

NYC CLIMATE PLAYBOOK

A LOCALIZED SUSTAINABILITY
GUIDE FOR NYC BUSINESSES



INTRODUCTION

For businesses to fight the world's ongoing climate crisis, we must move outside the outdated paradigms suggesting climate impacts can be nationally funded and implemented. With urban heat having enormous impacts on one coast and fires devastating the other, localization of national solutions and dollars is essential to continued progress. Impacts and outcomes are always steeped in place.

While climate has global effects, the solutions lay within local municipalities across the country. Community organizations fighting the unique climate challenges of their region, need businesses to step in and engage.

As New York City faces the growing realities of climate change—from rising temperatures to the threat of coastal storms—local businesses must adapt to protect both their operations and the communities they serve. [The PlaNYC sustainability report](#), a 2023 report from the Mayors Office of Climate & Environment Justice (MOCEJ), provides actionable steps that can guide this transformation, but businesses must also consider the broader context of environmental justice and climate resilience. After all, the brutal effects of climate change have the worst impact on our most vulnerable communities.

By applying trust based versus consumption based thinking, businesses can ensure that their sustainability efforts are grounded in actionable principles and a commitment to core values. From reducing emissions and retrofitting buildings to participating in circular economies and supporting community resilience programs,

NYC businesses are positioned to become key players in the city's climate action strategy—leveraging partnerships with city departments and influencers, and taking steps that directly address the environmental challenges before us. As the PlaNYC report reminds us, “billions of dollars—and millions of lives—are at stake.”

With this information in mind, we endeavor to provide a playbook. One that has been localized for New York City, but within a framework that can be utilized globally. Using the values and competencies each business has in varying amounts, we encourage businesses to identify where they can best contribute toward these 8 key drivers: Sustainability, Equity, Competency, Geography, Degrowth, Compass, Systems and Culture drivers.

In this way, we aren't looking for anyone to do more lifting than they are able, rather it's a call to action to contribute in the ways your business is best suited. We invite you to dive in.



SUSTAINABILITY-CENTERED ACTION

DECARBONIZE BUILDINGS

Sustainability-centered actions and brands treat the environment as the ultimate stakeholder by focusing on energy efficiency and long-term ecological health.



Buildings are the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in New York City, accounting for nearly 70% of the city's total emissions. To address this, the city introduced Local Law 97 in 2019 as part of the broader Climate Mobilization Act. LL97 mandates substantial emissions reductions by 2030 for its largest buildings—those over 25,000 square feet—and full carbon neutrality by 2050. Considered the world's most ambitious building emissions legislation, this law sets emissions limits tailored to each building's type and use, with the first limits taking effect in 2024. A key requirement is that building owners submit annual emissions reports to the NYC Department of Buildings, with the first reports due by May 1, 2025.

Buildings designed for efficiency promote both the comfort and health of New Yorkers while strengthening resilience against climate threats like extreme heat.

One approach to reducing building emissions is to focus on energy efficiency improvements. Buildings designed for efficiency promote both the comfort and health of New Yorkers while strengthening resilience against climate threats like extreme heat. Efficiency improvements include installing energy meters and controls, utilizing thermal storage systems, upgrading to ultra-efficient LED lighting,

deploying smart occupancy sensors, enhancing windows and facades for high performance, adding solar panels and electric batteries, adopting heat pumps, replacing outdated oil or natural gas boilers with rooftop heat pumps, and installing reflective “cool roofs” to combat urban heat islands. (NYC’s own [CoolRoofs program](#) was launched in 2009 to meet its commitment to installing 1 million square feet of cool roofs annually.)

For building owners who face financial challenges to “resilience retrofits,” the city launched [NYC Accelerator](#), a program that delivers free, individualized guidance on enhancing energy efficiency and integrating renewable energy solutions to comply with LL97. The program also connects businesses with available financial resources and assistance such as [Property Assessed Clean Energy \(PACE\)](#) financing, financial incentives through [NYSERDA](#), and more.

TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Retrofit buildings to meet Local Law 97 emissions reduction goals.**
- **Work with [NYC Accelerator](#)** to access resources and technical support to navigate LL97 compliance.
- **Engage with programs like the [NYC Carbon Challenge](#),** which encourage businesses to set ambitious greenhouse gas reduction goals. Joining such initiatives demonstrates a commitment to sustainability while benefiting from city resources and support.
- **Partner with [Urban Green Council](#),** a nonprofit dedicated to advancing green building practices in New York City. UGC helped develop and advocate for Local Law 97; they offer training and resources for building professionals to stay ahead in the green building movement.



