

OCTOBER 2021

Local Climate Response Project

Survey Response Report

LOCAL CLIMATE RESPONSE PROJECT: SURVEY RESPONSE REPORT

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Introduction

As part of its Local Climate Response Project, the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) distributed a survey via email in late July 2021 to local public works and planning directors, climate planners, tribes, and special purpose districts. An invitation to take the survey was also included in the July Local Government E-Newsletter.

The survey questions touched on these three broad climate topic areas: (1) reducing greenhouse gas emissions; (2) engaging historically marginalized communities in climate planning efforts; and (3) adapting and becoming more resilient to climate effects. Specific questions related to existing policies, plans, and studies around climate planning and implementation, as well as potential resources and tools that would be helpful to local governments in starting or continuing their work.

The survey received responses from 164 people from large and small local governments across the state. The number of responses for each individual question varies, however, as some survey respondents did not answer certain questions. The number of respondents who answered each question is included below. Approximately 120 people completed the entire survey.

This was not a statistically valid survey, but it will nevertheless help inform forthcoming blog posts, webinars, and other resources that will assist communities in developing and implementing effective climate-related plans and policies.

Demographics

Q1: Name, job title, jurisdiction/organization, jurisdiction’s estimated population, and email address

The first section included demographic questions such as organization size, job title, and contact information as a means of assessing data trends and collecting contact information for follow up questions, if needed.

The survey responses were distributed evenly between the Central Puget Sound region, Eastern Washington, and Western Washington, with approximately 50 responses from each region. These regions were chosen based on the [Growth Management Hearings Board regions](#)¹ as follows:

- **Central Puget Sound:** King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties
- **Eastern Washington:** All counties east of the Cascade mountains (from Okanogan County in the north to Klickitat County in the south)
- **Western Washington:** All counties west of the Cascade mountains except King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties

The chart below shows that the largest group of survey responses (68 responses out of 150, or 45%) were from jurisdictions of 75,000 people or less.

Number of survey respondents by jurisdiction size and region				
Jurisdiction Size	Eastern WA	Central Puget Sound	Western WA	TOTAL
10,000 or less	32	8	22	62
10,001 to 75,000	9	29	13	51
75,000+	9	12	16	37
TOTAL	50	49	51	150

The chart below shows that the largest group of survey responses were from cities in Eastern Washington (31 responses, or 21%) and the Central Puget Sound region (29 responses, or 19%).

Number of survey respondents by jurisdiction type and region				
Jurisdiction Type	Eastern WA	Central Puget Sound	Western WA	TOTAL
City	31	29	16	76
County	9	5	15	29
Other	10	16	20	46
TOTAL	50	50	51	151

¹ The Growth Management Hearings Board regions only include counties that are fully planning under the Growth Management Act (GMA). For our purposes, we also assigned regions to those counties that are not fully planning under GMA.

The chart below shows that the responses from Eastern Washington were primarily from small jurisdictions, the responses from Central Puget Sound were primarily from mid- to large jurisdictions, and the responses in Western Washington were more evenly distributed in terms of population.

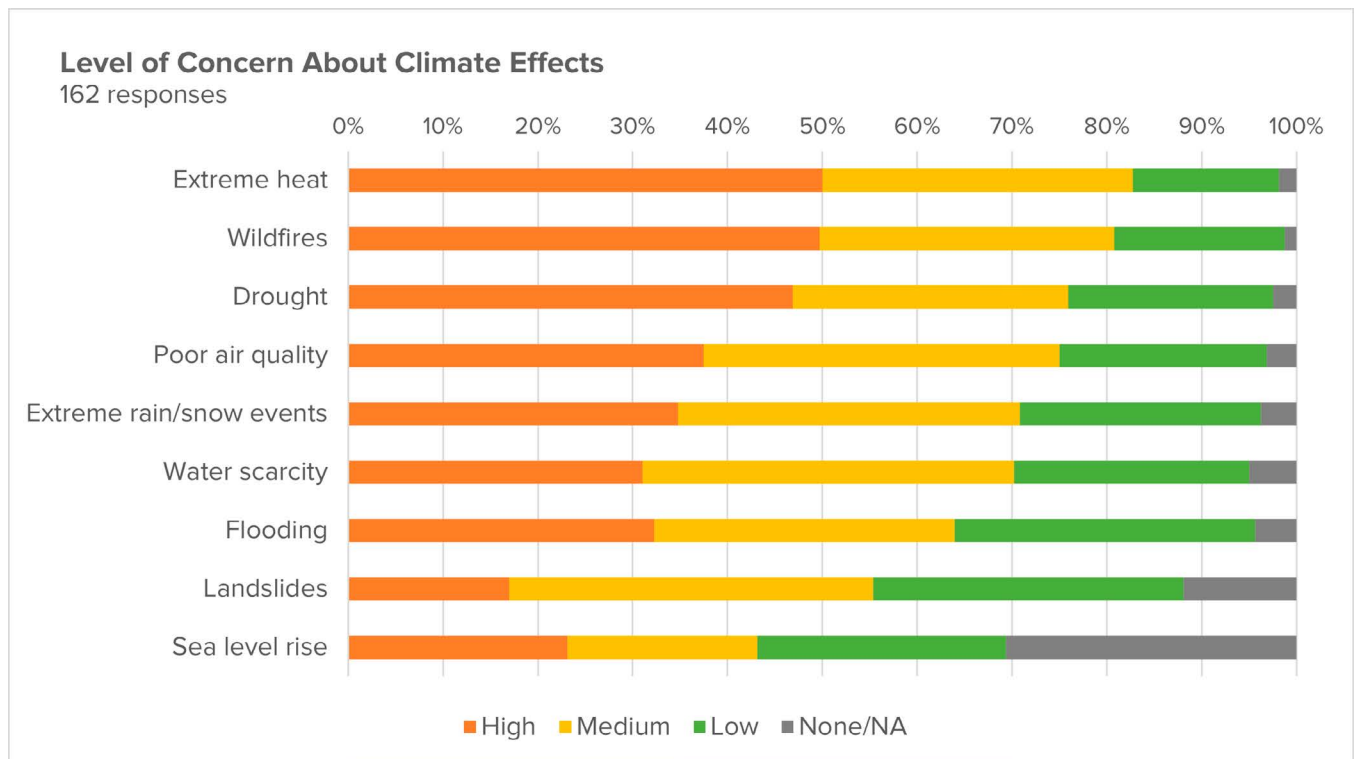
Number of survey respondents by jurisdiction type and size				
Jurisdiction Size	City	County	Other	TOTAL
10,000 or less	38	3	21	62
10,001 to 75,000	30	6	15	51
75,000+	8	20	9	37
TOTAL	76	29	45	150

Different jurisdiction types and sizes may have different considerations when developing climate-related responses, as discussed at the end of this report.

