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2022

Approaches and Strategies to Integrate Equity into Adaptation Planning

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**APPROACHES AND
STRATEGIES TO
INTEGRATE EQUITY INTO
ADAPTATION PLANNING**

San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative

MOVING BEYOND PREPLANNING

By initiating the adaptation planning process with an equity-first approach, practitioners should grow a deeper understanding of who will be impacted by the proposed adaptation strategies, who to engage, and what opportunities exist to holistically enhance community resilience. To do this, practitioners must identify their social equity communities, connect their adaptation planning efforts to the four dimensions of equity, and adjust proposed adaptation strategies based on intentional community feedback. Additionally, a robust community engagement strategy should be in place for the duration of the adaptation process, from pre planning to implementation. Finally, the adaptation strategies and projects identified should build both organizational and community capacity.

EQUITABLE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

A crucial step for successful community engagement during all planning phases of a climate adaptation process is to first appropriately identify and thoughtfully connect with all relevant stakeholders. Identifying and engaging with all potential stakeholders is important for building and maintaining trust, iterating on potential solutions, and sharing information. Stakeholders can include but are not limited to: individual community members such as local people and organizations; small businesses or community based organizations; other local agency planners from neighboring cities, and representatives; national and state government agencies, tribal governments, and academic and research institutions.

Other strategies to identify community stakeholders include targeting specific demographics and community behaviors such as vulnerability to specific climate hazards and stressors (extreme heat, flooding), renters versus home ownership or housing cost-burden, food insecurity, transportation access, and occupation (outdoor labor, seasonal jobs). To make sure all stakeholders are included, practitioners should collaborate with community groups and leaders to identify all relevant stakeholders.

IDENTIFYING STARTING POINT VULNERABILITIES

Ensuring historically marginalized voices are amplified is critical; beyond engaging with stakeholders, practitioners should also recognize the connection between present-day structural inequities and past actions of institutions, systems, and sectors (1). These deep-root causes, known as starting point vulnerabilities, are crucial for practitioners to address in order to build community resilience. Figure 1 below defines starting-point vulnerabilities and provides an example of how historic redlining relates to several present-day vulnerabilities (2). Identifying unjust systems helps effectively target existing inequities, which will increase adaptive capacity and lead to transformative adaptation (3). Sectors connected either indirectly or directly to climate impacts, such as housing or high-polluting industries, may be target areas that can help accelerate adaptation efforts.

WHAT IS A STARTING POINT VULNERABILITY?

A deep root cause that produces vulnerability and inequity in the first place. They are embedded in unequal processes, institutions, and systems (6). Below are the some of the present-day inequities associated with the starting point vulnerability of historic redlining (7).

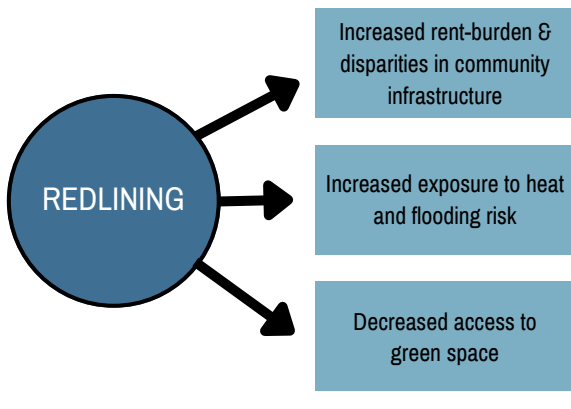


Figure 1: Definition of starting-point vulnerabilities, using redlining as an example.

MEASURING VULNERABILITY

Stakeholders and starting point vulnerabilities have been identified, informing the practitioner of the community's climate hazards, needs, and assets...now what? In Phase 2, practitioners perform a vulnerability assessment (VA). In short, a VA identifies and characterizes the climate hazards and other climate impacts a community will face across multiple time horizons (4). Specifically it quantifies how vulnerable populations, natural resources, and community assets are against climate change (5). In total, there are four major steps to complete a VA: exposure, sensitivity and potential impacts, adaptive capacity, and outreach and engagement.

For an equity-first approach, community engagement should be ongoing and it is important to consider how demographics and socioeconomic factors influence a community's sensitivity to climate change. Figure 2 below gives an example of a vulnerability assessment, with a high-level overview of each of the steps.

