

## WHAT DOES CLIMATE EQUITY MEAN FOR SAN ANTONIO?



Equity means that our policy-making, service delivery, and distribution of resources account for the different

histories, challenges, and needs of the people we serve. Equity differs from equality, which treats everyone the same despite disparate outcomes. (City of San Antonio, Equity Office, 2017)

Due to these different histories and challenges, in the City of San Antonio, not all community members are contributing equally to climate change, and not all community members have the same resources or capabilities to protect themselves from its negative effects. A climate equity framework prioritizes the communities burdened the most by climate change, those that contribute the least to climate change, and those that are socially vulnerable to climate change. Climate equity ensures that these communities play a central role in the just transformation of the systems that have established, and continue to perpetuate, the unequal burden of climate impacts. This means that intentional policies and projects to mitigate or adapt to climate change must:

- 1 Actively seek, include, and prioritize direction from these communities,
- 2 Prioritize benefit to these communities
- 3 Reduce existing burdens and bar additional burdens to these communities

*Developed by the Climate Equity Technical Working Group. The definition will be updated as continued climate equity discussions occur through plan implementation.*



## GROUNDING THE RESPONSE: CLIMATE EQUITY

Climate change affects everyone, but not all people are impacted equally. Across the world and right here in San Antonio, people who are already socially vulnerable (communities of color and low-income communities, in particular) are less able to adapt to climate impacts and to prioritize climate action. That is why equity is at the heart of our CAAP: we aim to ensure San Antonio's most vulnerable communities are meaningfully engaged in climate planning and implementation, and policymakers have the tools needed to prioritize equitable outcomes in CAAP-related decision-making.

### RECOGNIZING HISTORY TO SOLVE FOR THE FUTURE

An equitable approach to climate action requires an understanding of the historical legacies, structures, and policies that have resulted in and continue to perpetuate racial and economic inequities in San Antonio. Just as government plays a key role in addressing local climate action, so too does it bear some of the responsibility for driving systemic change to eliminate the inequities resulting in certain communities being disproportionately impacted by climate change.

In San Antonio, communities of color and low-income populations have experienced the greatest burdens due to inequities in housing, health, education, criminal justice, jobs, and other quality of life outcomes.

These inequities are the direct result of decades of discriminatory policies by local, state, and federal government agencies. Segregationist practices and policies, such as redlining and segregated public housing, isolated low-income communities of color from wealthier white communities, which set the foundation for San Antonio to become one of the most economically segregated cities in the country.<sup>8,9</sup> Housing discrimination, neglected infrastructure, and a lack of investment in public amenities, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, are just a few examples of the structural and institutional forms of racism contributing to the inequities existing between racial groups in San Antonio.

Structural inequities also hinder a community's ability to adapt to a changing climate. Higher temperatures may force low-income families to choose between turning on the AC or paying for food, medicine, and other basic necessities. Homeless individuals may not have access to water or shelter needed to avoid heat-related health impacts. People with disabilities are disproportionately burdened during floods or wildfires because emergency response plans and infrastructure may not be designed with them in mind.

Extreme weather and climate events will exacerbate the current challenges facing vulnerable groups in San Antonio, making climate equity all the more critical in the development and implementation of the CAAP.



**THE VISION: DEFINING CLIMATE EQUITY**

SA Climate Ready is part of bigger shift towards normalizing and institutionalizing equity within our city government. The City's Office of Equity is working across departments to identify opportunities to increase equity in city services, programs, and policies. The CAAP's climate equity approach will guide the city's consideration of equity in its climate policies and programs to achieve more environmentally and economically just outcomes for San Antonians.

**OPERATIONALIZING EQUITY IN THE CAAP: THE CLIMATE EQUITY SCREENING MECHANISM**

One of the key tools developed as part of the CAAP is the Climate Equity Screening Mechanism. The Climate Equity Screening Mechanism was designed as a framework for the intentional consideration of equity issues in the implementation of CAAP strategies, i.e. policies, programs, and budget decisions. It is intended as a practical tool for applying an equity lens to all actions related to climate mitigation and adaptation.

The full Screening Mechanism (included as Appendix III), which will be continually refined and tested to ensure clear equity gains, is centered around five climate equity themes:

- 1. Access and Accessibility** Increased access to jobs, housing, transportation, funding, education, healthy foods, and clean air for vulnerable populations.
- 2. Affordability** Lower / more predictable costs related to basic living needs (e.g. housing, food, utilities, healthcare, transportation, etc.) for vulnerable populations.
- 3. Cultural Preservation** Respecting and honoring cultural relevance and history.