Climate Effects

Q2: What is your level of concern regarding the following climate-related effects within your jurisdiction?

The chart below shows the level of concern expressed by survey respondents about various climate-related effects within their jurisdictions, with extreme heat, wildfires, and drought at the top of the list. These responses follow a summer of extreme heat and wildfires throughout the region. In the open-ended comments, some respondents also indicated concern about other effects, such as impacts on the health of ecosystems, wildlife, and people; ocean acidification; impacts on funding for social services; erosion; and water quality.



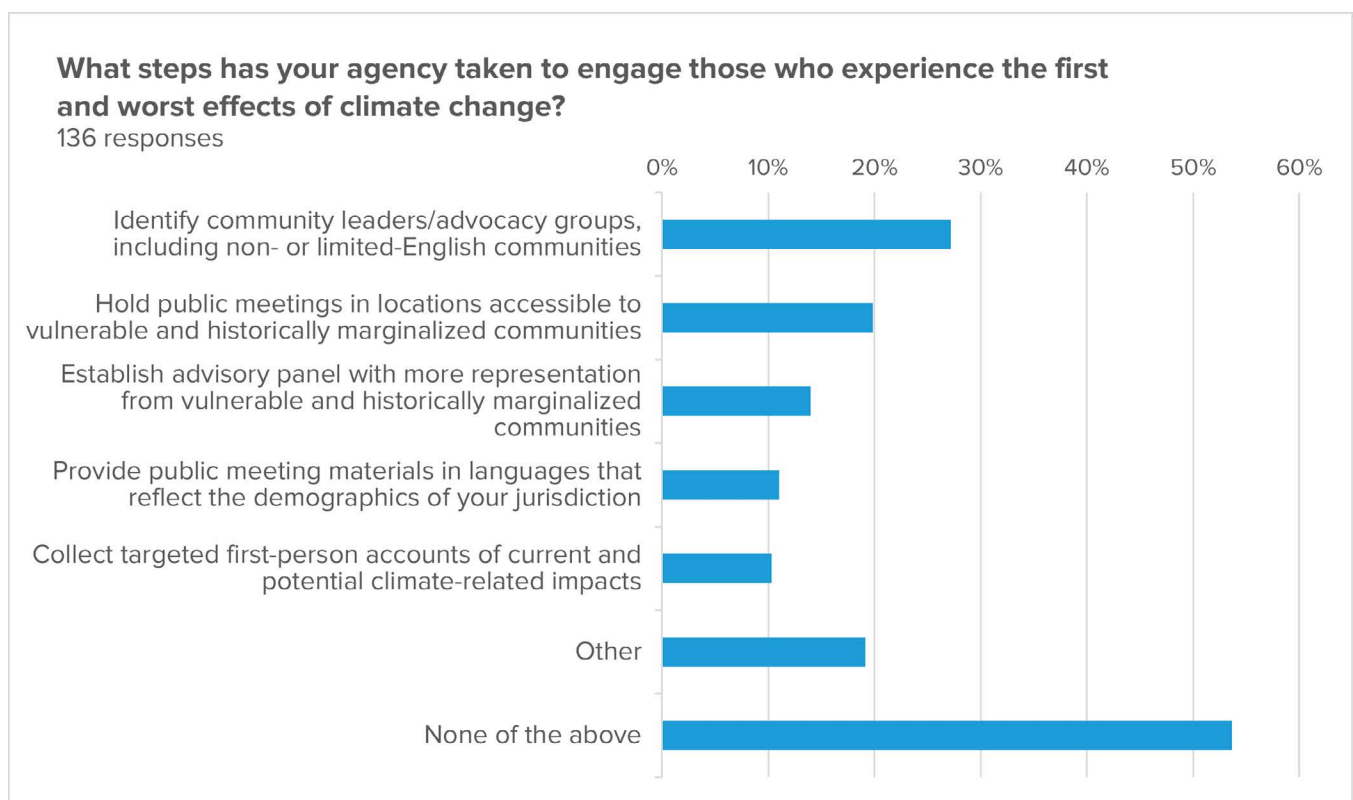
“ Wind and dust storms.

“ Loss of natural resources that form the basis for cultural and economic vitality.

Climate Equity

Q3: To your knowledge, which of the following steps has your jurisdiction/agency taken to engage those who experience the first and worst consequences of climate-related impacts? (Check all that apply.)

The chart below shows that most respondents noted that their jurisdictions/agencies had not taken any of the actions listed. Of the actions listed, identifying existing community leaders and local advocacy groups, and holding public meetings in locations that are accessible to vulnerable and historically marginalized communities received the most responses. Actions added by respondents included culturally appropriate training for tribes on resilience and adaptation planning, assessing impacts groups feel most vulnerable to, assessing which groups feel they have not been engaged in the process, equity centered community climate advisors, and environmental justice in comprehensive plans. It was also noted that some communities may be too small for advisory groups or public meetings.