STEWARD GREEN SPACES

Equity-focused organizations consistently center the principles of fairness and inclusivity in all aspects of their operations.



Extreme heat poses a significant health risk in New York City, particularly for underserved communities. Indeed, heat kills more New Yorkers every year than any other type of extreme weather event; and vulnerable populations, including elderly, low-income, and Black residents, are disproportionately affected due to a lack of air conditioning, limited green space, and high urban heat island effects. These communities are at increased risk as extreme heat events become more frequent with climate change.

To address these challenges, NYC has implemented several environmental justice initiatives, including the Cool Neighborhoods NYC plan, led by the Mayor's Office of Resiliency, which focuses on heat mitigation through strategies like tree planting and improving cooling infrastructure in neighborhoods most at risk. From 2015 to 2022, the city distributed over 22,000 air conditioners through the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to help vulnerable residents. And during the COVID-19 pandemic, the city launched Get Cool NYC, providing nearly 73,000 free air conditioners when access to cooling centers was limited.

Increasing tree canopy coverage is a key strategy to fostering heat resilience. Trees help cool neighborhoods by providing shade and reducing the urban heat island effect. NYC's \$112 million investment in tree planting in 2022 aimed to increase canopy cover by adding 36,000 trees to heat-prone areas—particularly those identified as high-risk on the Heat Vulnerability Index. Two strategic goals highlighted in the [PlaNYC sustainability report](#) are to “incentivize New Yorkers to steward green spaces” and to “maximize tree preservation and planting opportunities.” By supporting these efforts, businesses can directly contribute to cooling underserved communities and improving their resilience to extreme heat.

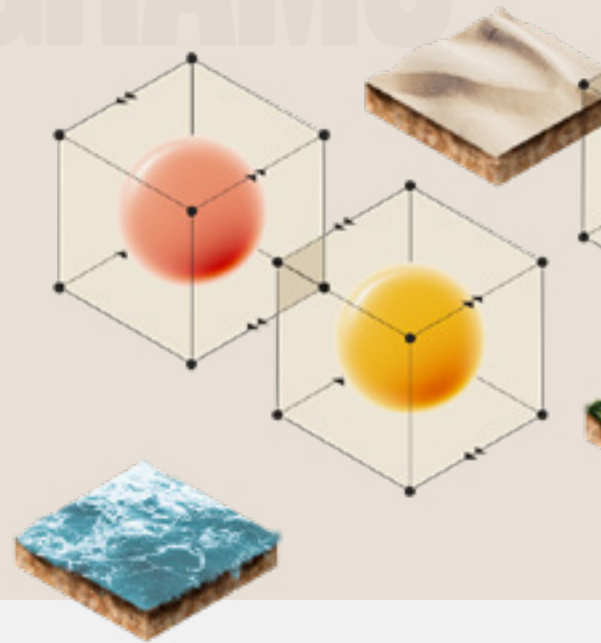
TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Partner with city-led programs for expanding green spaces and improving tree canopy cover** in underserved communities. Initiatives include the NYC Parks' [Green Infrastructure program](#) and the NYC Green Fund [Grassroots grant program](#) from the [City Parks Foundation](#), which focuses on tree planting and community stewardship.
- **Collaborate with organizations like the [Natural Areas Conservancy](#)**, which works to restore urban landscapes and increase tree canopy, especially in green-poor communities such as the Bronx.
- **Keep up with environmental and [climate justice influencers](#)** such as [@climateincolour](#), [@greengirlleah](#), [@xiyebeara](#), and [@browngirl_green](#) (the latter two are NYC residents.)



LAUNCH GREEN JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

Competency-centered teams and brands are dedicated to continuous improvement. Their mantra is “better, not bigger,” and they prioritize workforce development and contribute to the growth of the sustainable economy.



The green economy is committed to minimizing environmental risks and promoting sustainable growth by advancing industries that reduce carbon footprints, such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, green building practices, and waste management. This economy emphasizes job creation and economic opportunities in environmentally-sustainable sectors, making it crucial for combating climate change and driving long-term environmental stewardship.

