

# Coordinating EBCE Local Development Actions: City Staff Perspectives

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## City Climate Action Plans

All the cities in EBCE territory have Climate Action Plans (CAPs). Some of the cities are on their second or even third version of those plans.<sup>1</sup>

When I applied to the CAC I indicated I would like to help EBCE work with the cities to implement their Climate Action plans. I thought it was important to review how EBCE is coordinating local development actions with the CAPs of the cities in Alameda County .

While many of the action items in the city CAPs deal with issues not directly related to energy, such as sea-level rise, solid waste management, wildfire prevention, etc, several of the common action items are directly related to programs EBCE is currently conducting or considering developing.

Some examples of action items common to many cities related that are related to current or future EBCE programs are:

- cleaner electricity<sup>2</sup>
- electrify municipal buildings
- electrify city fleets
- electrify private buildings
- electric private vehicles and promote active transportation
- develop local resiliency centers, (critical municipal facilities)

## How is EBCE helping the cities?

The intent of this report is to improve coordination of EBCE local development programs with the staff of member cities who help implement these programs. This report is not intended to address how EBCE interacts with residents in its territory.

Although different EBCE programs were mentioned in these conversations, we did not discuss any of these programs in detail. I was trying to understand the perspectives and general experience of the city staff who work with EBCE to implement programs that support their cities CAPs.

## Method

I had direct communication with city “sustainability” staff. That is I attempted to reach the staff at each city who are responsible for implementing the action items of their city’s CAP. The communications were loosely structured interviews. After introducing myself and what I was trying to do, I would ask about what their city was doing regarding the energy-related action items in their CAP. After that I would ask about which EBCE programs they were working with and their experiences with implementing those programs. I also asked about their interactions with EBCE in general. Finally I asked if they had any other recommendations or anything else they would like me to report back to EBCE. I let them know as a CAC member I had no direct control of EBCE actions.

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1 When I refer to “city” in this report I mean not only the cities that make up EBCE, but the County of Alameda as well.

2 Many cities have adopted to default to EBCE’s Renewable 100 electricity, as one of their first climate action plans.

Over the course of the slightly more than a year and a half since I began this project I have spoken with the following people.

Matt Anderson (Emeryville), Megan Campbell (Pleasanton), Elizabeth Carrade (Albany), Karen Cook (Alameda County), Rachel DiFranco (Fremont), Soren Fajeau (Newark), Nicole Grucky (Hayward), Shayna Hirshfield-Gold (Oakland), Nancy Humphrey (Emeryville), Rebecca Miliken (Berkeley), Hoi-Fei Mok (San Leandro), Erik Pearson (Hayward), Billi Romain (Berkeley), Jim Scanlin (Newark), Jeffrey Wong (Oakland), and Shannan Young (Dublin)

I would like to thank all of them for their time and the thoughtfulness of the discussions we had.

Of the 16 member cities of EBCE, the only ones I have not yet spoken with staff are Piedmont, Tracy, Union City, Livermore and Stockton.

### **Key Findings**

All the city staff I spoke with appreciate EBCE. Many of them specifically stated that EBCE staff are responsive, helpful and willing to share their expertise. I heard several versions of “staff at EBCE are impressive”. While comparing working with EBCE instead of PG&E one person I spoke with said "getting a concussion is better than working with PG&E". Another said they were “thrilled to have EBCE as a partner”.

In these conversations it was clear that the EBCE cities are very diverse. This diversity includes the range of population size and number of city staff. The financial resources available to the cities varies even more than population size varies. One budget related finding that stood out for me is the importance of the timing of budget cycles to city programs. Given the lead times for cities to adopt a budget, it can be difficult for staff to include an EBCE program if they find out about it too late.

The cities’ CAPs had a wide range of climate adaptation ambitions and targeted actions. Some of this has to do with the age of existing building stock within the city and of the income levels of their residents. Some of this range is also due to political history and character of the different cities.

The city staff I spoke with participate in the monthly Municipal Alliance (MuniPALs) meetings. These are monthly meetings, hosted by EBCE with staff from cities working to implement EBCE programs. This is where most of them find out about EBCE programs their cities could participate in.

### **Reported Shortcomings**

One theme that I heard from nearly every city was the desire for a more collaborative planning process. Comments on this included:

- “big picture aligns, but actual roll-outs not co-designed”
- “sometimes not enough emphasis on working with cities to design programs”
- “EBCE doesn’t get enough input from cities early enough in design stage. Instead of creating programs with cities, are creating programs for cities”
- “meetings with EBCE are more of a download, would like a more open dialogue”
- “EBCE speed so fast cities feeling not quite listened to”
- “nice to have EBCE, would be better for more early collaboration”
- “some programs caught us by surprise, no chance for feedback”
- “hear about programs after they are fully baked”
- “more of a 1 way reporting out to cities”

“programs have been presented as take it or leave it.

Another common theme was EBCE programs are not as flexible as cities would like to see. This lack of program flexibility can unintentionally exclude some cities. Some comments I heard mentioning this included: “EBCE doesn't account for all the discrepancies between different municipalities”, “cities are different, [a program] doesn't work with every city”, “program offerings can be out of step with cities”, and “still kinks to work out to get services”.

Another repeated request was for a longer term perspective on what EBCE is planning for the next few years. One staffer asked what is the 5 year plan? Sustainability managers don't always have good connections to mayors and other city departments. Earlier notice about upcoming programs could help the staff anticipate deadlines which would allow them to align funding requests with city budget timelines.

Several staff commented they would like to see EBCE operate more like StopWaste.org. They felt StopWaste was better at involving cities in developing programs. The StopWaste programs were also designed with enough flexibility to be adopted by most cities.

Other issues that were brought up included: not seeing enough regional workforce development; would like more effort focused on building decarbonization and not so much on vehicle electrification; and a request to spend resources achieving cleaner electricity at cheaper rates.

A few of the city staff I spoke said they appreciated I was asking about their working relations with EBCE.

## **Recommendations**

After these discussions I recommend the following for EBCE:

1. Direct staff to seek input from cities during early program selection and planning stages,
2. Design programs to allow a wider range cities within EBCE territories to participate,
3. Prepare, and regularly, update a set of EBCE goals with input from city staff to inform long-term direction and strategy, as well as programmatic work and budget development, and
4. Initiate a regular process to get independent feedback from city staff who deal with EBCE on a regular basis.