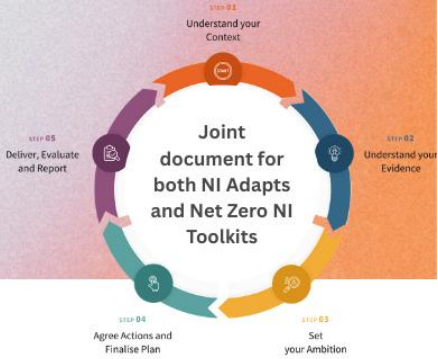

Vision, Aims and Themes

Introduction

Now that you have begun to develop your evidence base for both mitigation and adaptation, the next step is to use this information to identify a high-level structure for your plan, comprised of a vision and aims, and then a series of thematic areas which can guide development of your action plan.

Climate action is a long-term strategic challenge that you will need to align with your organisation's core aims and objectives. You should develop a vision, aims and themes which allow you to strategically plan an effective response. As you advance climate action work this high-level structure may develop to suit changes to organisational priorities or to better address the emerging policy landscape.

Activity 1 - Create a Vision

Provide a clear vision for your organisation that considers where you want to be both in terms of emissions reduction and preparation for climate impacts. Communicate the ultimate ambition for what you want to achieve by taking action on climate change, in wording that fits your organisation and level of influence.

Each Vision will be unique, and there are many options for how this might look. Some are quite short; others go into great detail. For example:

- "This Climate Action plan will enable the decarbonisation and adaptation of [your organisation] in order to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, becoming resilient to the effects of climate change and contributing to a healthier and more sustainable world."
- "[Your organisation] will become net-zero carbon and lead by example in implementing and promoting sustainable and low carbon practices in our ways of working and service delivery. This will include ensuring carbon reduction is embedded as a core part of decision-making and commissioning, and improving the energy and carbon efficiency buildings, land and fleet, as well as in all the services that we deliver. All employees and suppliers will understand the importance of reducing emissions, and their role in achieving these reductions."

- "[Your organisation] will embed mitigation actions and climate adaptation planning in line with its corporate plan and show leadership in preparing for climate impacts while contributing to city-wide resilience."

Activity 2 - Create High-level Aims

For the aims, be ambitious and consider exactly what it is you want to change as a result of developing your first climate action plan. These are strategic aims that will allow you to achieve the vision. Remember again to consider how adaptation and mitigation fit together here, even in aims which are not directly addressing one or the other in the title. For example, it is still very important that the future warmer, wetter climate is considered when designing actions on building improvement and energy efficiency.

It may also be useful to mirror the headings of major policy documents in your organisation, to help the understanding and alignment for senior leaders and other colleagues. Consider not only potential challenges but also the significant opportunities that could be developed.

Here are a few examples aims that you could include in your plan, these will vary according to your organisational structure, remit and influence:

- "Reduce emissions across the organisational boundary in line with national targets, prioritising Scope 1 and 2, and reaching Net Zero by 2050"
- "People and places will be resilient to climate change by X year, energy efficiency will be improved with the aim of a net zero property portfolio by X year"
- "Expand on-site renewable energy generation where possible and use renewable tariffs to meet current and future energy needs while maintaining emissions targets."
- "Improve energy efficiency by streamlining of processes or logistics, and through retrofitting of buildings. Implement policies to regulate the purchasing of any new vehicles or infrastructure, including new capital investment projects, to ensure maximum efficiency."
- "Leverage Nature-based solutions for carbon sequestration and adaptation, coupling Biodiversity Net Gain with our climate actions."
- "Promote sustainable practices in the procurement and consumption of resources, meeting best practice standards and aiming towards zero waste by X."
- "Consult vulnerable demographics and communities at all stages of the development and implementation of the Action Plan to ensure their needs and concerns are considered, in the process raising awareness of climate change and its impacts"
- "Embed transparent reporting and disclosure mechanisms, including through third party verification and disclosure services."

