



California Community Colleges Climate Action Framework

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To meet California's climate and workforce goals outlined in Vision 2030, the California Community Colleges system is mobilizing a distributed leadership structure around climate action. This layered model enables strategic coordination, regional representation, and student empowerment across all 116 colleges, creating systemwide capacity for sustainable infrastructure, education, and workforce development for green and blue economy jobs in California.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND IMPERATIVES

California is experiencing the accelerating impacts of climate change firsthand, underscoring the need for urgent, coordinated climate action. As institutions rooted in the communities they serve, California's community colleges are uniquely positioned to lead this response. The scale of the crisis demands not only institutional transformation, but also a reimagining of how colleges can advance climate justice, resiliency, and sustainability. The California Community Colleges Board of Governors has reaffirmed its commitment to this work, positioning climate action not just as an environmental priority, but as a social and economic imperative. As the largest workforce training provider in the nation, the community college system plays a vital role in preparing students for careers in green and blue economies. Through bold leadership, updated sustainability goals, and a distributed network of Climate Fellows, Climate Corps, Student Climate Fellows, and Climate Ambassadors, the system is building the infrastructure, knowledge, and partnerships needed to serve as a national model for equitable climate solutions in higher education.

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

1. Climate Fellows

The Climate Fellows program engages experienced leaders from across California's 116 community colleges to advance systemwide climate action. Fellows are selected to focus on four core pillars—student and community engagement, climate literacy across curriculum, workforce development for green and blue economy careers, and campus facilities and operations—aligning their efforts with Vision 2030 and the statewide Climate Action and Sustainability Goals. In their role, Climate Fellows lead climate planning and implementation that intersects sustainability, equity, and resiliency, drive the development of climate-centered educational pathways and workforce programs, and support campus decarbonization efforts. They represent the system in statewide and national climate forums, guiding institutions toward measurable impact. Working closely with regional stakeholders, faculty, students, and Chancellor's Office staff, Climate Fellows ensure strategic priorities are translated into action. In Fall 2025, we will expand to ten Climate Fellows.

2. Climate Corps Fellows

Four Climate Corps Fellows play a key role in supporting the Chancellor's Office Climate Fellows by helping to carry out systemwide climate initiatives and translating strategic goals into practical, campus-level actions. Climate Corps Fellows are hired through a partnership with Strategic Energy Innovations (SEI), a non-profit that trains Sustainability Professionals. Climate Corps Fellows assist with a wide range of tasks—from facilities-related research and sustainability planning to data tracking, compliance support,

and stakeholder engagement. Their efforts ensure that Climate Fellows are equipped with the operational and analytical capacity needed to move climate priorities forward effectively. One of the key projects Climate Corps Fellows are leading is a comprehensive landscape analysis of sustainability efforts across California's community colleges. This ongoing initiative involves in-depth research and interviews with campus representatives to better understand how colleges are advancing climate action. By gathering information on areas such as energy use, water conservation, waste management, and sustainable procurement, the fellows are building a systemwide picture of progress and identifying opportunities for further alignment with statewide climate goals.

3. Student Climate Fellows

The Student Climate Fellowship program empowers students who are passionate about climate action and sustainability to enact positive change on their own campuses, build relationships with peers across the state, and develop a framework for bringing climate solutions to other campuses statewide. Students may choose to work in one of three areas of focus - campus outreach, campus facilities, or student clubs and activities. In developing their scalable climate action projects, students not only aid in advancing Vision 2030 climate goals, but they also participate in networking events, benefit from workshops and other learning opportunities, and gain tangible skills that will be beneficial in pursuing green and / or blue economy jobs.

4. Climate Ambassadors

Climate Ambassadors serve as a think tank for climate action. Climate Ambassadors are a diverse group of campus leaders, including faculty, staff, students, administrators, and external experts who discuss and implement strategies that enhance sustainability efforts and prepare students for leadership roles in addressing climate change. Climate Ambassadors share resources across colleges, districts, and roles and provide feedback to the Chancellor's Climate Fellows on strategic direction. Climate Ambassadors serve as an advisory body to the Chancellor's Office and Chancellor's Climate Fellows, providing insights and recommendations on how California Community Colleges can further contribute to California's climate goals. The Climate Ambassadors Program provides an opportunity for faculty, staff, administrators, and students to engage in Climate Action work at the state level to gain deeper insight and experience or when they are unable to commit to a full fellowship.

CONCLUSION

This distributed climate leadership model empowers the California Community Colleges system to deliver on the promises of Vision 2030—advancing educational equity, climate resilience, and economic opportunity across the state. By activating four interconnected pillars—community engagement, curriculum development, workforce training, and campus facilities—this framework transforms climate ambition into coordinated, measurable action. Climate Fellows, Climate Corps Fellows, Student Climate Fellows, and Climate Ambassadors together form a network of changemakers embedded throughout the system. These champions lead with urgency and care, blending innovation with deep community ties to reimagine what sustainability in higher education can look like. Their work preserves the core values of the community college mission while enabling the scale and agility needed to meet today's climate challenges and build a more just, regenerative future for California.

Prepared by:

Carla Grandy, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor, Lead Climate Fellow