



AMERICAN CLIMATE
LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Clean Air Carolina

CleanAirCarolina.org

This guide offers a successful and stepwise model for you to replicate in your community. It is part of a series featuring the award-winning programs from the finalists of the American Climate Leadership Awards 2021 by ecoAmerica.

PURPOSE

Charlotte Mecklenburg Climate Leaders (CMCL) is a strong model of community engagement that has successfully spurred city and county government action on climate change. With membership representing a broad cross-section of organizations and sectors we challenge, educate, and partner with local elected officials and sustainability staff to set and achieve robust carbon reduction goals. We also challenge and engage North Carolina's energy provider, Duke Energy, one of the country's largest utility companies.

DESCRIPTION

CMCL is an easily replicable model for effective climate advocacy. We started as a small group that partnered with a few City Council members to promote a renewable energy resolution. After the first attempt failed we expanded and actively participated in a stakeholder process advising the City on the development of a new resolution and a Strategic Energy Action Plan. After adoption by Council, we committed to continue working with the City and engage with the County on climate goals. CMCL is now a formal initiative of Clean Air Carolina.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Local elected officials and sustainability staff are our primary audience, however, new initiatives begun in 2020 target the general public, including youth, and the faith community. Duke Energy staff who we engaged with in 2020 about their climate goals continues to be one of our target audiences.

GOALS

1. Advocate for implementation of strong city and county policies and strategies to successfully meet their internal and external carbon reduction goals. These strategies include conversion of city and county fleets to electric, improving energy efficiency in government buildings, and creating an equitable workforce development weatherization training program.

2. Educate and engage a diverse community of climate advocates committed to taking action to reduce carbon emissions and implementing sustainable strategies and solutions at the personal, organizational, and public levels.
3. Challenge and engage with Duke Energy to expand their portfolio of renewable energy and programming for the large number of customers suffering from energy burdens.

PRIMARY COMPONENTS OR ACTIVITIES

1. Expand participation in city and county stakeholder meetings related to buildings and transportation carbon reduction goals and workforce development. Review city and county sustainability, land use, and transportation plans to ensure alignment with climate action goals. Submits comments to appropriate agencies and engage in media advocacy.
2. Establish formal partnerships with politically and racially diverse organizations. Sponsor “Greening Our Faith Communities Summit” to raise awareness of the connection between creation care, environmental justice, and the climate crisis. Sponsor NC Climate Ambassador training to equip youth and adults with tools needed to promote climate solutions and other actions.
3. Promote participation and engage in Duke Energy’s Integrated Resource Plan process and other opportunities to challenge the utility on its long-range plan to continue its use of fossil fuels. Sponsor a webinar based on our report, “Review of Duke Energy 2020 Climate Report and Associated Climate Strategies”.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

1. The Sustainable and Resilient Charlotte by 2050 Resolution and the Strategic Energy Action Plan both passed unanimously as the result of our organizing, advocacy, and public engagement. Our urging of the City Council to designate a full-time position to sustainably resulted in the hiring of a Chief Sustainability and Resiliency Officer.
2. Our advocacy with Mecklenburg County Commissioners led to the creation of the Environmental Stewardship Committee, the drafting of an Environmental Leadership Action Plan, and the hiring of their first Sustainability and Resiliency Manager.
4. As a result of our engagement with the City’s sustainability staff we secured \$25,000 from the Energy Foundation to sponsor the “Greening Our Faith Communities” Summit.
5. Our Charlotte Climate Ambassadors Program provided two trainings last year attracting people from across the state. An updated NC Climate Ambassadors training was held in January with participants from across the state, Chicago, San Diego, and Conakry, Guinea.

**STEP-BY-STEP
GUIDE**

1. Organize a small, diverse group to meet with your city's sustainability staff or council members urging them to develop a stakeholder process for setting measurable carbon reduction goals and creating a strategic plan for reaching those goals or another relevant goal for your community
2. Recruit representatives from the following sectors: faith, business, sustainability, conservation and environmental justice, health, education and others. Include current and/or former elected officials familiar with policymaking, government planning processes, and city budgets.
3. Lean on nonprofit organizations, government, churches, or businesses to provide meeting space, copier usage, and logistical support. Negotiate a portion of staff-time for one of their employees to help with administrative needs.
4. Hold a strategic planning retreat to get to know each other, set measurable short term and long term goals, and form working committees. Be careful of "mission creep". Set up a shared Google Drive for meeting minutes, climate resource documents, local government plans, partnership information, etc.
5. Come up with a name for your group and begin presenting comments at public meetings with your new name, develop relationships with local reporters, get your name and positions publicized in the press. Create a website or a webpage on a partner's website to showcase your goals and achievements and recruit new members.
6. Have members sign up to serve on relevant city advisory boards and commissions to advocate for strong climate action goals and make strategic connections.
7. Hold monthly meetings to update members on progress, share information on upcoming events and opportunities for engagement. Invite guest speakers to build alliances with government and other groups that can support your efforts.
8. Form a leadership steering committee to plan meetings, coordinate education and advocacy activities and serve as spokespeople.
9. Connect with other groups in your state and across the country working on similar goals. Attend ecoAmerica's American Climate Leadership Summit and forums to learn the latest on climate science, clean energy and transportation solutions, successful models for addressing climate justice issues, and to establish alliances.
10. Recognize progress and take time to celebrate your wins!