



Technical Advisory Council

Item 7: Vulnerable Communities Definition Modification

March 7, 2025

Introduction

In April of 2018, the TAC adopted the following definition of climate vulnerability to guide actions to advance equity:

Climate vulnerability describes the degree to which natural, built, and human systems are at risk of exposure to climate change impacts. Vulnerable communities experience heightened risk and increased sensitivity to climate change and have less capacity and fewer resources to cope with, adapt to, or recover from climate impacts. These disproportionate effects are caused by physical (built and environmental), social, political, and/ or economic factor(s), which are exacerbated by climate impacts. These factors include, but are not limited to, race, class, sexual orientation and identification, national origin, and income inequality.

In March of 2024, the TAC voted to amend the Vulnerable Communities definition to list disability as a factor that influences vulnerability.

While the Council's definition of "vulnerable communities" provides clarity on the underlying factors of community vulnerability, and how these are exacerbated by climate impacts, a definition alone may not provide the level of detail needed to take actionable steps within the context of climate adaptation plans and implementation actions. The California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, with input from the ICARP Technical Advisory Council, developed this [resource guide](#) in 2018 as a starting point for practitioners to use when first considering how to define vulnerable communities in an adaptation context.

Definition Modification Proposal

At the March 2024 TAC meeting, the Council brought to staff attention that gender is not explicitly identified as a factor that can result in disproportionate impact from climate change. TAC members have shown continued interest in adding gender and specifying gender identification to the definition since then. Studies have shown that women, transgender people, and people outside of the gender binary are uniquely vulnerable to climate change. Gendered economic inequality and women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving contribute heavily to these vulnerabilities. LGBTQ+ people face health, social, and economic disparities leading to a greater risk of harm from climate change, and the current definition of vulnerable communities only calls out sexual orientation and

identification without naming gender. Several Councilmembers recommended that staff make a modification to the vulnerable communities definition to include gender and gender identification.

New Definition

Staff propose the following modified definition (as indicated with the bolded text) of vulnerable communities for adoption by the TAC to address this concern:

*Climate vulnerability describes the degree to which natural, built, and human systems are at risk of exposure to climate change impacts. Vulnerable communities experience heightened risk and increased sensitivity to climate change and have less capacity and fewer resources to cope with, adapt to, or recover from climate impacts. These disproportionate effects are caused by physical (built and environmental), social, political, and/ or economic factor(s), which are exacerbated by climate impacts. These factors include, but are not limited to, race, class, sexual orientation, **gender, gender identification**, national origin, income inequality, disability.*

Action

Vote to amend the Vulnerable Communities definition to list gender and gender identification as factors that influence vulnerability.