

GGBP Case Study Series

Stakeholder Engagement for State Climate Action Plans in the United States

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Country: [United States](#)

Sector(s): [Cross-cutting](#)

Key words: [planning](#), [stakeholder engagement](#), [climate change](#)

Over 30 states in the United States have taken an approach to climate planning which can be described as “leadership from the top to support bottom up planning.” Governors and cabinets established executive orders to convene stakeholders in a year-long comprehensive planning process to develop major new recommendations for action.

Context

Between 2004 and 2013 governors, cabinet leaders, and state legislatures in over 30 states in the United States initiated climate action plans. This was driven by lack of federal action, political ambition to make a mark on a major emerging issue, personal conviction about climate risks, and coherence with other priorities such as energy security and sustainable economic growth.

Arizona was one of the forerunners; it established an approach to analysis and stakeholder engagement that was subsequently used by many other states. This case draws particularly on the Arizona experience.

Approach

In July 2004 the Governor of the State of Arizona partnered with a United States consensus building non-governmental organization (NGO) to convene a stakeholder-based climate action planning process. It was designed to develop a portfolio of specific recommendations on climate mitigation goals and specific sector-based and cross-cutting policies and mechanisms needed to establish and reach mitigation goals and to address economic, energy, and health goals. The process was also intended to serve as a template for replication by other states in the region, and to foster regional cooperation and mechanisms. The process was facilitated by the NGO using evaluative facilitation techniques and advanced technical analysis of baselines and mitigation options.

The planning process included a set of 50 stakeholders selected by the governor's office, and an additional 50 technical work group members. Each of the stakeholders served on a plenary group (Arizona Climate Action Plan Advisory Group) as well as one or more subgroups (technical work groups covering each of the economic sectors). Other state residents were added to the technical work groups to expand resident expertise and representation on issues. The process involved preliminary fact-finding through the development of draft emission baselines (inventory and forecast) in a review format for subsequent stakeholder use. There was also a catalog of existing and potential new policy measures for each sector, derived from actions within Arizona and other states, that had the net effect of emission reductions even if the measure was primarily oriented toward another goal (e.g. energy efficiency). Stakeholder and technical work group members went through a stepwise joint fact-finding process involving an open,

transparent, formal consensus-building process, with formal voting at decision points, to progress through a complex, sequential series of steps to produce final recommendations. Consensus was sought but not mandated.

The process comprised 10 key steps:

1. start-up and organization;
2. baseline and catalog development;
3. expanding the list of catalog options for consideration;
4. narrowing the list to draft priorities through multi-criteria analysis ranking;
5. drafting initial policy designs for each of the draft options;
6. conducting initial draft micro-level analysis of each option;
7. iterating to final agreement on micro-level design and analysis by identifying potential barriers to consensus and formulating alternative solutions to remove objection;
8. developing macro-level analysis based on micro-level inputs;
9. finalizing recommendations via final policy design and analysis; and
10. transmitting final recommendations through a final report to the governor or other convener of the process.

The processes were typically mandated by executive order and overseen by a cabinet official or team. An expert and neutral third party provided facilitation and technical support. Funding was typically provided by a combination of state funds and private foundation funds.

In addition, these processes set important new standards for open, transparent decision-making in states that went above minimum legal requirements for information sharing. Proceedings were made public and posted to websites, and decisions made by advisory groups were open and facilitated typically by expert and neutral third parties through organized group decisions. Members of the

facilitation and technical analysis groups in most cases followed model codes of conduct for mediators and used a process of evaluative facilitation that was tailored to climate change issues and stakeholder participation at the state level.

Outcomes

The final result of the Arizona plan, similar to other United States state plans, included 49 recommendations that were each able to secure a supermajority of support from stakeholders (80 percent level of support); all but three options received unanimous support, with those three missing it by only one or two votes. The recommended plan identified sufficient emission reductions to enable Arizona, the fastest growing state in the United States, to adopt one of the most aggressive emission reduction goals when viewed against baseline emission growth. As noted, the plan has been replicated as a template either generally or specifically and improved upon in over 30 United States states since its introduction. Each of these plans followed a similar process but developed unique results based on state characteristics and needs. It has been emulated in Mexico and China as a template for low emission development and low carbon development.

Lessons

Legitimacy

The Arizona project and those that followed were a breakthrough at the time. Few states had attempted comprehensive stakeholder-based planning processes. The process set new

standards for openness and transparency, as well as depth of technical analysis.

Credibility

These processes were typically convened by governors and involved high degrees of openness, review, and technical standards.

Salience or relevancy

Arizona, as an example, had the highest growth rate of economy and greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, and also faced some of the most extreme impacts of climate change, including water scarcity, heat stress, and forest fires. It was (and remains) one of the most politically conservative states. As a result, the national political community took its actions seriously.

Further Information

Center for Climate Strategies:
<http://www.climatestrategies.us/>

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