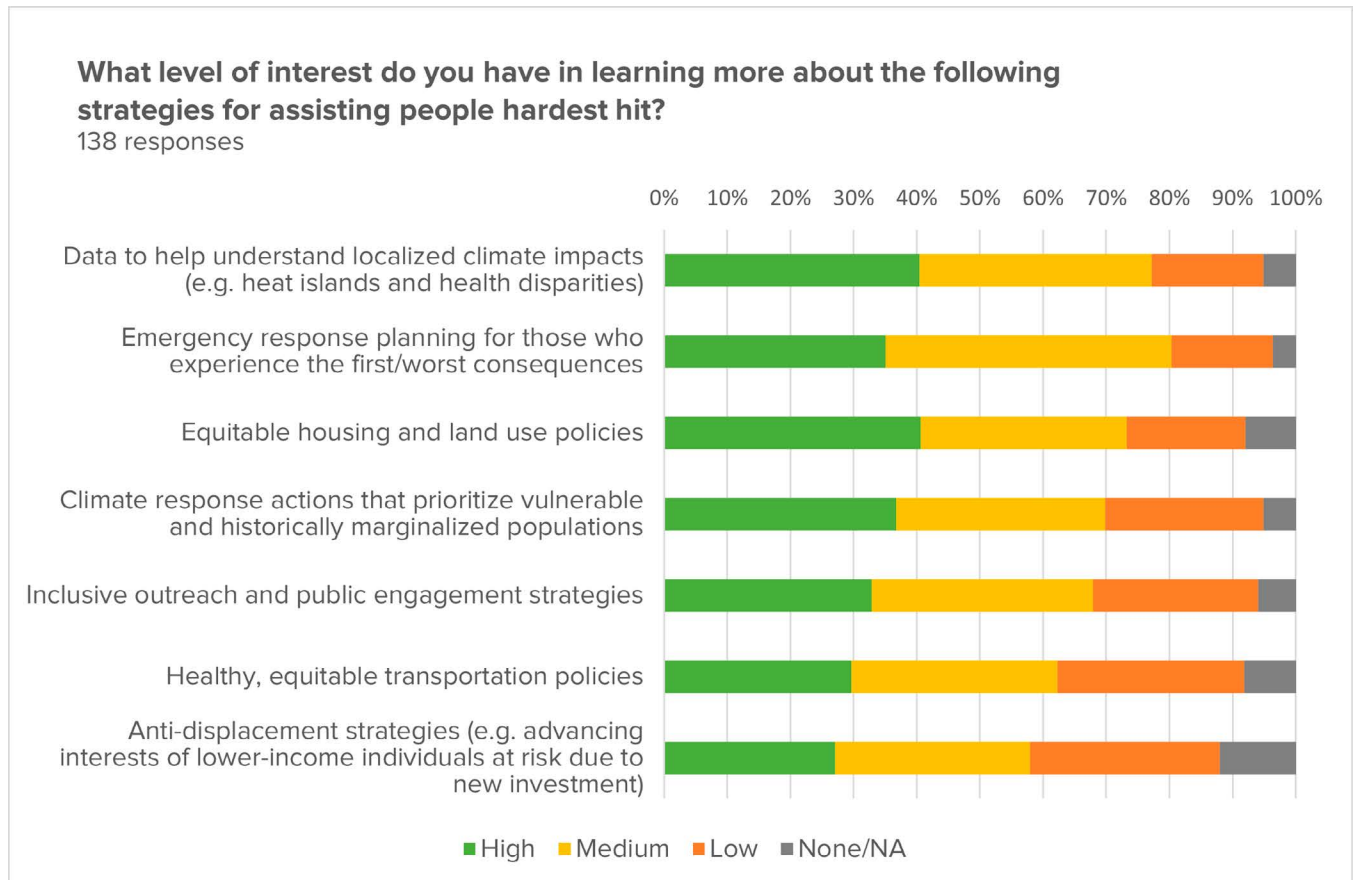


“ We’ve developed an equity centered group of Community Climate Advisors to help update our Climate Action Plan, with a focus on mitigation and adaptation.

“ Direct partnerships with community-led organizations to support their work in the community.

Q4: What level of interest do you have in learning more about the following strategies for assisting people hardest hit by climate-related impacts?

The chart below shows that respondents had the most interest in learning about equitable housing and land use policies and data to help understand localized climate impacts. Strategies added by respondents included food security, combating measures that negatively impact low-income residents, and preparing for fire and smoke. A few respondents also noted that small communities don't have the same issues as larger cities.



“ After decades of studies, now is the time for implementation of developed strategies.

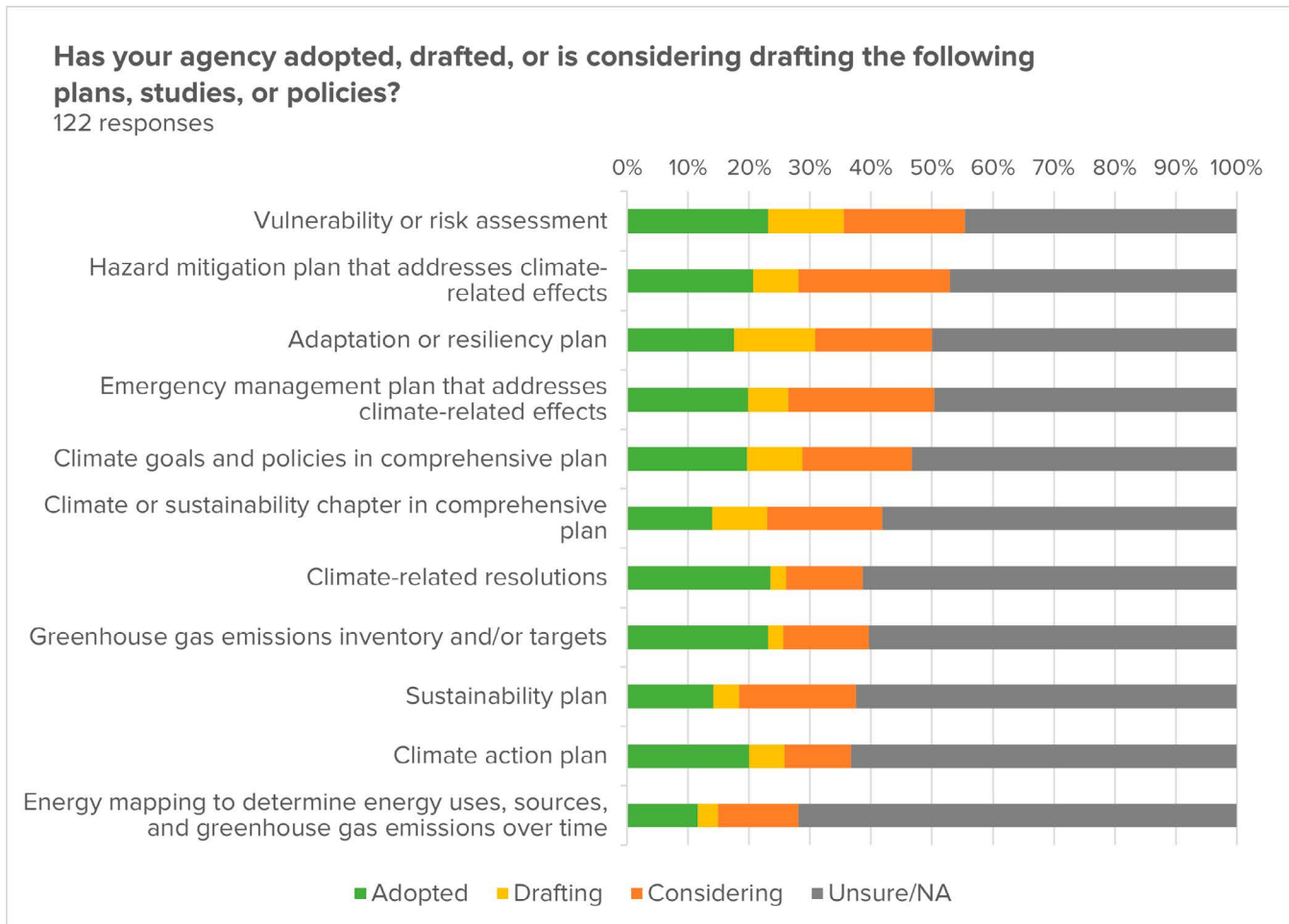
“ Improving food security in the face of climate chaos.

