CLIMATE MIGRATION READINESS PLAN

Green Cincinnati Plan



The Climate Migration Readiness Plan is grounded in the actions of the Green Cincinnati Plan. Through this work, Cincinnati strives to be more sustainable, resilient, and equitable in the face of uncertainty.

Foundational Works

The Climate Migration Readiness Plan builds on previous plans from the City of Cincinnati, including:

- Green Cincinnati Plan
- Green Workforce Landscape Analysis
- Cincinnati Region Climate Migration Outlook
- Connected Communities
- Cincinnati Financial Freedom Blueprint
- Cincinnati Strategic Housing Playbook

Other sources of data and knowledge are used to supplement these foundational documents.

Collaborators

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- Welcoming America
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Executive Snapshot



Cincinnati has always been a city shaped by people who came looking for something better; a safer place, a stronger economy, a community where they could belong. That story is personal to me.

My mother was born in Tibet and grew up in a refugee camp. My father is from Punjab, India. Together, they chose to make a life in this country, and they built it with the same hope that has drawn people to cities like Cincinnati for generations. The idea of being a welcoming community is not abstract to me; I have lived it.

Today, our city faces a new chapter in that story. As climate change disrupts communities across the country, through floods, drought, and forest fires, more people are seeking resilient cities. Cincinnati is one of those cities. Sitting along the Ohio River, we have the abundant water, stable infrastructure, and strong regional economy to prepare us for the future.

But before we look ahead, we must look at who is here right now. Frontline communities have been the first to experience the impacts of climate and social disruption. Too many of our neighbors are carrying the weight of housing insecurity and poverty. Any plan that prepares Cincinnati for future growth must start by strengthening the people who already call this city home. Shared stability is the foundation for our growth.

That is the spirit behind the Cincinnati Climate Migration Readiness Plan. It is a plan grounded in equity and built for the long term. It asks us to invest in affordability, housing, reliable transit, clean energy, and the social infrastructure that holds neighborhoods together.

The decisions we make today will define the city we grow to become. When we get these pieces right Cincinnati becomes what I believe it can be: a place where people can find not just security, but belonging.