Further Inspiration for Aims:

NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP) [1]

NICCAPs are developed by NI government departments (coordinated by DAERA) in five-year cycles to set out how it will respond to the most recent UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. The high-level objectives can be a useful guide to your own aims. We recommend using the most recent third NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3), but at time of writing it has not been fully adopted, so we also reference the previous programme (NICCAP2) below.

- NICCAP3 (2024-2029) - At time of writing, the consultation on the third NI National Climate Change Adaptation Programme has closed, and final stages are progressing. It sets out Northern Ireland's adaptation approach and actions for the period 2024– 2029.
- NICCAP2 (2019-2024) Published in September 2019 this sets out Northern Ireland's adaptation approach and actions for the period 2019 – 2024. The programme outlined the five–year approach to addressing the risks and opportunities identified within the NI Evidence Report.

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[2]

The SDGs are a global blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future by 2030. Established in 2015, these 17 interconnected goals address challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. The SDGs are designed to be universal and emphasize the need for collective action to ensure that no one is left behind. By promoting economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection, the SDGs aim to create a world where people and planet can thrive together. The SDGs offer great examples of high-level aims, and how these are sub-divided into targets and indicators. See a full list of the SDGs here

Activity 3 - Create Themes

These thematic areas are the 'pillars' or 'work packages' around which your climate action plan will be structured. As with the vision and aims, these themes will be specific to your individual organisation, although it might be useful to look at similar plans produced by different organisations within your sector.

Activity 3.1 - Consider a range of ideas, including:

- What priority levers (key departments, services, processes and practices) can be used to meet your vision and aims?

- How is your organisational governance structured? It could be worth considering themes by both departments/workstreams and in terms of structural barriers such as communication and data availability.
- How do your themes contribute to or enhance other corporate responsibilities and priorities, such as tackling inequalities and achieving economic or environmental benefits?

Potential themes could include:

- Governance
- Finance
- Transport
- Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Buildings
- Procurement and Consumption
- Data and Evidence
- Estates and Maintenance
- Assets and Capital Development
- Education and Skills
- Communications.

Activity 3.2 - Once you have developed a list of themes, write a couple of objectives for each theme on how it meets the overall aims of your climate action plan. This will help guide the development of actions in the next exercise.

Do a final cross-check to ensure these objectives link to your risk register. Make sure that every priority risk is addressed by at least one theme objective.

Example:

In Figure 2 below, for the theme on Transport, the objectives could be:

- Reduce the vehicle emissions of the Council fleet.
- Promote and deliver active travel policies and projects within the County to facilitate greater walking and cycling.
- Support the delivery of rail connectivity and the enhancement of other public transport options to encourage modal shift from private car transport.
- Enable the development of a network of electric vehicle charging points.

Example: Donegal County Council

Our Vision

To be a Climate Resilient, Biodiversity Rich, Environmentally Sustainable, and Carbon Neutral Donegal by no later than the end of 2050.

Our Mission Statement

To deliver transformative change and measurable climate action across Donegal County Council within our own organisation and services, through leadership, example, and mobilising action at a local level

Aims

- Accurate understanding of the problem
- Efficient resource allocation
- Identifying effective mitigation measures
- Informing adaptation strategies
- Building public trust and engagement
- Facilitating Local, Regional, National, and international cooperation
- Monitoring and evaluation

Themes

1. Governance and Leadership
2. Transport
3. Built Environment
4. Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure
5. Communities Resilience
6. Sustainability and Resource Management

Figure 2: Example of Vision, Aims, and Themes for Donegal County Council[3]

References

1. DAERA. 2019. Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024. Available online at: *https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-climate-change-adaptation-programme-2019-2024*
2. UNDESA. 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals. Available online at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals
3. Donegal County Council. 2024. *Donegal County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029*. Available online at: https://www.donegalcoco.ie/media/s2cpk5y5/climate-action-plan-english-web-version-v2-1.pdf