The NYC Green Economy initiative aims to accelerate job creation and economic growth in sustainable industries. It supports workforce development through training programs and partnerships, improving environmental outcomes while creating employment opportunities with high economic mobility for underserved communities. Programs like NYC CoolRoofs and Cool Corridors help train workforces, some of which otherwise face significant barriers to gainful employment, all while minimizing the city’s ecological footprint.

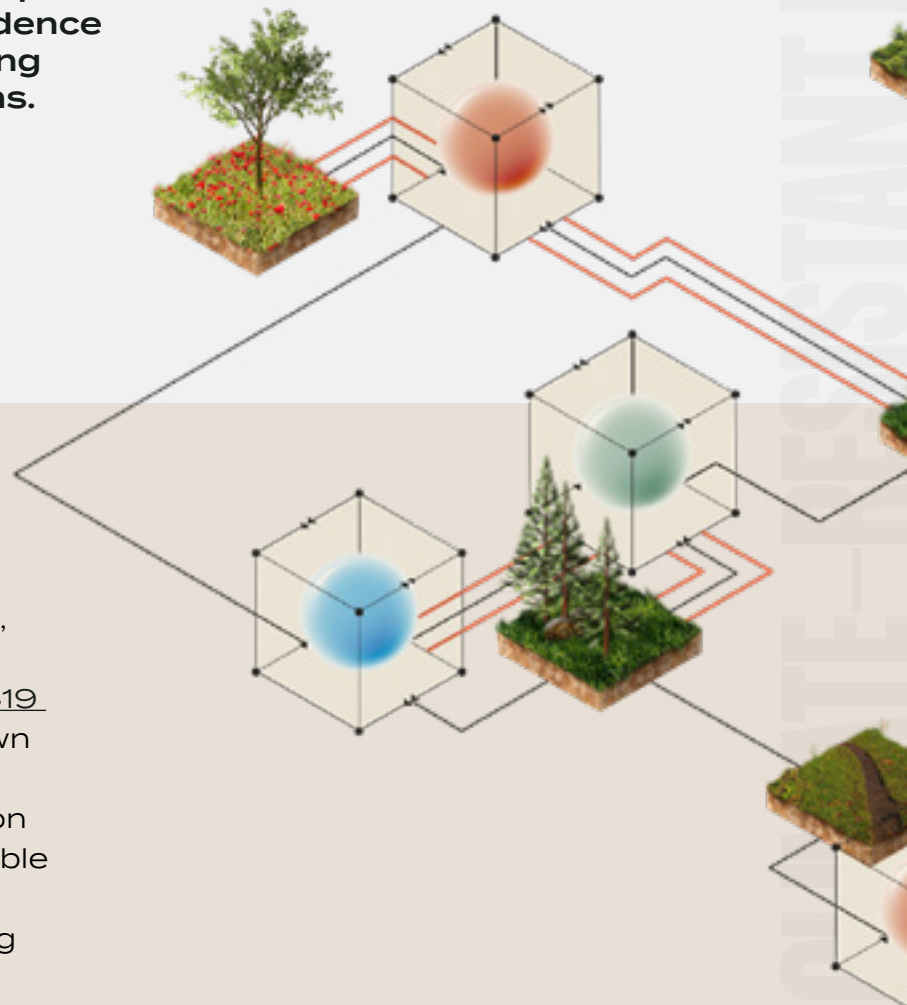
TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Launch green job training programs through the city’s Green Economy initiative**, which supports workforce development in sectors with a focus on sustainability and environmental responsibility.
- **Engage with local nonprofits and educational institutions** to offer training opportunities for underserved communities, ensuring equitable access to green jobs.

BUILD CLIMATE-RESISTANT INFRASTRUCTURE

Location-centered approaches prioritize sustainable geographic economies where local resources and participation drive growth, minimizing dependence on distant markets while fostering interconnected, resilient systems.

Flooding in New York City poses a growing threat due to rising sea levels, more frequent severe storms, and aging infrastructure. Events like Hurricane Sandy—which cost NYC \$19 billion—and Hurricane Ida have shown the devastating impacts of coastal storm surges and torrential rainfall on property, infrastructure, and vulnerable communities. Beyond extreme weather, chronic tidal flooding during high tides is becoming a persistent issue for shoreline communities, highlighting the urgent need to bolster flood resilience citywide.