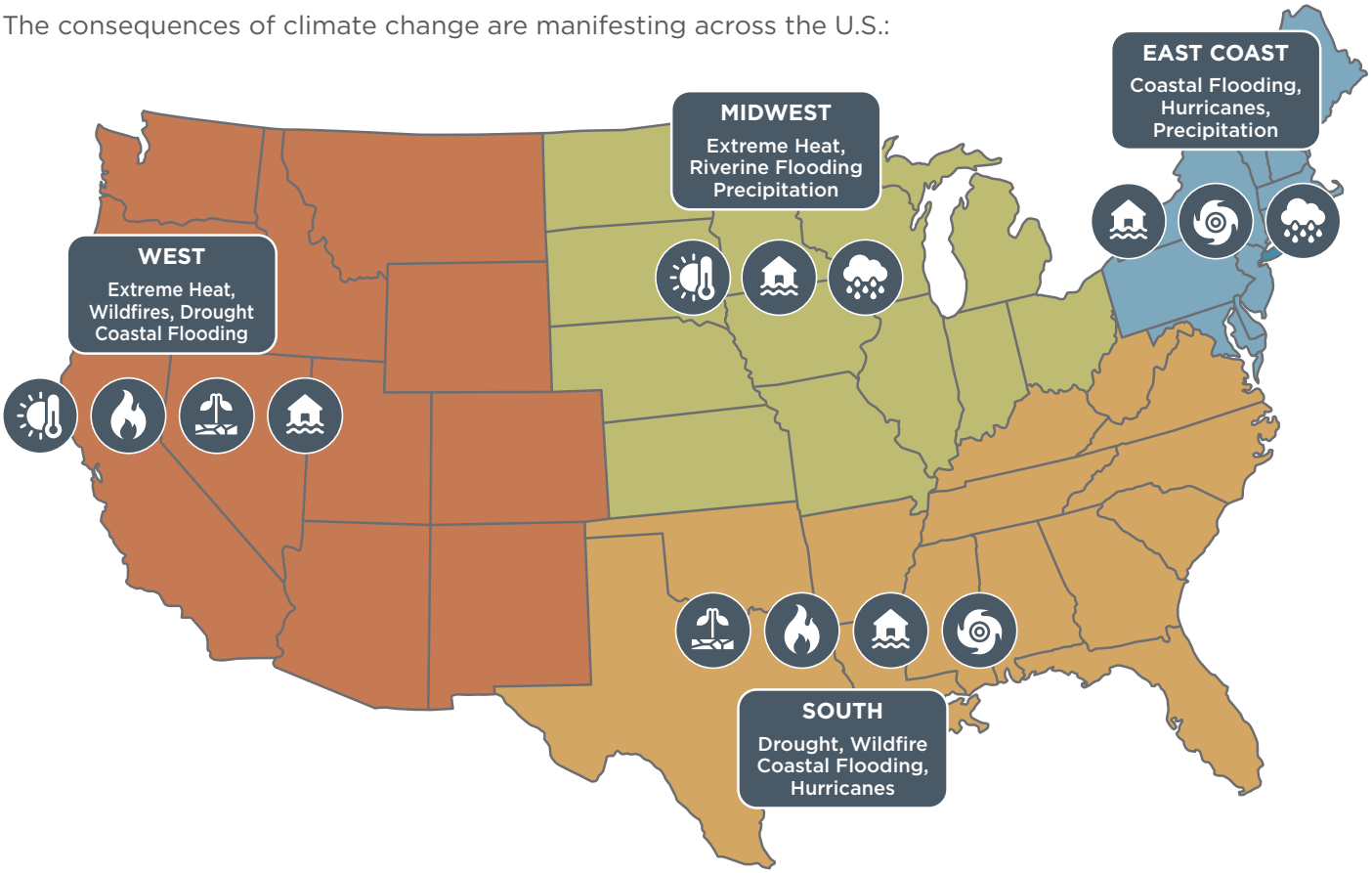


Mayor Aftab Pureval

What is Happening Nationally?

In a time of intensifying climate pressures, the impacts of climate change may influence where people move. People are relocating from highly impacted areas, like those facing extreme heat or coastal flooding, to areas they view as safer. These people, called climate migrants, are reshaping migration flows in the U.S. and abroad.

The consequences of climate change are manifesting across the U.S.:



No place is completely insulated from the impacts of climate change, but some areas are relatively safer. The impacts of climate change are unique across the nation, as are the experiences of climate migrants. Those impacted by a long-term water shortage will move differently than those impacted by a sudden wildfire. Some people may choose to move before it is too dangerous, while others may be forced to move following a disaster. Who moves and how they move shapes their needs upon arrival. Understanding the diversity of climate migrants helps us prepare to meet new demands on city resources.

Since the 1960s, Midwestern cities have lost population to suburban areas and the Sun Belt. But data suggests this trend may be changing. Since 2010, migration flows have increased Cincinnati's population, driven primarily by international newcomers and movers from other cities in the region.

More recently, federal immigration policy has slowed the influx of international newcomers; local or regional moves are emerging as an important component of population change. Cities, including Cincinnati, may continue to grow given the domestic flow of people north. However, the future is uncertain and readiness dependent, so there is no guarantee that Cincinnati will be a receiving city of climate migration.

What We Know About Cincinnati

As migration patterns shift and people move to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, Cincinnati may be positioned to receive newcomers. There are a few key reasons people may choose Cincinnati as their new home:

Relative Affordability

Cincinnati is less expensive than many other U.S. cities.

Strong Economy

Home to Fortune 500 companies and small businesses, Cincinnati has a robust and diverse economy.



Unique & Bustling Neighborhoods

Tucked into the hills, Cincinnati's 52 distinct neighborhoods each have their own charms to draw in residents.

