

# Local Government Climate Emergency Mobilization FAQs

## **Why is a climate emergency mobilization program necessary? Isn't it enough to say "we're still in" the Paris Agreement?**

The world is already seeing the deadly effects of climate change at just over 1°C of warming: stronger and more frequent wildfires, hurricanes, and storms; tropical viruses moving out of the tropics, including pandemics like Zika; unprecedented heat waves, droughts, water shortages, and famine; and a resultant cycle of civil unrest, refugee and humanitarian crises, and state failure.

A recent study conducted by a team of the world's top climate scientists, "Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene," confirms that even the Paris Agreement's "preferred" level of average global warming (1.5°C above pre-industrial levels), which by some projections could come within a decade, could potentially trigger a cascade of tipping points that sends the Earth into a "hothouse" state that causes the collapse of civilization and leaves most of the planet uninhabitable. Although more conservative reports project Earth will hit 1.5°C of warming at some later date, a responsible risk-management approach to providing *maximum protection* for our constituents and humanity at large -- as well as an unflinching look at the destruction already wrought by the current level of warming -- demands much more than the incremental reform the Paris Agreement contemplates. It demands instead an emergency mobilization effort on a scale not seen since WWII to restore safe, pre-industrial climate conditions.

## **What does mobilization mean here?**

The term "mobilization" is used here to refer to the emergency restructuring of a modern industrial economy, typically accomplished at rapid speed in order to fight a war. It involves all citizens and impacts all areas of society. It is a nothing less than a government-coordinated social and industrial revolution. The World War II home front effort is considered the classic example of a successful economic mobilization and provides numer-

ous lessons about how to rapidly redirect the American economy toward a specific mission. That said, there has never been a *peacetime mobilization* of a similar speed and scale, so the climate emergency mobilization proposed here is unprecedented and offers an exciting chance to innovate.

## **How does a climate emergency mobilization program differ from a climate action program?**

A climate emergency mobilization program differs from the traditional climate action program paradigm in that it recognizes that we have waited far too long to respond to the climate crisis, allowing it to escalate into a full-blown emergency that threatens the continued existence of human civilization. It eschews incremental approaches, such as market-based tweaks like carbon pricing or carbon trading.

When a locality adopts a climate emergency mobilization program, it moves into *emergency mode* — that is, a highly focused state differing from panic mode in which groups engage productively with crises — *taking on responsibility to actually solve the crisis*. In practice, a climate emergency mobilization program involves a reorientation of local government to prioritize not only its own rapid transformation to end emissions and reach drawdown within its jurisdiction, but also a multi-directional push out to other local governments and up to higher levels of governments using all available levers to advocate the rapid economic and societal transformation needed to end emissions and reach drawdown elsewhere.

## **How does a climate emergency mobilization program relate to climate justice and a just transition?**

A climate emergency mobilization program recognizes that, fundamentally, climate change is a matter of human rights and dignity. That is why it seeks to solve

the crisis — which has been created by the richest of the world and has hit the poorest first and hardest — not over many decades but in a matter of years.

Similarly, key to the climate emergency mobilization program proposed here is a just transition that will benefit environmental justice communities and workers first in the mobilization to a regenerative economy. For example, the City of Los Angeles noted in its proposal to create the country's first Climate Emergency Mobilization Department that it must "aggressively move to reduce and remove greenhouse gas emissions and adapt and restore ecosystems by rapidly adopting legislation to mandate such efforts Citywide and by doing so in such a way that lower-income and frontline communities of color benefit first from mitigation and adaptation funds." What is more, given that it involves a close partnership between government and the community — requiring the active consultation, participation, and engagement of all those affected — a local climate emergency mobilization program works to strengthen the democratic process.

### **Are any other localities doing this?**

Local governments from Hoboken, NJ, and Montgomery County, MD, to Berkeley and Richmond, CA have declared a climate emergency and committed to emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate. Los Angeles is moving towards establishing a Climate Emergency Mobilization Department to coordinate the rapid transition needed.

What is more, cities abroad are moving into climate emergency mode as well: In Australia, the Darebin City Council has adopted a climate emergency plan, and the neighboring municipalities of Yarra and Moreland have passed climate emergency motions. The Victorian Local Government Association (LGA) recognized that we face a climate emergency and the Western Australian LGA has rewritten its climate policy to do the same.

### **What about the cost? How will we fund this, especially when our sustainability staff is already overworked and underpaid?**

One of the key features of the local climate emergency mobilization program is the concept of a *multi-directional push using all available levers* to advocate the mobilization of higher levels of government. This means that as higher levels of government come on

board, local governments will be relieved of carrying the full cost of implementation. Further, any governmental apparatus established or fortified to coordinate the climate emergency response, such as the proposed Los Angeles Climate Emergency Mobilization Department, should have as a central focus the seeking out of grants and other streams of funding from higher levels of government and philanthropic sources. Moreover, in Darebin, Australia, the city council has put volunteers front and center in its response, creating a specialist committee, Climate Emergency Darebin, "to help the Council to implement the Darebin Climate Emergency Plan by . . . mobilising and activating the community broadly and deeply around the climate emergency issue, and facilitating community contributions to action, including via volunteerism and donations."

### **What about all the other ongoing crises we have to address?**

Because of the interconnected character of many of the crises that governments must address, and because of the exacerbating nature of the climate crisis, it is anticipated that many such crises will be ameliorated by the adoption of a climate emergency mobilization program coupled with a just transition. The strong justice component of the proposed climate emergency mobilization program means that disadvantaged communities will benefit first from the massive economic stimulus brought on by the mobilization. And because of the direct involvement of community members in the planning and execution of the mobilization, residents can be sure to shape the policies to address extant social issues, meaning policies can be tailored to address ongoing crises, such as houselessness, while solving climate change.

### **Does a local climate emergency declaration have any legal effect?**

The Berkeley and Richmond declarations are official recognitions of the climate emergency, reflecting a clear signal that we must move out of reform-as-usual mode and treat climate change as the existential threat that it is. Since they are not formal proclamations under California state law, however, they run the risk of being seen as merely rhetorical. That is why they must be followed by strong, substantive action.