To address these challenges, NYC has implemented a comprehensive flood resilience strategy. Key measures include creating a new leadership structure under the [Department of Environmental Protection](#) to oversee coastal and stormwater flood management, developing minimum resilience standards for shoreline assets by 2026, and collaborating with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on neighborhood-scale coastal protection projects. Additionally, the city introduced a stormwater flooding adaptation plan in 2024, expanding nature-based solutions like rain gardens, bluebelts, green streets, and wetlands. It's also focusing on infrastructure upgrades to safeguard both coastal and inland communities.

TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Integrate the [NYC Climate Resiliency Design Guidelines](#)** into development projects by aligning building and infrastructure designs with climate resilience strategies such as flood management.
- **Install green infrastructure such as rain gardens, green roofs, or permeable pavement** to manage stormwater and reduce flooding risks. [DEP's Green Infrastructure program](#) has numerous examples of successful installations across the city, and businesses can receive financial support to incorporate stormwater management features on their properties through its [grant program](#).
- **Contribute to local adaptation plans**, such as the [NYC Stormwater Resiliency Plan](#), by providing input or aligning business goals with city-wide strategies.



DEGROWTH-CENTERED ACTION

PROMOTE RESOURCE EFFICIENCY AND WASTE REDUCTION

Degrowth-centered actions and brands adopt methods that prioritize the careful stewardship of resources, reducing waste and avoiding unnecessary extraction.



Of the 24 million pounds of waste collected by the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) every day, 76% could be recycled, composted, or otherwise diverted away from landfills. A circular economy aims to replace the traditional one-way flow of materials (production to waste) with a system focused on reuse, extended product lifespans, and resource recirculation. This approach reduces landfill dependency, conserves resources, and mitigates greenhouse gas emissions. In urban settings like NYC, circular systems

can foster economic growth by creating local manufacturing jobs and reducing waste-export costs. By recovering materials such as organics, textiles, and construction debris, cities can transform waste into assets, contributing to sustainability and resilience against environmental challenges.

The city is home to the only urban paper recycling mill in the country.

New York City is advancing a circular economy, beginning with organics and infrastructure upgrades. The city is home to [the only urban paper recycling mill](#) in the country, which recycles nearly 400,000 tons of paper into new cardboard boxes each year. In 2024, NYC launched [a curbside organics collection program](#) in partnership with the Department of Sanitation to divert food scraps and yard waste from landfills to local processing facilities. These organics are [converted into compost and biogas](#) through co-digestion at wastewater facilities. The city has also implemented [Smart Composting Bins](#) for easy food scrap drop-off and expanded commercial organics separation requirements for food-related businesses.



TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Adopt circular economy principles by participating in the citywide curbside organics collection program.** Leveraging NYC’s existing infrastructure means contributing to a closed-loop system that processes organic material locally, creating renewable energy and compost while reducing landfill impact.
- **Partner with licensed haulers**—certified waste management companies authorized to handle and dispose of waste in an environmentally-responsible manner—and explore innovations to reduce waste.
- **Engage with [Made in NYC](#)**, a nonprofit that supports over 1,500 NYC-based manufacturers to foster a sustainable and environmentally-conscious economy. Made in NYC helps businesses minimize waste by recycling and reusing materials, keeping items like cardboard, wood, and metals out of landfills. It also empowers small businesses with free resources, training, and marketing opportunities to thrive locally.

COMPASS-CENTERED ACTION

ALIGN WITH LONG-TERM CLIMATE GOALS

Compass-centered actions and brands prioritize expansion that aligns with their ethical impact, driven by the belief that “values drive value.”

New York City’s long-term climate goals include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, [transitioning to clean energy](#), managing stormwater, and fostering equity in climate initiatives. The city envisions leveraging its physical assets—such as rooftops—to support renewable energy and climate infrastructure while advocating for zoning reforms and funding mechanisms to accelerate these transitions citywide.