Renowned Colleges

Home to University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, Cincinnati State, and more, Cincinnati has high-quality and diverse secondary-education options.

Beautiful Greenspace

With 5,000 acres of greenspace, most Cincinnatians (88%) live within a ten-minute walk of a park.



Ample Water Source

The Ohio River and its tributaries provide a secure source of water for current and future Cincinnatians.

Growing Population

Reversing a decades-long trend, Cincinnati has been gaining residents since 2010.

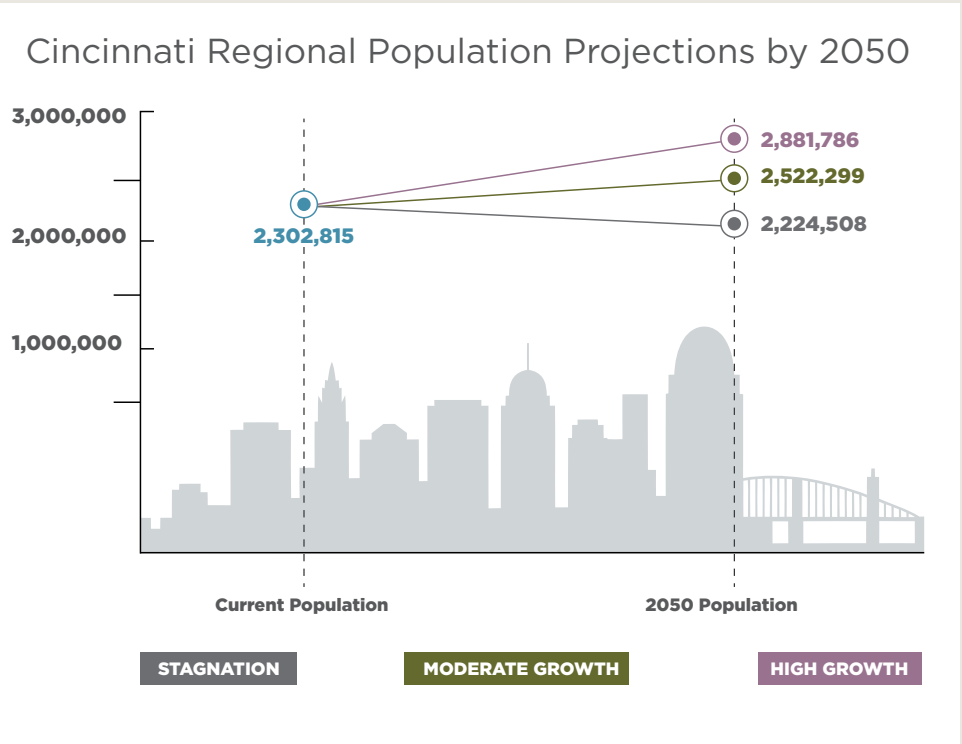
These strengths are not equitably distributed across the City's fifty-two neighborhoods, as each have their own unique identity. For example, there is a stark difference in wealth, with a 74.7% gap in poverty rates between the most wealthy and poorest neighborhood. The latter neighborhoods face a higher risk of displacement and being underserved if climate migrants arrive.

An emerging strength of Cincinnati is its lower climate risk compared to other areas. Cities face a range of climate risks, from wildfires and sea level rise to extreme natural disasters, but some regions may be more impacted than others. People may begin to move from the most severely impacted areas to relatively safer cities, like Cincinnati.

Climate change still impacts Cincinnati, with issues like extreme precipitation, overland flooding, and urban heat expected to worsen over time. But our abundant fresh water, lower disaster risk, and established resilience may make Cincinnati a safer place compared to those experiencing the most severe impacts of climate change. This relative safety might attract newcomers avoiding the harshest consequences of climate change.

