



Challenge support cycle 2020 – City of Buffalo, USA

## An equity planning framework for developing Buffalo as a climate haven

Buffalo, New York, is strategically located at the junction of Lake Erie and the Niagara River along the US-Canadian border. With abundant access to water, a moderate to cold climate and a low risk to be affected by the worst impacts of climate change like sea level rise, heat waves or severe storm events, Buffalo has been rated [a safe destination for climate migration](#). Furthermore, having experienced deindustrialization and population decline, the city has vacant housing and large scale infrastructures to accommodate substantial numbers of new residents. Acknowledging the opportunity of these favorable conditions to revitalize the local economy, Buffalo's Mayor has recently [announced Buffalo as a climate refuge](#) and [invited migrants to the city](#).

In order to preserve these assets and prepare the city for upcoming developments, the city has identified three key priorities for action within their upcoming climate planning process: Firstly, environmental protection and climate mitigation efforts will be systematically maintained and strengthened to preserve Buffalo's natural resources. Secondly, climate adaptation measures will be developed and implemented. Even as a low-risk city, increasing temperatures and precipitation levels will impact residents and the local environment. Infrastructure like pipes and sewers need to be future-proofed, while green spaces and fresh-air corridors need to be protected to preserve the mild conditions in summer. Thirdly, a cross-cutting equity focus will be incorporated. Social inequality has been one of the main transition challenges in Buffalo. The upgrade of old buildings and aging infrastructure for current and new residents will require targeted investments, while neighborhood development is likely to aggravate trends of gentrification. The effects of increased in-migration due to the climate haven status, for different communities in particular and for social systems overall, will be assessed and addressed through equity components in sustainability initiatives.

### Urban Transitions Alliance Support

The Urban Transitions Alliance will support the city of Buffalo in developing a baseline understanding of how other cities are assessing the impacts of climate change to infrastructures and social systems; identifying methods for assessing areas of concern; and engaging stakeholders on project development and implementation. Through cross-regional exchange, planning frameworks and practices will be explored, drawing experiences from current climate planning processes in the Alliance cities of Dortmund and Turku. Pittsburgh's resilience strategy, built on the four core values of people, place, planet and performance, and Baltimore's equity-focused sustainability planning will provide additional insights on inclusive design.

Industrial decline left many legacy cities with vacant spaces and unused infrastructure. Buffalo is not alone in relying on these assets to attract new residents. Peer exchange will be beneficial to align with similar climate refuge considerations in Cincinnati.

### Key Questions

- What are key pillars to ensure a clean, healthy environment and an equitable provision of services in Buffalo?
- What stressors to services and infrastructure exist, and how will these be impacted by climate change?
- Throughout the climate planning process, how can the city of Buffalo prepare for climate related in-migration?

### Expected Outcomes

- Mapping of different layers of transition challenges and their interconnectedness;
- Support for the development of a climate planning framework based on good practices from peer Alliance cities;
- Recommendations for designing an inclusive stakeholder process with an equity focus;
- International positioning of Buffalo as a climate haven city through Alliance outreach channels.