New York State
Climate Smart Communities

Climate Smart Communities Certification Manual Version 2.0

Climate Smart Communities is a program of the New York State departments of Environmental Conservation, Health, State and Transportation; State Public Service Commission; and State Energy Research and Development Authority.

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Acknowledgments

The launch of the New York State Climate Smart Communities Certification program adds a new dimension to New York State's efforts to provide support, technical assistance and leadership to the state's local governments as they undertake efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. This Certification Manual describes the actions Climate Smart Communities can take, the standards they must meet and procedures for submitting documentation for credit toward certification and the bronze, silver and gold award levels.

The Climate Smart Communities program was originally launched in February 2009 by the state departments of Environmental Conservation and State, Energy Research and Development Authority, and Public Service Commission. The state departments of Health and Transportation subsequently joined as participating agencies. Since that original launch, more than 126 counties, cities, towns and villages have committed to local climate action by taking the Climate Smart Community pledge. Through the launch of the certification program and release of this Certification Manual, the Climate Smart Communities agencies hope to provide a more structured framework of local action and a means to recognize the efforts of those communities that are leading the way in confronting the challenges of climate change.

City of Watervliet, *Michael Manning,* Mayor

Mark Lowery
Climate Planning Analyst
Office of Climate Change
New York State
Department of Environmental Conservation

Climate Smart Communities Certification Program

Certification Manual

INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

New York State established the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Program in 2009 to provide local governments with guidance on how to reduce GHG emissions, save taxpayer dollars, and advance community goals for health and safety, economic vitality, energy independence, and quality of life. The program is free and open to all local governments in New York State. The Climate Smart Communities Program is jointly sponsored by six New York State agencies: the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of State (DOS), and the Public Service Commission (PSC).

The New York State Climate Smart Communities Certification program represents the next phase in development of the CSC Program. Development of the CSC Certification Program began in 2013 with funding from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund through the DEC Hudson River Estuary Program and in cooperation with the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission. The intent of the CSC Certification Program is to further engage New York State local governments in the CSC Program, to provide a more robust framework to guide local governments in their climate action efforts, and to recognize their achievements as they make progress.

Any local government whose legislative body adopts the Climate Smart Community Pledge is designated a Climate Smart Community. The certification program described in this manual provides information on a number of climate mitigation and adaptation actions. Communities can be awarded a specified number of points toward certification and the higher levels of bronze, silver and gold for each action they complete. In addition to accumulating a minimum number of points for to achieve each level of recognition, each community must complete a number of "priority" actions. This manual describes each action, the number of points that may be earned, minimum requirements and the documentation that must be submitted to earn points.

PROGRAM GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PRINCIPLES

New York State developed the CSC Certification Program with the primary goal of providing a more structured framework and guidance for local governments to advance their local climate action through the existing CSC Pledge. This certification is based entirely on the existing CSC pledge elements. Participation in CSC and the CSC Certification Program is voluntary. The CSC Certification Program is designed to encourage ongoing implementation of actions related to climate action mitigation of

climate change through reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to effects of climate change, and to recognize achievements of local governments in every phase of the program.

The following design guidelines were used to develop the rating system:

- **Broadly Applicable**: The program is designed to be applicable and useful to all local governments in New York State.

- **User Friendly**: The program has an easy to navigate menu-based system, which allows local governments to select actions that are most appropriate to their local needs.

- **Acknowledges Early Adopters**: Jurisdictions can earn points for actions implemented before the release of the rating system.

- **Promotes Ongoing Action**: The framework and overall program are designed to drive ongoing action toward achieving goals.

- **Rewards Leaders**: Bonus points can be awarded for local governments that demonstrate performance improvements or innovative strategies.

The actions within the CSC Certification Program are organized based on an action pathway (see figure below). The five action pathway phases of the CSC process are designed to guide continual progress toward achieving climate action goals. The first phase of the process (Commit) is a local government's entryway into CSC Program. The last phase (Monitor & Report) is the public communication and recognition of a local government's efforts through achievement of a level of CSC certification. The three steps between are the foundation for the certification program. These are described below:

- **Commit:** Make a commitment to reduce GHG emissions and adapt to climate change. Adopting the CSC Pledge demonstrates this commitment.