Looking Ahead

With this new reality in mind, the Cincinnati Regional Chamber of Commerce examined how climate migration could affect population levels in the Cincinnati region. Their Climate Migration Outlook projects population across three scenarios: stagnation, moderate growth, and high growth. If climate migration and broader domestic relocation trends accelerate, the Cincinnati region could absorb an additional 525,000 new residents by 2050 under the high growth scenario.



Current residents experiencing poverty, housing insecurity, unemployment, hunger, and other disparities are likely to be most affected if our population changes and strains our resources. As Cincinnati prepares for potential population growth, the City must center the wellbeing and goals of current residents. The goals below reflect their priorities and will guide how Cincinnati readies for newcomers:

- More affordable housing
- Homeownership
- Improved public transportation
- Financial stability
- Improved health
- Walkable, dense neighborhoods





Planning Principles

This plan builds on work Cincinnati is already doing, like equity-focused budgeting, affordable housing programs, resilience investments, and community partnerships. The following five principles build on that foundation for climate-migration planning, ensuring that population change strengthens the city for everyone already here.

Five Guiding Principles

1. Center Current Residents

- As Cincinnati changes, the City should stay focused on stabilizing neighborhoods and delivering services for current residents.
- **Building on:** Using Cincinnati's Climate Equity Indicators and equity-focused budgeting as a basis, this plan deepens Cincinnati's commitment to serving all residents, especially historically underinvested communities.

2. Prevent Displacement

- Displacement is already happening, but climate migration could bring new pressures to an already stressed housing stock. Protective tools need to be in place before demand spikes, not after.
- **Building on:** Cincinnati's Strategic Housing Playbook evaluates each neighborhood for its displacement risk and recommends strategies to ensure residents can stay in their homes. The Strategic Housing Playbook, Cincinnati's existing affordable housing, and eviction-prevention measures form the basis of this plan's housing focus.

3. Align Housing Supply

- The right housing built too late, or in the wrong place, still produces price shocks. Strategic housing investment is necessary to ensure housing availability and protect affordability.
- **Building on:** The Connected Communities zoning updates and the Strategic Housing Playbook's targeted housing recommendations for different neighborhoods already pursue ample, neighborhood-suited, affordable housing. This plan connects these goals to housing supply signals and demand changes.

4. Invest Ahead of Stress

- Our infrastructure has capacity limits that could be surpassed if population grows. Monitoring infrastructure now means we can be proactive with adaptation, instead of reactive to stressors.
- **Building on:** This plan connects current infrastructure investment, such as transit, green infrastructure, resilience hubs, and community partnerships, to data on emerging demands.

5. Stay Welcoming and Inclusive

- As Cincinnati evolves, the City should demonstrate inclusive leadership by ensuring all residents have equitable access to services, civic life, and economic opportunity.
- **Building on:** Cincinnati's commitment to welcoming principles is exhibited by im-migrant-friendly programs, culture-bridging arts and festivals, and partnerships like Cincinnati Compass that advance inclusion of immigrants and refugees. These efforts help turn welcoming principles into visible, city-wide practice.

What We're Watching

Cincinnati may not know if or when newcomers will arrive, but we can build a system that sees it coming. This section establishes a robust monitoring system to project population shifts early, track system readiness in real time, and activate the right response before stress becomes crisis.

The monitoring system watches five distinct dimensions of city readiness.

DIMENSIONS:	MONITORING:
National Climate Impacts ►	Conditions deteriorating in origin regions
Early Migration Signals ►	First signs of population movement toward Cincinnati
Neighborhood Housing Demand ►	Block-by-block capacity and affordability pressure
Social Services ►	Whether services can absorb new demand
Infrastructure Thresholds ►	Schools, roads, water, power approaching limits



National Climate Impacts

Climate migration is about what's deteriorating elsewhere as much as what Cincinnati offers. These signals monitor regions where climate risks are compounding, the economics of staying are worsening, and out-migration is most likely.