“ In our region, wildfire and smoke are the clearest impacts, though down the road diminished water supply will also be significant. Economically disadvantaged people suffer more of the impacts from fire and smoke and have fewer resources to proactively prepare for anticipated impacts.

Plans, Studies, and Actions

Q5: To your knowledge, has your jurisdiction/agency adopted, drafted, or is considering drafting the following plans, studies, or policies?

The chart below shows that vulnerability or risk assessments, climate-related resolutions, and greenhouse gas emissions inventories and/or targets were most frequently noted as having been adopted. Respondents most frequently noted that they are in the process of drafting vulnerability or risk assessments and adaptation or resiliency plans. Respondents most frequently said that they are considering developing hazard mitigation plans and emergency management plans. Some respondents noted that they have not yet started on climate related work due to factors such as lack of funding, staff, and political will.

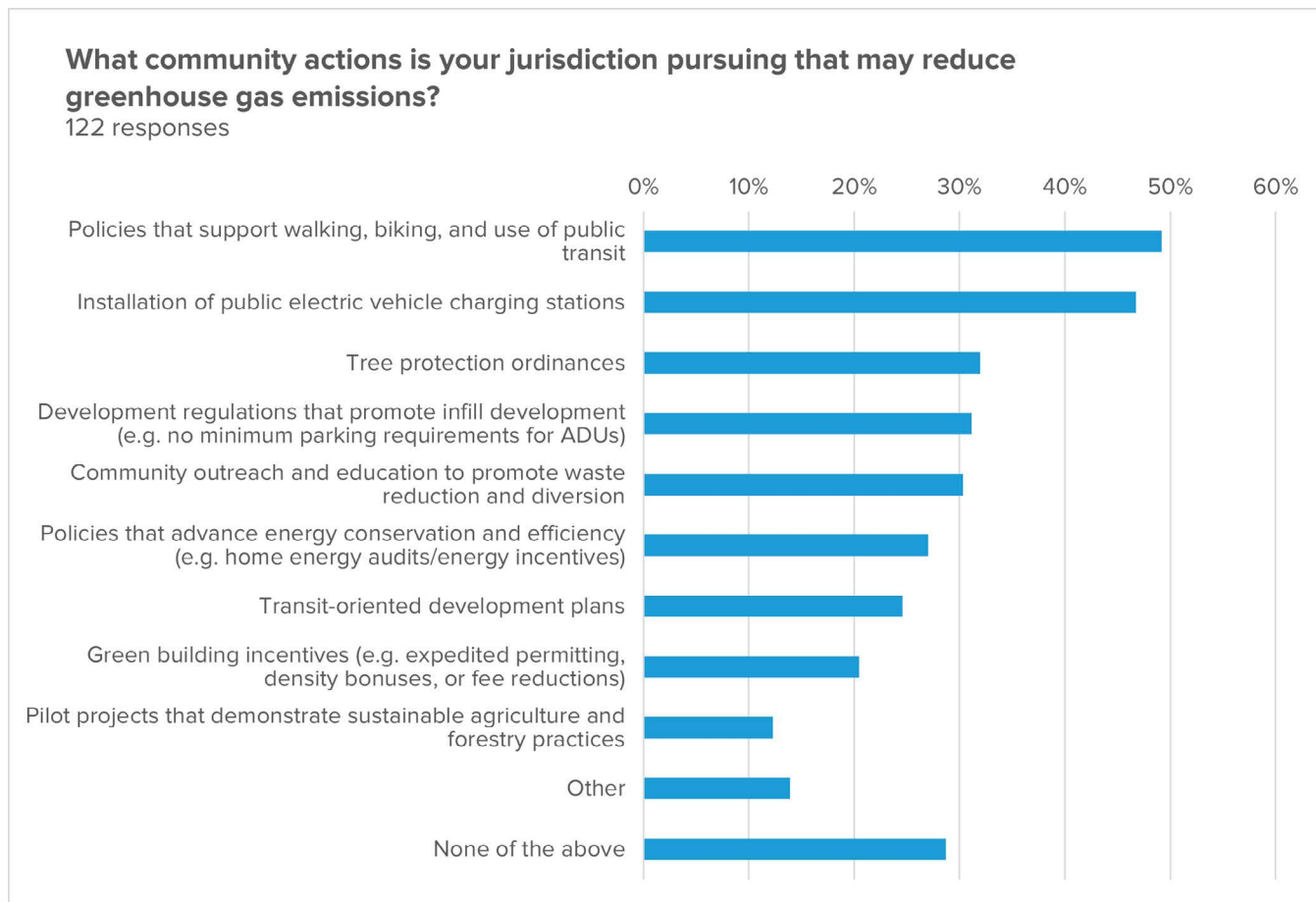


“ We have participated in a larger community driven effort that encompasses the Methow Valley.

