“Climate justice seeks to equitably distribute the costs and benefits related to climate adaptation and mitigation measures by centering the wellbeing and wisdom of those most impacted by climate change.

Without climate justice, tackling the climate crisis can only address symptoms, not root causes.”

- Climate Justice Charter for Vancouver

6 GOALS : CLIMATE JUSTICE CHARTER

- 1** Recognize and accept Indigenous sovereignty as a foundation of climate justice.
- 2** Ensure climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions are guided by those who are most impacted by systemic oppression and climate change.
- 3** Support the equitable redistribution of the burdens and benefits of climate response.
- 4** Restore and sustain our relationship to nature.
- 5** Respond to the need for accountability and resulting repair work related to climate injustices.
- 6** Systems change within climate policy and practice.





Photo taken by Author. Mural by Antonis. Astro Alley, Vancouver, BC, August 2023.

SUMMARY / KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Equitable evaluation - and all progress towards justice and equity - must be rooted in care and courage. It requires an ethic of love and joy.**¹⁴
- **Equitable evaluation is about learning and meaningful engagement.** As such, it requires a slow and intentional, patient, and persistent journey of continual growth, humility, dialogue, deep-listening, relationship-building, and iterative improvements.
- **Equitable evaluation is participatory and inclusive. It is conducted not for community, stakeholders, or rights holders, but with them.** Done well, equitable evaluation is a part of a broader Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach and commitment that includes the input of community members, rightsholders, organizational representatives, researchers, and other users.¹⁵ Together, policymakers, planners, and community members provide information to engage the community at each stage of the research, planning, or evaluation process(es).
- **Equitable evaluation work should speak to underlying systemic drivers of inequity** and “should explore ways in which cultural context is tangled up in both the structural conditions and the change initiative itself.”¹⁶
- **Equitable evaluation requires new (creative, bold, relational) ways of doing things and integrates both social justice analysis and technical analysis,** including a robust mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach to indicators, metrics, disaggregated data, and storytelling. It seeks to honour, recognize, and understand the complexity and diversity of intersectional lived experience(s).
- **Evaluation findings grow mutual understandings and service mutual solutions and deepened reciprocal relationships in community, organizations, and city services.** Findings should be continually integrated into deeper expressions of equity.
- **Equitable evaluation must be integrated throughout the entire policy cycle of a Climate Action or Adaptation Plan.** According to the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, “An inclusive, collaborative process for climate action planning is as important as the climate action plan itself, as it builds widespread community and political support, fosters credibility and strengthens the resulting plan.”¹⁷
- **Equitable evaluation must consider both human and more-than-human members of community.**
- **To be done well, equitable evaluation requires dedicated staff, adequate resources, and organizational buy-in.** It cannot be a “side of desk” endeavour and must be seen and prioritized as fundamental to the robustness of planning, policy development, equity learning, and public accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Embed the Climate Justice Charter (CJC) as a key pillar of the climate policy ecosystem at the City of Vancouver, alongside the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) and Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS), upholding its six articulated goals as the standard of equity and justice evaluation in COV Climate Policy.
- 2** Prioritize and fund Learning, Evaluation, and Engagement work in the Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability (PDS) Department through full-time staff position(s), with a focus on justice and equity evaluation in COV Climate Policy.¹⁸
- 3** Create and equip a wider interdepartmental Learning, Evaluation, and Engagement team at the City, further allowing for integration and collaboration on evaluation measures to track overlapping goals and methodologies in the COV Equity Strategy, Climate Justice Charter, Healthy City Strategy, Resilient Vancouver Strategy, and UNDRIP Strategy.
- 4** Recognizing that Equity is both an outcome and a Process,¹⁹ integrate participatory equity learning, feedback, and evaluation into every part of the policy cycle from design, implementation, and end-cycle evaluation.
- 5** Engage community-based and participatory methodologies and decolonized approaches to evaluation, feedback, and learning wherever possible, including possible expansion of work with the city's existing civic agencies, the Climate Equity Working Group (CEWG), or other neighbourhood and community groups representing equity-seeking groups.

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- The COV Equity Framework's Equity Commitment #5 speaks to Adequate Funding for Equity, affirming, "Work on equity cannot happen off the sides of desks and deserves to be valued. We commit to ensuring that both central and departmental equity functions are adequately resourced at the City." (p. 9)
- City of Vancouver (2021), *Getting our House in Order: The City of Vancouver's Equity Framework*, p.6

CITY OF VANCOUVER:

- [Climate Emergency Action Plan \(CEAP\)](#)
- [Climate Change Adaptation Strategy \(CCAS\)](#)
- [Climate Justice Charter \(CJC\)](#)
- [Equity Framework](#)
- [Healthy City Strategy](#)
- [UNDRIP Strategy](#)
- [Resilient Vancouver Strategy](#)