WHAT WE WATCH

- Repeated natural disasters in an area may prompt people to move to safer places. By recording instances of hurricanes, flooding, or infrastructure failures, we can flag and understand where pressure is building for out-migration.
- Public agencies, like FEMA, and insurers are increasingly interested in relocating people from high-risk areas to lower-risk areas. FEMA-identified repetitive-loss properties, voluntary buyout programs, and insurers' refusal to renew policies or increasing premiums are all indicators that an area may be too risky for people to stay.

KEY METRICS

- FEMA repetitive-loss and buyouts per 1,000 housing units
- Insurance distress: non-renewals, premium spikes, and withdrawals

RIGHT NOW:

Insurance non-renewal rates in Florida in 2023: 2.99%

Source:
United States Senate Committee on the Budget

Early Migration Signals

These are the fastest-moving signals that people from climate-stressed areas are beginning to move toward Cincinnati, often 3 to 5 years before census data confirms it.

WHAT WE WATCH

- Address change data, like that collected by the IRS, state motor vehicle agencies, and USPS, show domestic migrants' origins and destination in Cincinnati. This data can be used to establish climate migration trends regarding place-of-origin or income.
- English Learner (EL) enrollment is widely used as a proxy indicator for immigrant and language-minority student presence. Increases in EL enrollment may indicate increases in families migrating to Cincinnati.

KEY METRICS

- Driver's license, USPS, and IRS address changes
- English Learner enrollment at Cincinnati Public Schools
- Net arrivals per 1,000 existing residents
- Net arrivals from flagged areas

RIGHT NOW:

Number of recently arrive English learner students at Cincinnati Public Schools: 702

Source:
Ohio Department of Education and Workforce

Neighborhood Housing Demand

Citywide housing numbers can hide neighborhood-level stress. These signals watch affordability and displacement pressure at the block level where long-term residents are most vulnerable to being priced out.

WHAT WE WATCH

- Centering current residents means understanding how population changes affect the demand for housing. We need to understand if population increases are driving up prices, reducing available supply of affordable housing, and displacing residents.
- On the supply side of housing, there are indicators we can watch to determine if Cincinnati is building or providing enough housing units. Building permit and inspection times reflect how quickly we can create new housing units; while Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) permits and Short-Term Rental permits illustrate how neighborhoods increase housing supply by converting current housing into duplexes or vacation rentals.

KEY METRICS (Tracked by Neighborhood)

- Rent growth differential: neighborhood vs. City average
- Share of rent burdened residents: percentage of renter households spending more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities
- Building permit and inspection times

RIGHT NOW:

Rent burden in the Villages at Roll Hill: 54.1%

Source: City of Cincinnati

Social Services

Newcomers need more than housing. These signals track whether city services, such as language access, support services, or childcare, have the capacity to absorb new demand without failing the residents already counting on them.

WHAT WE WATCH

- Staff at frontline nonprofits and government agencies provide critical support to newcomers but may be overwhelmed if population surges dramatically. We need to understand if staff at these organizations are surpassing their intended capacity and struggling to deliver services.
- Systems, like our childcare services and workforce, should adapt quickly to population changes. When newcomers cannot quickly secure employment and childcare, they may struggle to stabilize in their new locale. Monitoring newcomers' ability to get a job or childcare gives us insight into whether these systems are adequately adapting to a changing Cincinnati.

KEY METRICS

- Median days from application to benefits decision for SNAP, Medicaid, and housing assistance
- Licensed childcare slots per 100 children under age 5
- Workforce time-to-placement for newcomers

RIGHT NOW:

Number of child care centers per 1,000 children under 5 in Hamilton county: 10

Source:
County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Infrastructure Stressors

Every major system has a breaking point. These signals define those thresholds: points at which small increases in population cause system failure.



WHAT WE WATCH

- Soft infrastructure, like public education and health care, can be strained by increases in population. Schools, emergency rooms, and primary care facilities are designed with a maximum capacity but may exceed that capacity if the population grows. Monitoring demand at these institutions compared to designed capacity allows us to understand if our social services are stretching to accommodate newcomers.
- Hard infrastructure, like our roads, water and wastewater systems, and electrical grid, must adapt to changing average demand and peak demand if population increases.