“ Need funding and capacity to develop these.

Q6: To your knowledge, which of the following community actions or strategies is your jurisdiction pursuing that may reduce greenhouse gas emissions? (Check all that apply.)

The chart below shows that the actions with the most responses include policies that support walking, biking, and transit and installation of public electric vehicle charging stations. Actions or strategies added by respondents included agency operational/capital planning efforts such as solar panels on municipal buildings, conversion of city vehicles to electric vehicles, and sustainable purchasing.



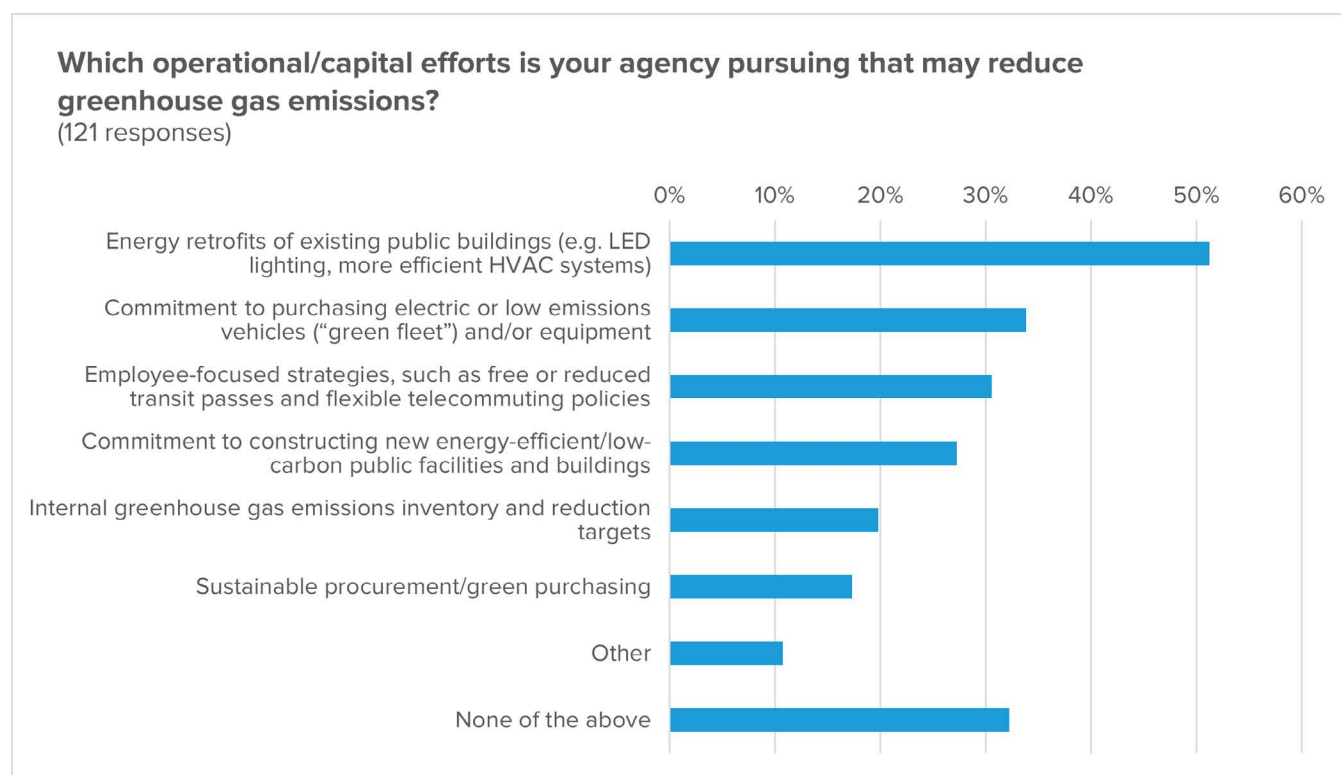
“ Encourage water conservation through our Saving Water Partnership.

“ Educate decision-makers, residents, including youth, about the effects, risks, and opportunities to decrease the vulnerability of the Puget Sound socio-ecological system to climate change.

“ We have programs, part of implementing our Northwest Ports Clean Air Strategy, that seek to demonstrate and deploy shore power for ships, zero emission cargo handling equipment, and zero emission drayage trucks in the next 5 years. The examples of early demonstrations of zero emission technology are part of our vision to get to zero across the board by 2050.

Q7: To your knowledge, which of the following agency operational/capital planning efforts is your jurisdiction or organization pursuing that may reduce greenhouse gas emissions? (Check all that apply.)

The chart below shows that the most frequently selected efforts were energy retrofits of existing public buildings and commitment to purchasing electric or low emissions vehicles and/or equipment. The third most selected response was “none of the above,” which indicates that more effort needs to be placed on identifying and reducing barriers that may hinder climate-related actions in internal operations. Additional efforts listed by respondents included renewable hydrogen fuel cell, district heating and cooling microgrids, and rooftop solar on public buildings. Respondents also noted that more options were needed for small cities.



“ We are actively pursuing projects and funding for rooftop solar on public buildings.