- **Assess, Plan and Govern**: Assess baseline conditions, establish goals, and develop plans and policies to achieve those goals.

- **Build Capacity**: Identify or hire a party to be responsible for the ongoing implementation and reporting of actions. Collaborate with key stakeholders to achieve goals. Educate staff and stakeholders on the value of these efforts.

- **Implement**: Apply resources and leverage tools to implement initiatives to achieve goals.

- **Monitor and Report**: Track, through various metrics, the progress of an action and publicly report the results. Celebrate important successes, and notify and engage the public.

CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORK: 10 CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES PLEDGE ELEMENTS

The CSC Certification framework has been organized around the ten pledge elements in the Climate Smart Communities Pledge. Local governments that have signed the pledge have made a commitment to addressing these ten areas, and many are already implementing actions in the certification program. The descriptions of the ten pledge elements have been modified from the original version of the pledge to be consistent with the scope and goals of the certification program.

1. **Pledge to be a Climate Smart Community.** Adopt the pledge to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapt to a changing climate. Designate a point person and a Climate Smart

Communities task force. Join a regional or national climate campaign focused on reducing GHG emissions or enhancing sustainability[1].

2. **Set goals, inventory emissions, plan for climate action.** Gather data about local GHG emission sources. Develop baseline emissions inventories for government operations and the community. Establish quantifiable GHG emissions reduction targets. Propose an emission reduction schedule and financing strategy. Develop a local action plan for reducing emissions.

3. **Decrease community energy use.** Adopt specific energy-reduction goals. Take action to reduce energy demand in existing public facilities, infrastructure, and vehicle fleet, and to maximize energy efficiency. Implement policies and programs to reduce community energy demand through energy conservation and efficiency improvements. Reduce waste and increase recycling in government operations. Encourage and support action by local government employees to meet energy use reduction goals.

4. **Increase community use of renewable energy.** Set a goal to maximize the use of renewable energy in municipal operations and the community. Implement renewable energy projects such as solar, wind, geothermal, or small hydro. Implement policies and programs to encourage community use of renewable energy sources.

5. **Realize benefits of recycling and other climate-smart solid waste management practices.** Encourage and support waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting of materials community wide. Offer recycling and composting programs, household hazardous waste collections, and waste diversion opportunities that focus on reducing and reusing materials.

6. **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through use of climate-smart land-use tools.** Minimize the GHG impact of new development. Update or adopt community plans, land-use policies, building codes, and multi-modal transportation actions to limit sprawl, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and protect open lands, wetlands, and forests.

7. **Enhance community resilience and prepare for the effects of climate change.** Establish a climate resiliency vision and associated goals, identify vulnerabilities to climate change effects for both government operations and the community, and develop and implement strategies to address those vulnerabilities and increase overall community resilience.

8. **Support development of a green innovation economy.** Lead and support the transition to a green economy by incorporating climate action and sustainability into economic development plans. Create demand and offer incentives and support for local green industries and green jobs training.

9. **Inform and inspire the public.** Lead by example. Host events; organize campaigns, and support websites and social media outlets that publicize local government commitment to reducing energy use; saving tax dollars; reducing, reusing, and recycling materials; and adapting to a changing climate. Encourage citizens to follow suit.

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[1] The definition of sustainability is an active topic of debate. For purposes of the CSC Certification Program, this manual will use the term in the sense of the definition of sustainable development provided by the Brundtland Commission: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."
http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm

10. **Commit to an evolving process of climate action.** Monitor and report on progress toward achieving goals. Be willing to consider new ideas and adjust existing approaches. Ensure strategies and plans are up to date. Compare successes and cooperate with neighboring communities. Maintain involvement of stakeholders.

The majority of the points in the rating system can be earned through the actions associated with the ten pledge elements. However, the system has been designed to encourage and reward local governments that have implemented innovative actions and can demonstrate achieved GHG emissions reductions and other performance metrics. Thus, CSCs can earn bonus points by demonstrating innovation or achieved performance.