KEY METRICS

- Student enrollment as a percentage of permanent seat capacity (excluding portables)
- Road level-of-service and transit load factor
- Water/wastewater flows vs permitted capacity

RIGHT NOW:

Increase in ridership of Metro buses in January 2026 vs January 2025: 3.5%

Source:
SORTA/Metro Planning and Operations Committee

Important Terms



Soft Infrastructure
The non-physical systems, services, networks, and organizations that make up the social fabric of a community. Soft infrastructure runs on human and social capital to uphold living standards. Some examples are our school system, policies, institutions, and cultural norms.



Hard Infrastructure
The built systems and structures necessary for a functional community. Some examples are roads, electrical grids, and water treatment plants.

Cross-Sector Strategies

Watching these indicators can help us navigate the uncertainty of climate migration, but some actions can be taken now to prepare for any future. The below strategies were proposed by local government officials, non-profit leaders, and members of the business community as ways to ready the city for potential newcomers while improving quality of life for longtime residents.



Accelerate Housing Development

Housing prices are high, regardless of how many newcomers we see. Residents saw the need to increase the availability and affordability of housing through a few approaches:

- Prioritize building high-density housing
- Build along transit corridors
- Inclusionary zoning to secure affordable housing



Serve Residents

To best take care of current and future residents, the government needs to welcome residents to the decision-making table and be easy to work with. Some strategies include:

- Increasing civic engagement and outreach
- Offering multilingual government communications
- Centering neighborhood priorities in decision-making



Attract and Retain Business

Maintaining a vibrant economy is essential for residents' financial stability and quality of life. Attracting new business and supporting current businesses was seen as an important goal for the city that could be achieved by:

- Creating a small business incubator
- Reducing barriers to market entry for new businesses
- Adopting a business attraction and retention strategy

Invest in Resilient Infrastructure

Our hard infrastructure supports the function and economic vitality of Cincinnati, but are jeopardized by underinvestment. The City can prepare for newcomers and address current infrastructure issues by:

- Protecting the region's water wealth
- Increasing generation of clean energy
- Addressing the spread of impervious surfaces and combined sewer overflow



Improve Transit System

Our roads, buses, and sidewalks provide a critical service to Cincinnati, but not without their challenges. Some strategies to improve our transit system in preparation for newcomers include:

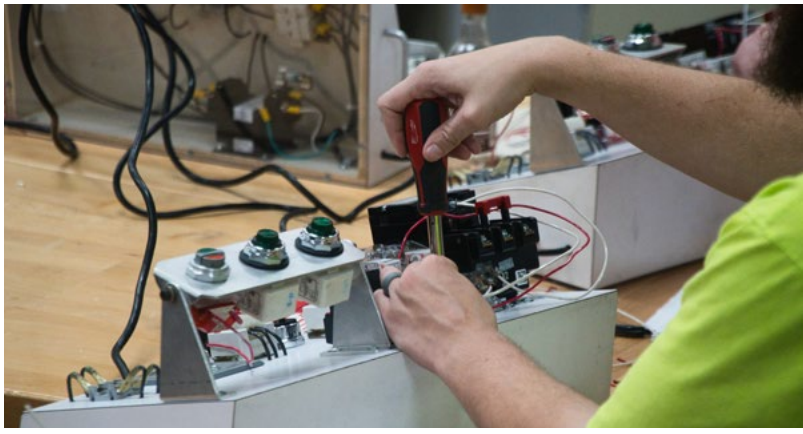
- Promoting transit-oriented development
- Increasing and improving pedestrian and bike-friendly infrastructure
- Focusing public transportation along key corridors



Develop our Workforce

Workforce development is top of mind for residents wanting to improve their skills and advance their careers. Some strategies to help Cincinnati's workforce prepare for the future include:

- K-12 STEM and green workforce training
- Sector-specific job training
- Job placement services



Collaborate Regionally

Residents' lives often cross over municipalities' boundaries, but some of the governments' services, programs, and policies do not. Regional collaboration, regardless of population growth, was seen as an important way to improve service delivery to residents, align similar efforts, and efficiently use resources. Some ways to improve regional collaboration among municipalities include:

- Consolidating utilities and services
- Aligning regional policies, like zoning
- Collaborating on public transportation



Working Collaboratively

As the City of Cincinnati begins monitoring climate-migration indicators, the City should provide governance of the process, working group, and deliverables. Good governance ensures that the project stays aligned with our Planning Principles and shares important data and updates with the public and local leadership.

The Office of Environment and Sustainability (OES) is the primary coordinator of climate migration work. As such, OES is responsible for convening the working group described below, communicating with the public and stakeholders, and ensuring the data is accurate and current. OES will partner with other city departments to build and update the dashboard. This work would best be executed in partnership with an office of newcomer services, much like the immigration support offices of peer cities, that would be well-positioned to integrate welcoming and readiness into city operations.

A committed working group is necessary to create the monitoring system. The working group will meet on a regular schedule to review dashboard data, identify emerging trends, and honor the Planning Principles at each step.

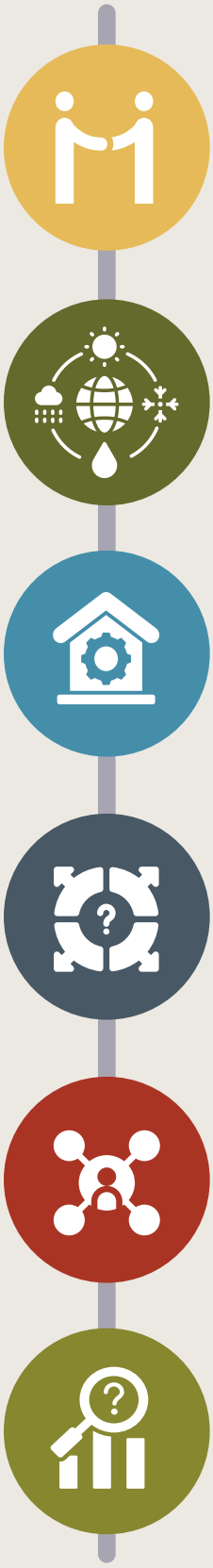
Building on previous work, OES will continue to collaborate across a diverse set of stakeholders, including city departments, climate migration experts, local immigration- or climate resilience-focused non-profits, and newcomer communities.

Milestones & Deliverables



Moving Forward

The CMRP is a key step in Cincinnati's preparation for climate migration. However, there are other initiatives the city has already undertaken that are critical to meeting the CMRP's goals. The following next steps build off existing partnerships to advance readiness and resilience in the face of potential climate migration:



Certified Welcoming

Pursuing formal Certified Welcoming designation to assess City's support for newcomers and identify new ways to build belonging.

Climate Migration Modeling

Using partnerships through EDDIT and others to begin data collection and modeling.

Resident-focused climate migration and housing workshop

With New America, OES will host a workshop to discuss the potential impacts of climate migration on housing in a neighborhood vulnerable to displacement.

Understanding current climate migrants

Through the Connected Communities Cohort, OES, Green Umbrella, and Refugee Connect will interview climate migrants in Cincinnati to learn from their experience, understand their needs, and promote their civic engagement.

Regional Engagement

Collaborate with Green Umbrella to elevate the CMRP to anchor institutions and neighboring municipalities.

Integrate climate migration readiness into the regional climate action playbook, Thrive Together.

Landscape Analysis and Listening Tour of Migration-focused Organizations

Network with existing immigration support organizations to understand current services, capacity, and gaps in resources.

Green Cincinnati Plan

CITY OF CINCINNATI

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

www.cincinnati-oh.gov/oes

Read the
Green Cincinnati Plan

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