- 4. Health** Increased health (physical and mental) for vulnerable populations.
- 5. Safety and Security** Mitigation of potential threats and increased access to critical lifelines when (or before) threats are experienced.

Each of these themes is associated with a list of diagnostic questions to assess the potential positive or negative impacts of a proposed strategy, action, or program. For example, under the theme of affordability a question that will be considered through the Equity Screening Mechanism is: "Could this reduce the number of families that are cost burdened by housing + transportation (defined as spending more than 33% of income on H+T)?" The purpose of the Climate Equity Screening mechanism is to ensure that the climate equity implications are considered in every decision made in the implementation of the CAAP both in terms of potential benefits and unintended consequences.

**SAN ANTONIO'S COMMITMENT TO CLIMATE EQUITY**

The City of San Antonio was committed to prioritizing climate equity in the development and in the implementation of climate action and adaptation strategies. Working with key community equity stakeholders and prior to implementation, each of the strategies outlined in the CAAP will be evaluated using the Climate Equity Screening Mechanism, which will allow the city to identify and mitigate potential equity impacts, reduce existing inequities and identify opportunities to improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups. Applying an equity lens to the implementation of the CAAP will ensure that the different experiences and perspectives of the San Antonians whose lives will be most impacted by climate change guide the city's decision-making around climate action and adaptation.



**“Water should be free. I just want to stay cool.”**

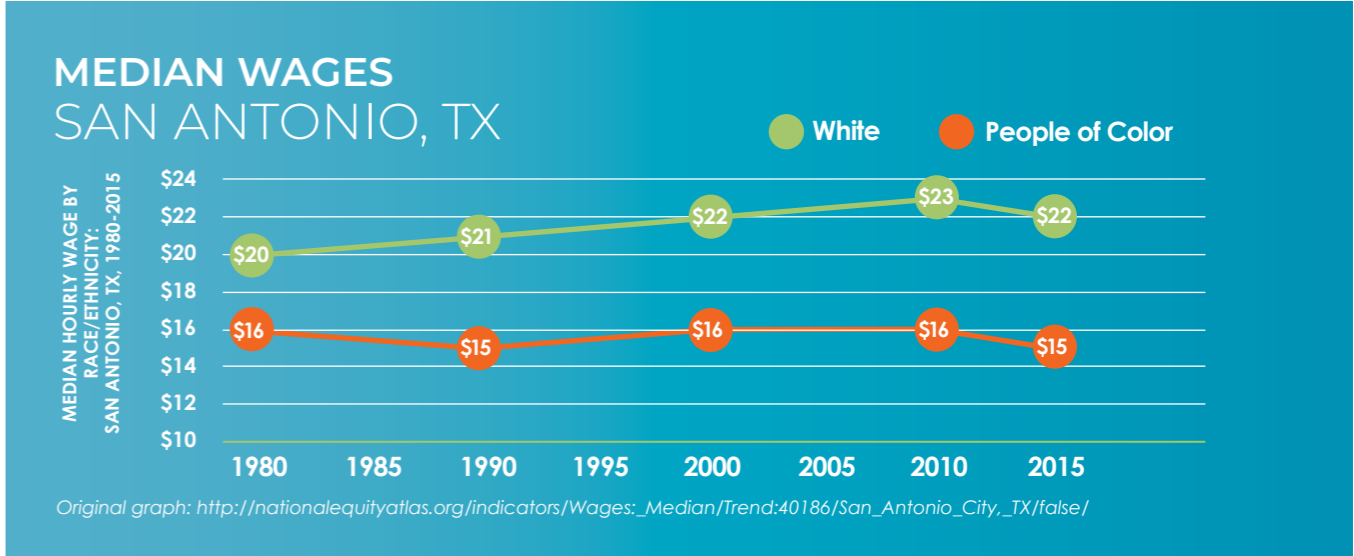
— Homeless gentleman discussing access to water fountains and shelter during heatwaves  
Bazan Branch Library (August 2018)





### SAN ANTONIO: EXAMPLES OF ECONOMIC INEQUITIES

The extent to which vulnerable populations face hardships resulting from historical inequities is not always top of mind. The following charts, from the National Equity Atlas,<sup>10</sup> serve as a reminder of the economic inequities experienced in San Antonio.