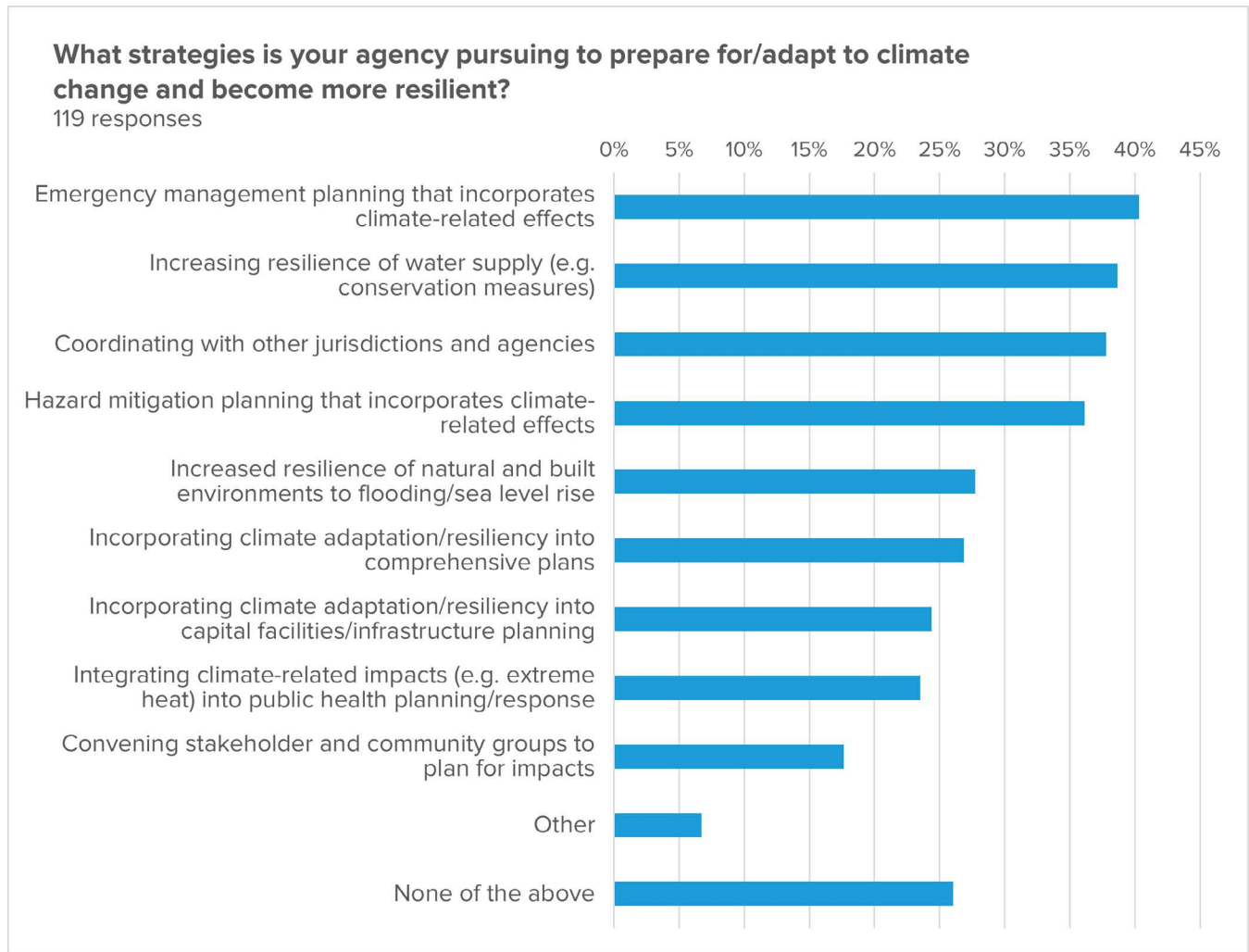
“ We are pursuing a district heating and cooling microgrid with our local school district.

“ The city will be looking at its fleet and facilities in consideration of the climate change resolution it has adopted and developing an action plan.

“ Most of these items simply cannot relate to such a small town.

Q8: To your knowledge, which of the following strategies is your jurisdiction pursuing to prepare for, adapt to, and become more resilient to climate effects? (Check all that apply.)

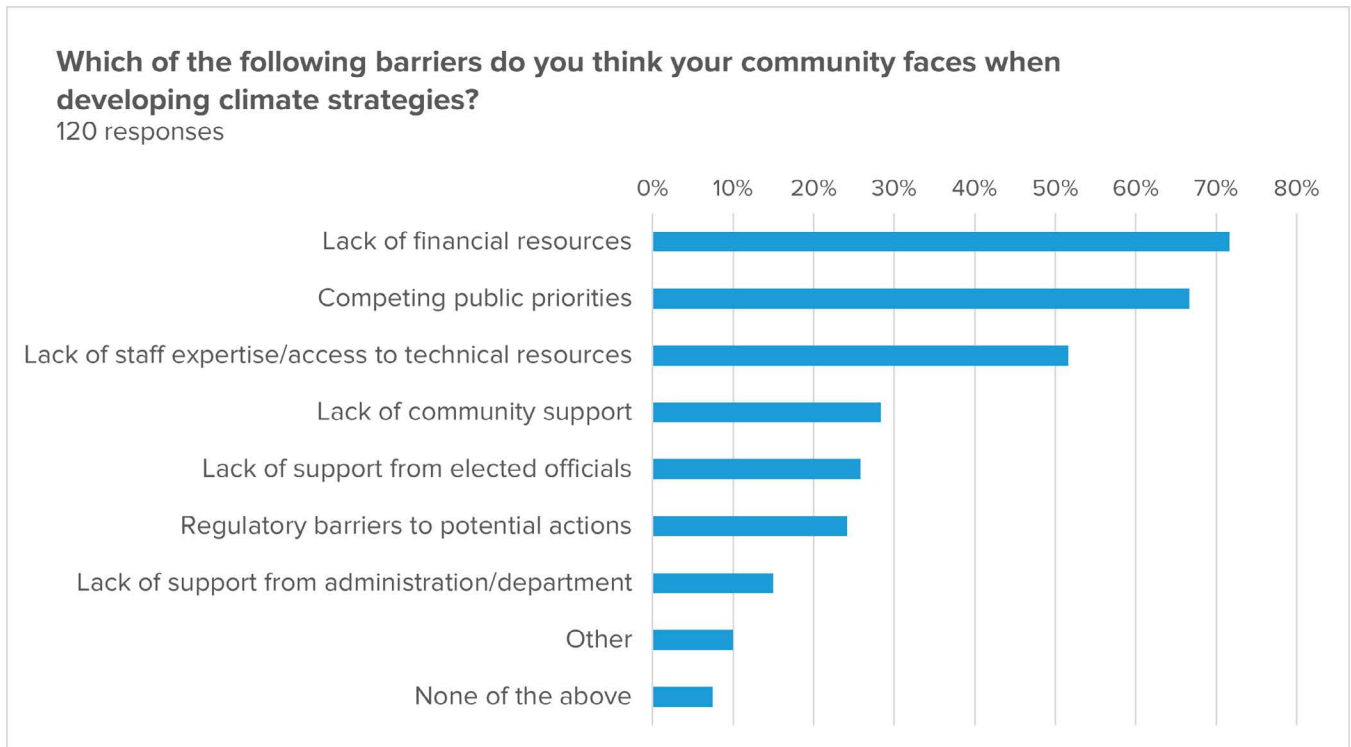
The chart below shows that respondents most frequently noted that they are pursuing emergency management planning, efforts to increase resiliency of the water supply, and coordination with other jurisdictions and agencies to respond to climate effects.



