



Los Angeles County Department of Public Health: Urban Heat Island Reduction Plan

OPR Best Practice Pilot Program

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The Governor's Office of Planning and Research developed the Best Practice Pilot Program (BP3) to formalize the process of providing technical assistance to local and regional partners while capturing the design and implementation of best practices. The BP3 acts as a mechanism to institutionalize the production of case examples of piloted policies or programs recently recommended or required by the State. To learn more about the Best Practice Pilot Program, please visit the [BP3 web page](#). This report is one of a series of case studies supported by CivicSpark, a Governor's Initiative AmeriCorps Program, administered by the Local Government Commission in partnership with the Governor's Office of Planning and Research.

Executive Summary

The development of the Los Angeles County Urban Heat Island Reduction Plan (Plan) is an interdepartmental collaborative effort led by the County's Climate Committee. The Committee, led by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, is comprised of members from the County Departments of Regional Planning, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Beaches & Harbors, Internal Services, and Fire. Throughout the year, the Committee has convened to develop components of the Plan which fall under four strategy areas: (1) expand and maintain the urban forest; (2) promote cool roofs, (3) increase urban green space, and (4) promote cool and permeable pavements. Simultaneously, the Committee is also developing an outreach strategy to gain feedback and buy-in for the Plan from key stakeholders. The outcome of this effort will be a draft Plan to be presented to the County Board of Supervisors in 2017.

The Urban Heat Island Reduction project was supported by CivicSpark fellow Sergio Avelar. CivicSpark is a Governor's Initiative AmeriCorps program focused on building local governments' capacity to address climate change. Administered by the Local Government Commission in partnership with the Office of Planning and Research, CivicSpark places fellows with local governments for 11 months to support climate mitigation and adaptation projects. At the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Sergio assisted Elizabeth Rhoades, the Climate Change Lead, with organizing the Climate Committee and developing the Urban Heat Island Reduction Plan.

Sergio graduated from the University of Southern California with a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies. In addition to his work with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, he volunteers as a Water Lab technician at the California Science Center.

Project Description

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is a leader in county-wide climate change efforts, spearheading a number of workgroups that bring County departments together to achieve common climate-related goals. Among these workgroups is the County Climate Committee, launched in August 2014. Comprised of the departments of Beaches and Harbors, Fire, Internal Services, Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Public Works, and Regional Planning, the Climate Committee's mission is to leverage interdepartmental collaboration to advance projects that mitigate climate change and improve climate resiliency. The Climate Committee is currently focusing on developing an Urban Heat Island Reduction Plan, which will include measures related to trees, green space, cool roofs, and cool and permeable pavements.

Urban heat island reduction is essential in preparing for the impacts of climate change, which is expected to bring warmer average temperatures and more frequent and severe extreme heat events in the Los Angeles region. Already, California has experienced hundreds of heat-related deaths due to heat waves in the past; a 2006 heat wave was responsible for more than 650 deaths across the State, as well as more than 16,000 excess emergency room visits, as heat exacerbates underlying medical conditions. By cooling neighborhoods through tree planting, green space, and cool surfaces such as roofs and pavements, urban

heat island reduction can offset some of the warming expected with climate change and help protect vulnerable communities from negative health outcomes related to heat.

Throughout the year, the Committee has convened to develop components of the Plan that fall under four strategy areas: (1) expand and maintain the urban forest; (2) promote cool roofs, (3) increase urban green space, and (4) promote cool and permeable pavements. Because different departments are responsible for different proposed measures within the Plan, sustained coordination and communication have been essential throughout the process. Simultaneously, the Committee is in the process of developing an outreach strategy to gain feedback and buy-in for the Plan from key stakeholders, including regional collaboratives, non-profits, homeowners associations, utilities, contractors' associations, and industry. The outcome of this effort will be a draft Plan to be presented to the County Board of Supervisors in 2017.

