

## **Introduction**

A group of New England governmental and nongovernmental leaders are collaborating to help communities across the region become resilient to the impacts from global climate change. These leaders are united by a shared determination to offer support and assistance to New England communities as they learn about what climate change will mean for them and as they take practical steps to become better prepared.

The genesis of this effort was an invitational Climate Leaders' Summit organized by EPA New England on November 8, 2013, at Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. The 140 attendees from federal, state and local government agencies, regional and local non-profit organizations, and businesses spent the day discussing the challenges to building climate resilience across New England. There was a strong consensus by the end of the day that an ongoing New England-wide initiative could help tackle those challenges and propel changes at all levels of government that are necessary for the region's long term climate resilience.

The Key Challenges identified that need to be addressed are:

### *1. Resource Limitations*

The 1,493 communities in New England are extremely diverse. There are large cities and metropolitan areas with populations in the millions and hundreds of very small municipal governments run by volunteer elected officials. Each one faces unique challenges as they try to prioritize limited resources and staff time to prepare for changing conditions at the local level. The needs of the small rural communities and large metropolitan centers will inherently be different and we need to be prepared to help them all understand their climate change vulnerabilities and to plan accordingly.

### *2. Lack of Information and Tools to Support Decision Making*

Information on current climate change trends and impacts at the international, national and New England scales has proliferated in recent years, as have near- and long-term projections of what the future will bring. However this information is decentralized across many agency web sites, and is often in a form that cannot be easily used by municipal leaders or its existence is not known. Community leaders need easier access to reliable local data on climate impacts, so they can assess their primary risks and vulnerabilities. They also need good tools and technical assistance to help them consider climate change as they plan for their future, develop local land use regulations, consider regional approaches to hazard mitigation, and make decisions about how to invest municipal capital budgets.

### *3. Gaps in Coordination Across Governments, Organizations and Others*

Effective climate change resilience planning requires efficient coordination among and within municipal, state, and federal governments, regional organizations, and other non-governmental entities. These bodies often have different missions, numerous authorities and complex structures that are typically organized to address issues other than climate change. This can make coordination on climate change preparedness particularly challenging and can create confusion among municipalities that are trying to understand and identify sources of help. Even among municipalities, it can be difficult to learn what nearby jurisdictions are doing, and to identify ways of working together.

### *4. Policy Obstacles*

Most federal and state funding programs were created before we fully understood how climate change would affect our communities. Some of these programs are now creating obstacles for communities that are trying to better understand their risks and take practical steps to address those using resources that are currently available. These funding programs need to be reviewed with the latest climate projections in mind, and modernized or revised, so that they better support and encourage local actions to build resilience. In the fall of 2014, The White House State, Local and Tribal Leaders Task Force (“White House Task Force”) on Climate Preparedness and Resilience will provide recommendations to the Administration about how this might be accomplished. This will be a strong first step towards making those needed improvements. Collaboration between the regional offices of federal agencies and state and local governments during implementation will then be needed to achieve meaningful benefits for New England communities.

#### 5. *Communication Needs*

Municipal officials need help to communicate effectively about the risks and the opportunities that may emerge for their communities in an uncertain future. They need tools and training to help them raise awareness among municipal departments, residents, businesses and local groups about likely climate impacts. They also need help to build strong support for municipal actions and investments that can help them prepare and bounce back from disasters.

The group of New England leaders that met at Johnson and Wales on November 8, 2013 has identified the following vision, and three critical goals/deliverables necessary to achieve it. They have also agreed on an organizational structure – including six teams with individual work plans – to produce those deliverables in the next two years.

#### **Vision**

Local communities and regions across New England are prepared for climate change. They have assessed the risks they are confronting or will soon confront as climate patterns change and extreme events become more frequent. They have also taken practical steps to adapt their plans, capital investments and operations to manage those risks, and ensure their long-term safety and prosperity.

#### **Three Goals/Deliverables and Their Target Audiences**

##### **Increase Vulnerability Assessments and Resiliency (Direct Support Track)**

This initiative will seek to create and publicize models for how communities throughout New England can conduct vulnerability assessments and prioritize actions for improving resilience. A first step will be to compile and synthesize lessons from communities that are already well along the road to greater resilience, and to inventory sources of data and decision support tools already in use. As this is occurring, federal and state agencies will meet in state-by-state roundtables to identify specific opportunities to improving agency coordination and better assisting communities in the work of vulnerability assessment and resilience planning. If resources are available, several communities across New England will be selected for pilot projects to create and showcase best practices. Lessons will be captured and made available to all New England communities. A marketing and recognition program will be developed to support community action in New England. Target Audience: Local Communities

##### **Resolve Policy Obstacles (Policy Track)**

The final recommendations of the White House Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience will provide a roadmap for improving federal programs so they better support states and communities to improve their climate resilience. This initiative will create a partnership for working on the implementation of those recommendations in New England. There will be a special focus on policy and program changes to facilitate the development and redevelopment of climate resilient infrastructure, especially regional infrastructure such as electric grid and transportation networks. In addition, through state by state roundtables, participating states will learn from each other about state program reforms that are removing obstacles to progress. Target Audience: Federal, State and Regional Partners

### **Develop New Tools (Resources Track)**

New ways of synthesizing and providing access to locally relevant information about climate impacts and risks will be developed. The work of this track is integrally linked with the “Support Track” described above. A first step will be to explore the feasibility of creating a New England wide web-based portal to help regional and municipal leaders explore current climate data on impacts and trends. Models like ‘Cal Adapt’ (<http://cal-adapt.org/>) will be examined, and funding needs will be evaluated as we develop clarity about what kinds of tools or web-based portals would add the most value in New England. In addition, an effort to learn about and develop effective communication messages and strategies will be launched, beginning with a review of what communities are already using. Target Audience: Climate Adaptation Community

### **Organizational Structure and Tasks**

#### Teams:

There are six teams – each with representation from multiple states and stakeholder groups – to work on the three deliverables. The teams will coordinate throughout their work. The teams are:

- Team A - Vulnerability Assessment and Resilience Planning: Laboratory, Marketing and Map
- Team B - Convene State Roundtables with Federal Partners to Coordinate Assessment Resources
- Team C - Integrate Adaptation Planning into the Municipal Process as "Business as Usual"
- Team D - Develop a Common Data Platform for New England
- Team E - Making Climate Impacts and Solutions Local and Personal
- Team F - Reform Federal, State and Municipal Funding Programs

#### Champions:

Each team has one or more champions who will lead the development and implementation of their action plans and coordinate with the champions of other teams as necessary to share resources and to avoid duplication.