Barriers

Q9: Which of the following barriers do you think your community is facing when developing and implementing your climate response strategies? (Check all that apply.)

The chart below shows that respondents most frequently cited these barriers: lack of financial resources, competing public priorities, and lack of staff expertise/access to technical resources. Barriers added by respondents included climate strategies that aren't part of a coordinated effort, lack of information on the costs and benefits of climate actions and impacts, and competing priorities that impact staff capacity.



“ Could use resources to bridge the climate/housing affordability gap.

“ We aren't even at the point of determining what barriers our community is facing.

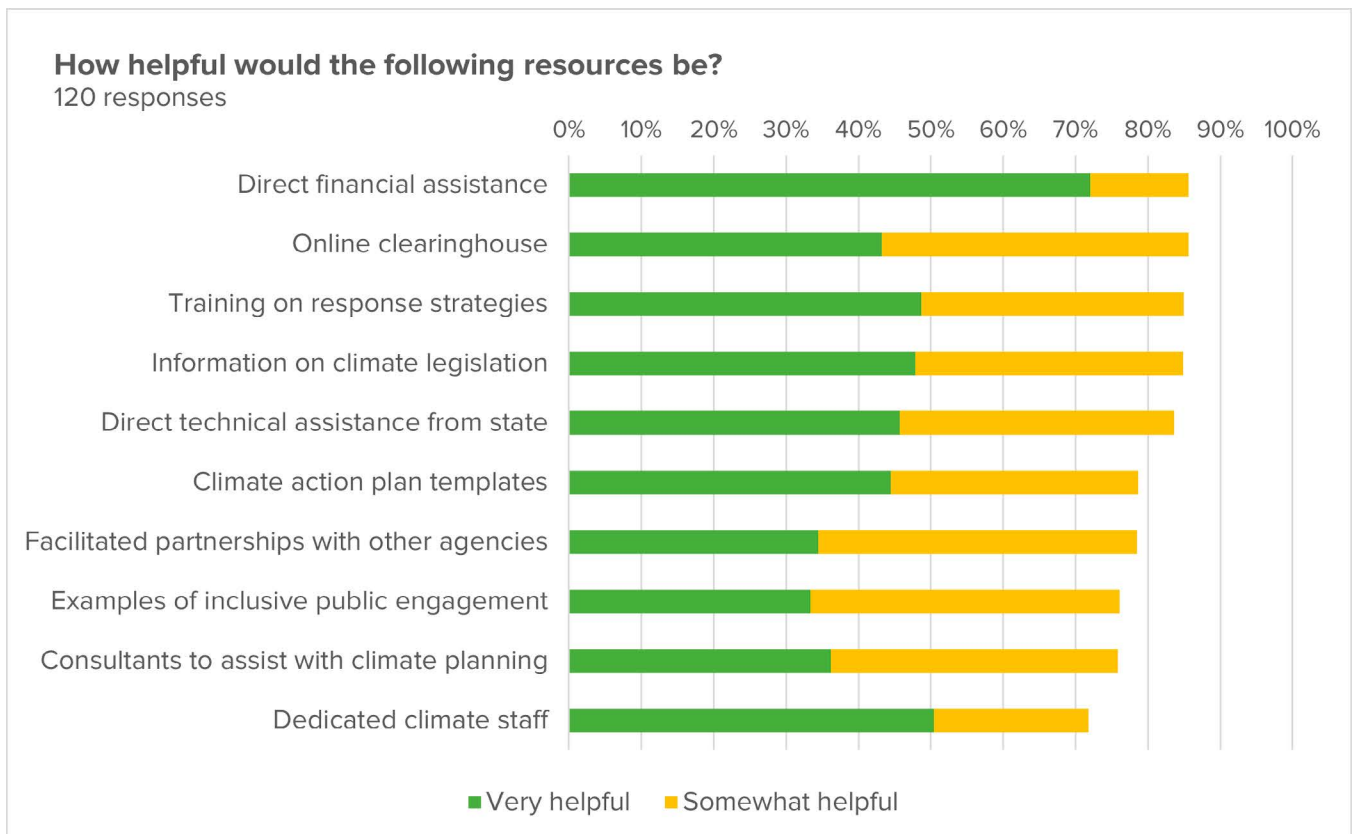
“ The city has undertaken a number of smart, climate-friendly actions, but has not developed a larger framework to implement a coordinated strategy under the umbrella of climate change, sustainability, or resiliency.

“ Cost-benefit of measures is an issue.

Resources

Q10: How helpful do you think the following resources would be in your climate response efforts?

The chart below shows that respondents noted direct financial assistance, staff dedicated to climate planning and implementation, and training for staff and elected officials as the most helpful resources. Most frequently noted as somewhat helpful were facilitated partnerships with peer jurisdictions, examples of inclusive public engagement processes, and an online clearinghouse with best practices. Resources added by respondents included funding to purchase lower carbon technologies, training on how climate effects are impacting the local community and economy, options and tools to respond to climate effects, and ideas for aligning greenhouse gas emissions reduction policies with economic principles. The chart below shows the “very helpful” and “somewhat helpful” responses. The remaining responses were in the categories of “not helpful” or “unsure/NA.”



“ As a very small town, we just don’t have the resources in terms of staff, money, or time to address climate impacts comprehensively.