Background of Jurisdiction and Problems Faced by Jurisdiction

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health) is responsible for the health and well-being of the 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. When approaching climate change mitigation and adaptation, the size and scope of the county and its complex demographics, microclimates, and jurisdictional structure make for many challenges and opportunities. Los Angeles County is the most populous and one of the most diverse counties in the country, with people of all incomes and races living in neighborhoods ranging from the highly urbanized, such as downtown Los Angeles, to the very rural, such as the Antelope Valley. With coastal areas, valleys, mountains, and high desert, the county is also home to varying microclimates, each of which face distinct climate impacts. A network of 88 cities and unincorporated areas constitutes a multifaceted jurisdictional structure. However, while the size and complexity of the county can be a challenge, it is also a strength: Los Angeles is rich in climate change expertise and data, such as downscaled projections.

Initial Goals

The goal of this project is to create a draft Urban Heat Island Reduction Plan for Los Angeles County, drawing from the expertise and collaboration of various County departments and external agencies. This goal was selected through a consensus-oriented process that took place within the County Climate Committee, a Public Health-led committee comprised of members of the Departments of Beaches and Harbors, Fire, Internal Services, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Regional Planning. An urban heat island reduction plan is pursuant to implementation steps established in the [Los Angeles County Unincorporated Community Climate Action Plan](#) to reduce the urban heat island.

Interdepartmental Coordination

The County Climate Committee is the primary vehicle for drafting the Urban Heat Island Reduction Plan, with meetings of the Committee dedicated to brainstorming potential components of the plan and discussing action steps towards achieving them. The Committee is a subcommittee of, and modeled after,

the highly successful Public Health-led [Healthy Design Workgroup \(HDW\)](#). The HDW focuses on improving interdepartmental coordination through open discussion and consensus-oriented decision-making. The HDW has been particularly effective in identifying staff champions within each department who are passionate and knowledgeable about various aspects of healthy design and are able to advance projects within their own departments while working collaboratively with other County departments. This model has been adopted by the Climate Committee.

Project Difficulties

The main challenge facing the project is staff resources. Public Health has one full-time staff person dedicated to climate change, and additionally utilized a CivicSpark fellow to assist with running the Climate Committee, conducting literature searches to inform sections of the plan, and writing the Plan. However, resources for conducting external engagement to gain feedback on and support for the Plan, and resources to finalize the Plan, are limited. Insufficient resources to implement well-defined solutions to address climate change are a common barrier across government agencies, and particularly health departments.

Technical Assistance

The Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) serves as an intergovernmental facilitator to support the exchange of information and the ultimate development of guidance and resources to support local and regional activities related to longer term climate change goals, including urban heat island (UHI). OPR will continue to support ongoing State efforts on UHI that would also support the County's efforts in this area. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health looks forward to working with OPR in the future to advance urban heat island reduction goals.

Identified Paths to Success and Replicable Elements

Various strategies have allowed for the success of the Climate Committee, including:

Forming a workgroup focused on collaboration

Many Los Angeles County departments are actively involved in climate change work. Establishing the Climate Committee provided a venue for interdepartmental communication and collaboration, increasing each departments' awareness of the others' activities and allowing the development of important synergies.

Identifying potential projects based on established County priorities

Projects were selected using a consensus-oriented decision-making process, which promotes members' involvement in and ownership over the decisions made by the workgroup. Potential projects were assessed based on an agreed-upon list of criteria, one of the most important of which was whether the project helps implement adopted or draft County plan. Urban heat island reduction projects are pursuant to the objectives laid out in the County's Unincorporated Community Climate Action Plan.

Learning from successes and challenges faced by pioneers in the field

The City of Los Angeles has already passed a cool roofs ordinance, setting an important precedent that other jurisdictions can follow. The County has been fortunate to be able to draw on the experience and expertise of staff at the City of Los Angeles as well as Climate Resolve, who were instrumental in developing and implementing the ordinance.