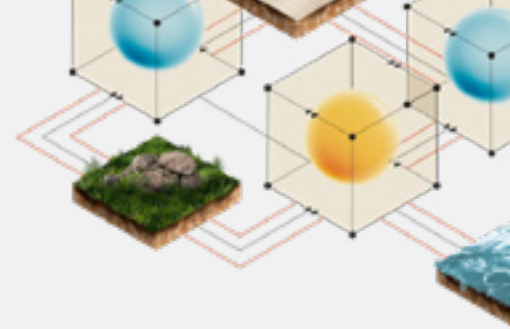
To meet some of these goals, NYC implemented Local Laws 92 and 94 in 2019, mandating sustainable roofing systems like solar panels and green roofs on new and renovated buildings. The city also plans to install solar energy and other renewable technologies on all viable city-owned properties by 2035, prioritizing installation in environmental justice communities. Programs like [Public Solar](#) aim to assist low-income homeowners who’ve historically been excluded from the clean energy economy in adopting solar solutions, while zoning updates and funding opportunities, such as those from the [Inflation Reduction Act](#), enhance accessibility to clean energy infrastructure.

TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Install solar panels to align with the city’s sustainability goals and support emissions reductions.** Businesses can take advantage of tax incentives like the [Solar Electric Generating Systems Tax Abatement](#) and leverage funding opportunities to reduce installation costs.
- **Partner with the [NYC Mayor’s Office of Climate & Environmental Justice](#)**, which has a goal of [installing 1,000 MW of solar power citywide by 2030](#), and at least 100 MW on city-owned buildings by 2025.
- **Participate in renewable energy programs like [ElectrifyNYC](#)**, which works with Minority- and Women-Owned Businesses (MWBES) to foster green job opportunities and promote equitable economic development. Services include tailored energy solutions and guidance to replace fossil fuel-based systems with electric alternatives for heating and cooling.



REDUCE AIR POLLUTION TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH



A systems-centered brand focuses on systems-driven execution, fostering innovation and mutual growth by leveraging an ecosystems mindset. These brands empower other businesses to thrive through tools and partnerships that promote mutualism and sustainable scalability.

New York City is grappling with the interconnected challenges of climate change and air pollution, both of which significantly impact public health. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) remains a critical issue. PM2.5, the most harmful air pollutant, has no safe exposure level and continues to pose health risks, particularly in low-income and environmental justice communities where rates of asthma, respiratory disease, and cardiovascular issues are disproportionately high. Indoor air pollution, exacerbated by gas stoves and substandard housing conditions, adds to these challenges.

To mitigate these health risks, the city has implemented multiple strategies targeting key sources of pollution. It has mandated the retrofitting of charbroilers in commercial kitchens—one of the largest contributors to PM2.5 emissions—with technology designed to cut these emissions by 75% by 2027. Additionally, the city is planning a [Restaurant Accelerator Program](#) to support businesses with compliance through grants, technical assistance, and needs assessments.

TACTICAL ACTION ITEMS

- **Retrofit commercial kitchen equipment to reduce emissions.** Charbroilers in particular must be outfitted with emission control devices to comply with upcoming regulations.
- **Engage with the city's [environmental justice monitoring sites](#).** NYC has expanded monitoring in low-income neighborhoods and areas with higher air pollution to address equity issues. Businesses in these areas can collaborate to improve local conditions or contribute to community-focused environmental efforts.
- **Participate in initiatives like the [Restaurant Accelerator Program](#)** to align with the city's air pollution plans and make commercial cooking infrastructure more sustainable.



CULTURE-CENTERED ACTION

ENGAGE EMPLOYEES AND COMMUNITIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

Culture-centered brands foster workplace cultures that prioritize environmental and social equity. They improve companies by improving people.

To align with PlaNYC’s sustainability plan, NYC businesses can actively engage their employees and foster community-driven climate resilience efforts in several ways:



Environmental justice education. Businesses can organize workshops, training sessions, and speaker events focused on environmental justice topics. These should cover how climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities and the importance of equitable solutions. Partnering with local organizations such as [WE ACT for Environmental Justice](#) or the [NYC Environmental Justice Alliance](#) can provide expertise and credibility.



