



Executive Summary

In the Northeast, the impacts of a changing climate are clearly evident and well-documented. Leaders in the region recognize the need to be proactive in adapting to such changes, but do not yet have the resources and tools they require to do so successfully. This report presents a snapshot of the needs of local, regional and state governments in undertaking such climate preparedness efforts. The goal is to target assistance effectively, and to help our partners in this effort—policy-makers, NGOs and others—do the same.

The research was conducted in 2010 and early 2011 and involved extensive individual interviews as well as an online survey distributed to more than 200 communities. The responses, which were well distributed throughout the region, indicate the following:

Northeast communities are concerned about climate change impacts.

- Over half who responded are already doing some form of climate preparedness planning.
- Another third are concerned, but are unsure what steps to take or lack capacity.
- Sea-level rise, increased precipitation, floodplain changes, and public welfare and health are the impacts of greatest concern.

In order to progress, they need technical, communications, and financial assistance.

- The top “technical assistance” priority is help with infrastructure vulnerability assessments, with 33 percent of the respondents ranking it as their top technical need.
- Other high-priority technical needs include updated floodplain maps (19%) local climate/scientific data (15%) and help with creating adaptation plans (15%).
- The top “education and outreach” priority (25%) is “convincing the public that climate change is happening,” which is followed closely by “lack of national leadership and education awareness campaign” (19%).
- On a related note, many said they needed help making adaptation action a priority in their communities at a time of constrained human and financial resources.
- Communities need financial assistance and additional staff capacity: 77 percent noted that they don’t have the existing personnel or knowledge base to integrate climate preparedness across their departments, although they would like to.

Increased coordination, collaboration and resource sharing is a high priority.

- Representatives from government at every level identified a need to work across disciplines, agencies and organizations on this issue.
- Projects undertaken at a regional level—in a watershed or within the jurisdiction of a regional planning commission, for instance—are beginning to deliver tangible results and are benefiting from economies of scale.
- Climate adaptation-focused networks are rapidly developing within and between Northeast states. Their aim is to connect data “providers” with “consumers,” avoiding duplication of efforts and conducting knowledge transfer
- Partnerships with NGOs, universities and/or the private sector have been vital to the progress of many existing community climate preparedness efforts.