“ Funding would be the most helpful for us at this time. Climate action is competing for funds with other priorities, like housing and economic initiatives.

Q11: If your jurisdiction had sufficient resources (staffing, funding, etc.), what climate response efforts would you tackle? (Open-ended question.)

In this open-ended question, key responses included the following:

- Preparing for impacts such as wildfires, drought, erosion, water shortages, sea level rise, and flooding
- Managed retreat from shorelines
- Electric and low emissions vehicles
- Public transit, walking, and biking
- Compact neighborhoods with mixed uses
- Centering equity and providing resources to help the most vulnerable populations
- Retrofits for energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Incentives for energy efficiency
- Internal operations
- Microgrids
- Tree planting and urban heat sinks
- Protection of ecosystems and salmon
- Food security
- Cooling and clean air centers
- Climate in comprehensive plan updates
- Public education
- Sufficient staffing for climate action
- Implementation and monitoring

“ Engaging the community on the need, identifying the direction small communities can take to get started, and coordinating with other agencies and community groups.

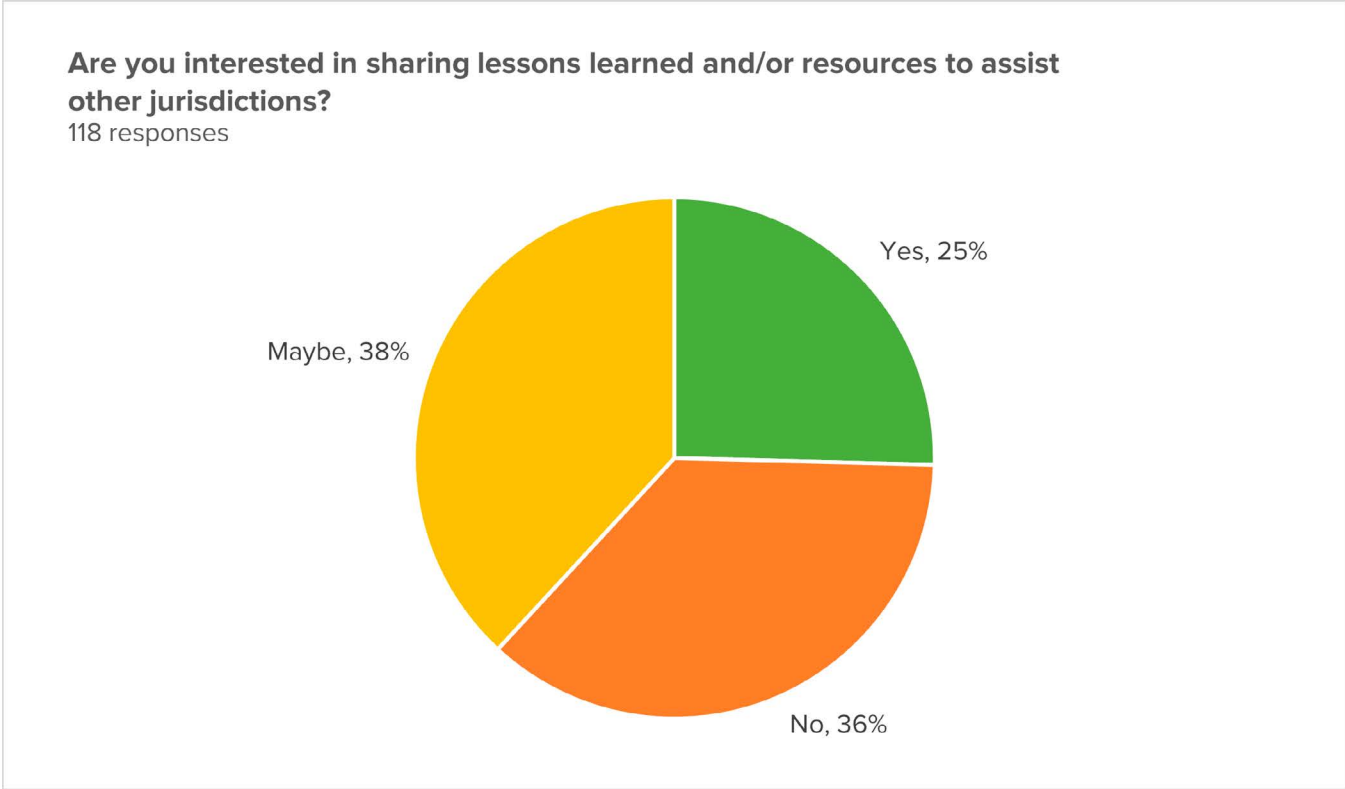
“ Understanding the impact on shoreline erosion as a result of sea level rise and developing an adaptation strategy.

“ Building decarbonization policies and programs, including funding to support substantial retrofits for low to moderate income households.

“ Help each individual tribe to define and achieve their climate goals.

Q12: Are you interested in sharing lessons learned and/or resources to assist other jurisdictions and agencies who are just embarking on their climate efforts?

The chart below shows that most respondents are interested in or would consider sharing lessons learned and/or resources from their climate planning efforts with other jurisdictions and agencies.



Differences Between Jurisdiction Types and Sizes

The survey findings and charts presented in this report show the total responses for each question. However, additional staff analysis revealed several differences in responses between small and large jurisdictions and local government and agency types (e.g. cities, counties, special purpose districts, and tribes).

These differences are due to several factors, including the varying challenges and levels of statutory authority among jurisdictions in different parts of the state. Additionally, some climate strategies may not apply to certain jurisdictions or may not be politically or financially feasible for others. For instance, the climate-related strategies of many special purpose districts may be limited primarily to the agency's own capital facilities and operations, while cities and counties have much broader authority, such as land use and transportation planning and implementation.

Similarly, agencies of different sizes will have different considerations. More populous jurisdictions typically have more staff, financial resources, and technical resources, and provide a greater range of services with more specialization. Smaller jurisdictions typically have fewer employees and financial resources. Different jurisdictions also have different political and budgeting structures that depend on a wide range of factors.

As MRSC continues this Local Climate Response Project, we will include resources and examples that reflect a variety of approaches that can be used by local governments and agencies of varying sizes and within different regions across the state.


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