**Median Wages** Equitable wages would reflect differences in education, training, and experience but would not vary systematically by race. In 2015, San Antonio had a significant difference in median wages, with workers of color earning \$7 less than the median hourly wage for White workers.

“No se si la casa esta segura para vivir pero pues que le hago?”

“I’m not sure if my home is [structurally] safe to live in but what can I do?”

— Community resident sharing concerns for her home and limited resources to repair.

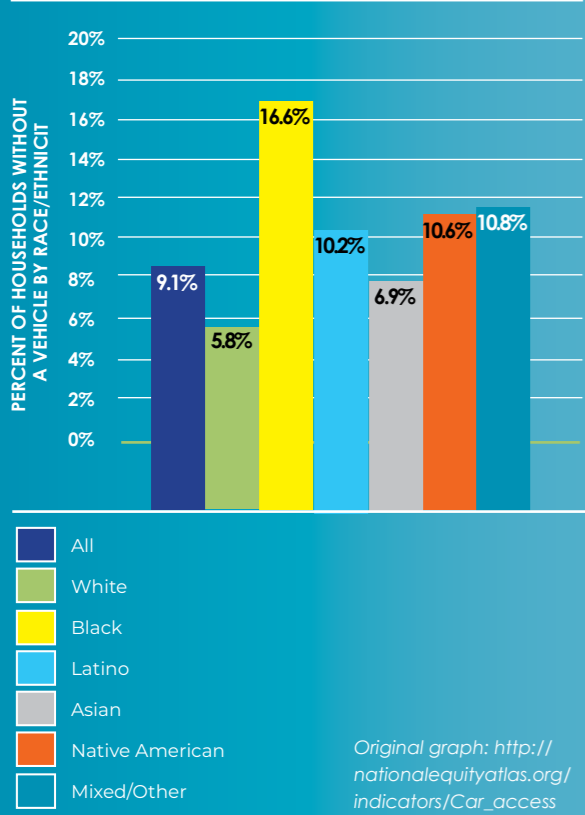
Las Palmas Branch Library (September 2018)