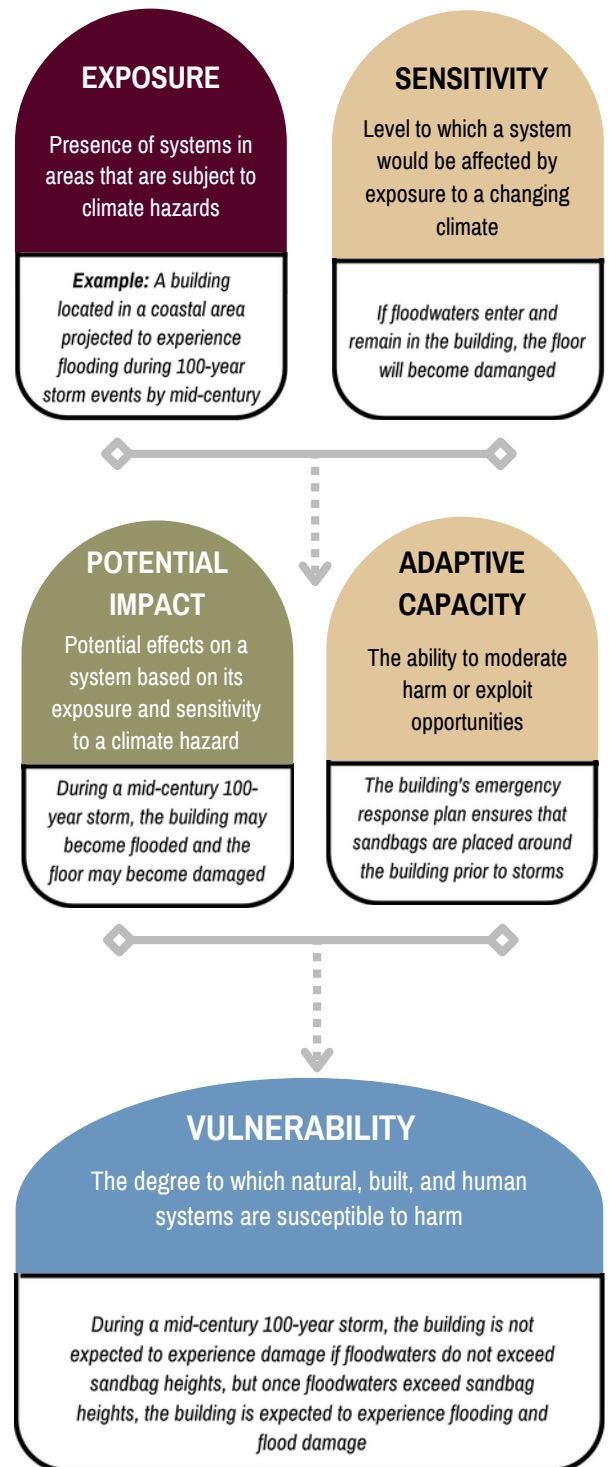


Figure 2: Summary of the four steps of a Vulnerability Assessment, which is the major outcome of Phase 2 of climate adaptation planning.

SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES

Before beginning any climate adaptation planning process, practitioners must be aware of how historic prejudice and racism, along with current climate impacts, may exacerbate pre-existing social inequities and serve an important role in identifying effective adaptation strategies. Every assumption of the adaptation strategy – who is vulnerable, what are the community’s needs and existing assets, and who are the stakeholders – should also be identified by the community itself. The most successful adaptation strategies and projects not only engage with the community throughout the process but actually empower the community to become leaders of the strategies, and help gain support and momentum through implementation.

Practitioners must deeply understand and effectively incorporate the four dimensions of equity into Phases 0-4 of climate adaptation planning. Figure 3 summarizes the major outputs of Phases 1-4 of as well as their equity opportunities. Prioritizing equity, community engagement, and practitioner learning and accountability through community evaluation are best practices for adaptation. Through community-led accountability and monitoring methods, the most impactful adaptation strategies have the opportunity to shift and evolve according to feedback, local changes, and new available data.

The adaptation strategies are meant to build community capacity and directly benefit the community by addressing starting-point vulnerabilities. By carefully implementing equity-first best practices into each phase of the adaptation planning process, practitioners will be able to produce an effective climate adaptation plan that improves a community’s resilience.



PHASE 1: EXPLORE, DEFINE, AND INITIATE

OUTPUT

Identifies what potential climate hazards a community might face along with its essential physical, social, and natural assets.

EQUITY-FIRST

Requires understanding how a community's systemic inequities relates to its hazards while measuring its vulnerability to climate impacts.

PHASE 2: ASSESS VULNERABILITY

OUTPUT

Practitioners conduct a vulnerability assessment, which characterizes the climate hazards and impacts a community will face in the near and far-distant future.

EQUITY-FIRST

Requires understanding how a community's systemic inequities relates to its hazards while measuring its vulnerability to climate impacts.

PHASE 3: DEFINE ADAPTATION FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIES

OUTPUT

Practitioners design an adaptation framework, which provides the community strategies to address the potential for harm identified in the vulnerability assessment.

EQUITY-FIRST

Adaptation strategies consider a community's resources, goals, values, needs, and regional context. It is crucial for practitioners to practice transparency and collect direct input from the community to establish shared goals for adaptation and resilience.