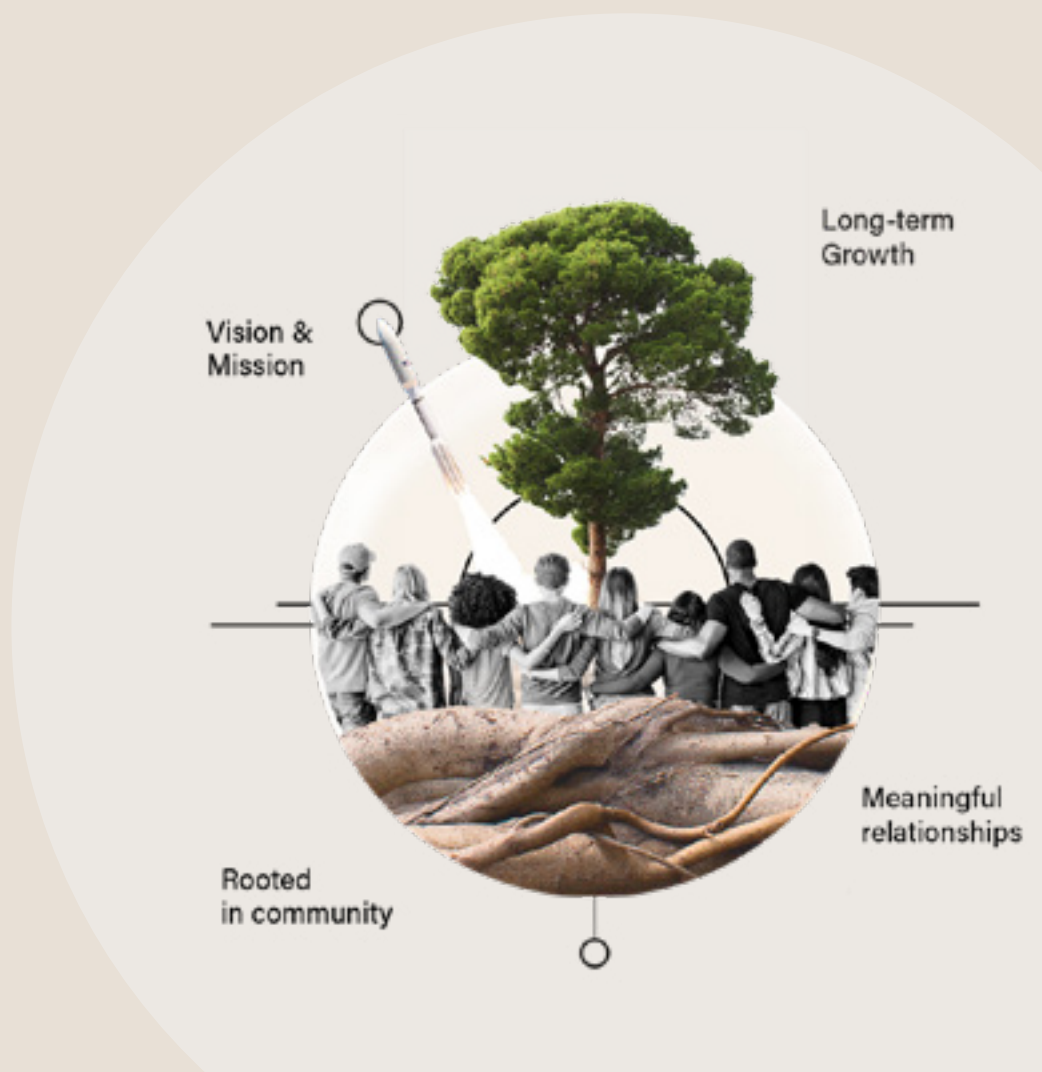
Employee-led initiatives. Encouraging employees to participate in volunteer programs focused on community-driven climate resilience projects is another impactful approach. Activities like urban greening, installing cooling centers in vulnerable neighborhoods, or supporting community gardens can build climate adaptation capacity while fostering employee engagement. Offering paid volunteer days can further motivate participation.



Support for community-led projects. Businesses can invest in or sponsor local projects aimed at improving climate resilience, such as upgrading green infrastructure, enhancing flood protection, or providing resources for energy-efficient retrofitting in underserved communities. They can also collaborate with city agencies to support initiatives like PlaNYC's climate adaptation strategies, focusing on neighborhoods most at risk from extreme weather and heat.

Through education, direct involvement, and support for localized efforts, NYC businesses can contribute meaningfully to environmental justice and climate resilience while fostering a culture of sustainability and equity among employees.

The successful implementation of New York City's climate action plan hinges on collaboration between businesses, residents, and policymakers. By embracing these recommendations, businesses can lead the charge in fostering a resilient, sustainable city for generations to come.





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