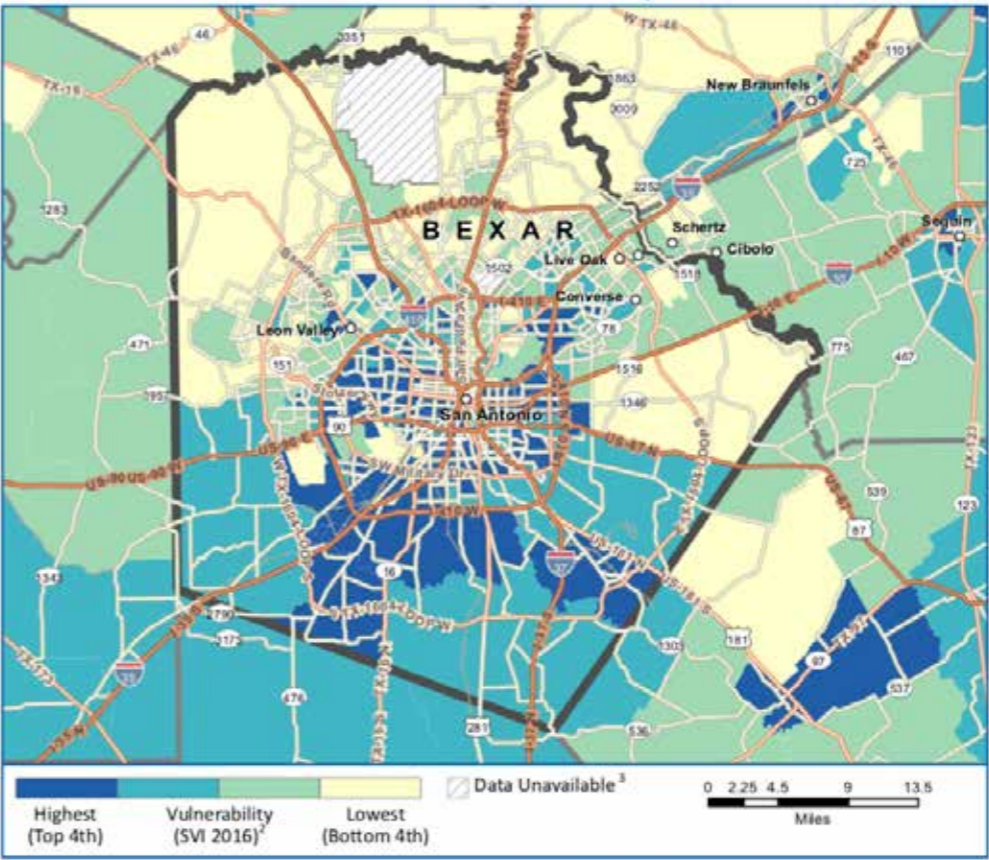
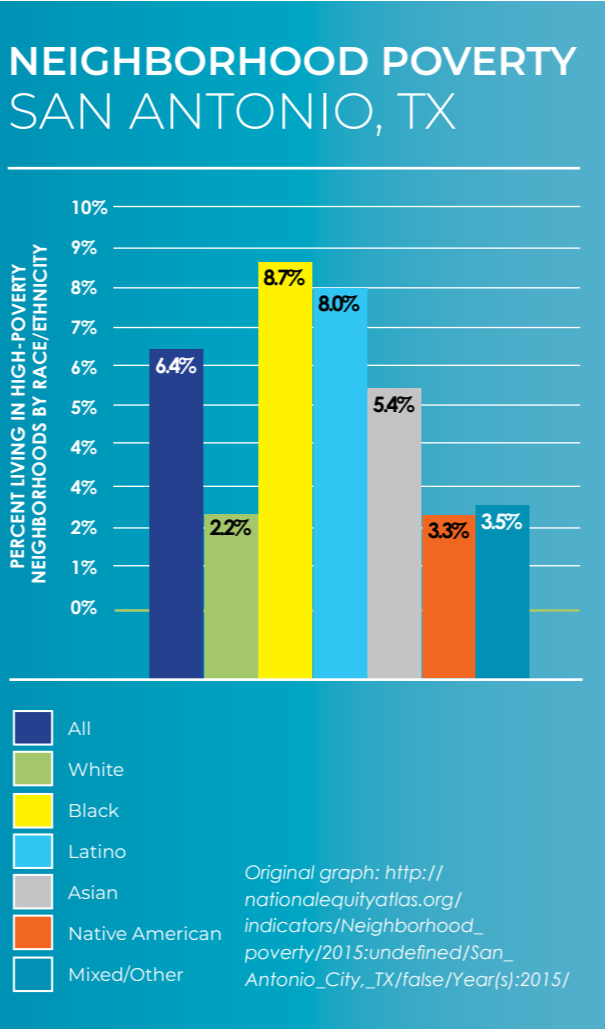


### CAR ACCESS SAN ANTONIO, TX



**Car Access** “Reliable and affordable transportation is critical for meeting daily needs and accessing educational and employment opportunities.”<sup>11</sup> In 2015, fewer than 6% of White households did not have access to a car, while more than 10% of Latino households and more than 16% of Black households lacked access to a car.

**Neighborhood Poverty** “People who live in high-poverty neighborhoods have less access to jobs, services, high-quality education, parks, safe streets, and other essential ingredients of economic and social success that are the backbone of strong economies.”<sup>12</sup> In 2015, San Antonio’s White population had the lowest concentration of people living in high poverty neighborhoods, while both the Black and Latino populations had over 8% of their populations living in high poverty neighborhoods.



Original graph: [https://svi.cdc.gov/Documents/CountyMaps/2016/Texas/Texas2016\\_Bexar.pdf](https://svi.cdc.gov/Documents/CountyMaps/2016/Texas/Texas2016_Bexar.pdf)

### SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention uses a tool known as the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) to identify communities most likely to need support before, during, and after a disaster or extreme event. The SVI utilizes 15 indicators from U.S. Census data to determine social vulnerability at the census tract level. The indicators are categorized into the following themes:

**Socioeconomic status:**

Poverty, unemployment, income, and education levels.

**Race/ethnicity/language:**

People of color and limited English proficient speakers.

**Household composition:**

Elderly, children, disabled, and single-parent households.

**Housing/transportation:**

Mobile homes, large multifamily buildings, group quarters, crowded households, and households without a vehicle.