PHASE 4: IMPLEMENT, MONITOR, EVALUATE, ADJUST

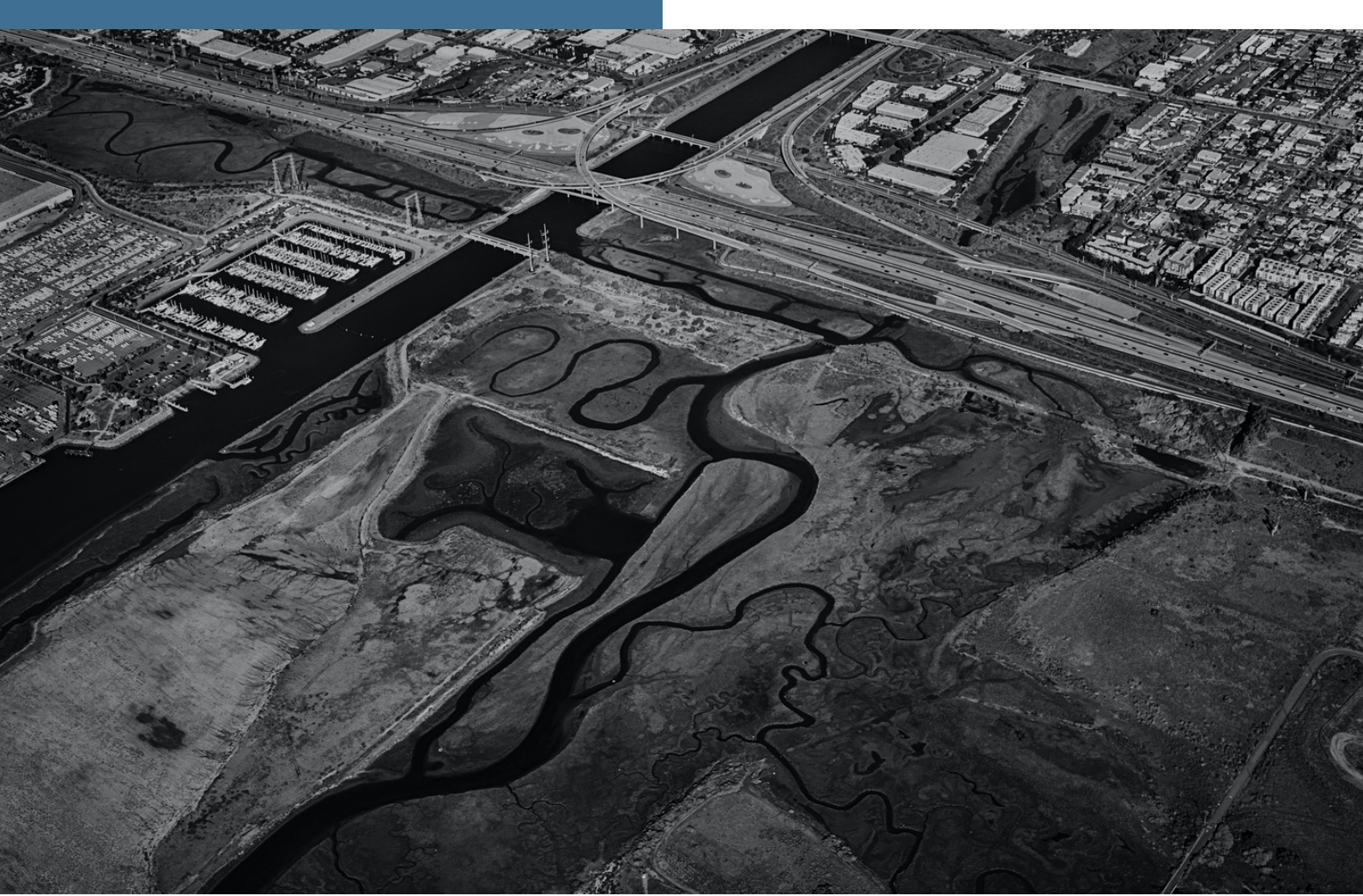
OUTPUT

Ensures the implementation of the adaptation framework and strategies continue to be effective and supported by the community. It is the most critical phase in measuring the impact of adaptation strategies

EQUITY-FIRST

Implementation is directly evaluated by community members, holding practitioners accountable that the adaptation strategies provide direct benefits that address the community's starting-point vulnerabilities and self-identified needs.

Figure 3: Summary of Phases 1-4 of Climate Adaptation Planning, including main outcomes of each phase and opportunities to integrate equity.



SOURCES

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The San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative was established in 2011 as a network for public agencies to advance climate change solutions and is currently housed at The Nonprofit Institute at the University of San Diego.