- **Innovation Bonus Points.** Earn additional points for using innovative strategies for the implementation of climate action actions. CSCs achieve this by implementing advanced actions not included in the rating system or using an innovative approach to implementing an action in the rating system. Innovation bonus points will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

- **Performance Bonus Points.** Earn additional points for demonstrating actual reductions in energy use and GHG emissions resulting from the implementation of specific actions. This will require CSCs to provide actual energy use or other relevant data with before and after details to confirm achievement.

ACTION TYPES AND POINTS

The actions in the CSC Certification Program are organized according to the ten CSC pledge elements and further classified by the type of action as indicated in Table 1. A menu of potential actions that a local government can implement to reduce GHG emissions or adapt to a changing climate is associated with each pledge element. This allows local governments to select and earn points for the most applicable actions, without requiring a large number of strict preliminary steps or prerequisites. The menu-based rating system includes a variety of action types that allow local governments to easily match the actions they have taken with those in the certification program. Local governments are not required to proceed through the actions in order; they may select the actions that are most relevant to their particular circumstances.

The rating system includes a variety of actions that can have an effect on reducing GHG emissions, enhancing local resilience, or building a green economy. Based on the following criteria, points were assigned to each action using a consistent methodology:

- **Program Priority**. Priority actions for this program have been identified and are weighted most heavily.

- **Duration.** For how long will the action have an effect, short-term (1-5 years), medium-term (6-10 years), or long-term (over 10 years)?

- **Impact**. What is the possible effect of the action in terms of GHG reductions, climate resiliency, or building a green economy?

- **Certainty**. How certain is it that the action will have an impact? Does the action require some management, enforcement, or program uptake to have an impact?

- **Level of Effort / Cost to Implement**. What is the level of effort or cost to implement the action? What is the incremental cost of the action compared to a more conventional approach? What is the payback period of the action?

Each action was assigned a score in the methodology criteria stated above, and then the weighted average of the points was used to determine the score for the action. A summary of the range of points associated with each action is provided in Table 1 along with the breakdown of the action type and associated action pathway Phase.

Table 1: Action Types and Associated Points

Action Pathway Phase	Action Type	Description	Point Range
Assess, Plan and Govern			
Assess, Plan and Govern	Inventory, Assessment, Survey, or Technical Report	Conducting an analysis to support the implementation of climate action strategies. Includes GHG inventories, assessments, surveys, audits, or reports.	4-8
Assess, Plan and Govern	Plan Development	Development or updates to any community plans such as a land-use plan, climate action plan, sustainability plan, open space plan, strategic energy plan, etc.	4-8
Assess, Plan and Govern	New Policies, Laws, or Zoning	New or updated ordinances, resolutions, laws, codes, zoning, or standards.	3-8
Build Capacity			
Build Capacity	Education and Outreach	Public awareness, education, outreach, campaign or public engagement efforts; forming task forces or advisory committees.	2-5
Build Capacity	Partnerships and Collaboration	Working with neighboring jurisdictions, agencies, multi-jurisdictional efforts, task forces or advisory committees, or other organizations on shared objectives.	2 to 4

Implement			
Implement	Operational Changes	Changes to operations or practices. Forming an internal green team. Appointing staff to work on climate change related issues.	1-5
Implement	Programs, Services, and Incentives	Local government-led initiatives that support climate action efforts in the community. Includes financing programs, incentives, and programs to minimize environmental impacts.	2-8
Implement	Facilities and Infrastructure	Investments or capital improvements to community or government-owned facilities, infrastructure, or operations, such as buildings, vehicle fleets, public transit systems, outdoor lighting, waste management, wastewater treatment plants, etc. Includes green and grey infrastructure.	1-10
Monitor and Report			
Monitor and Report	Reporting	Reports or scorecards that provide updates on the progress of implementation of actions and the results associated with them.	3-4

BONUS POINTS			
Innovation	Innovation	An action or innovative approach that is not listed in the rating system, but provides a climate mitigation, adaptation, or green economy benefit. Points will be awarded based on the direct benefits provided by the action.	1-10
Performance	Performance	Additional points for demonstrating reductions in energy use and GHG emissions. Local governments must provide data on actual energy savings to receive performance bonus points.	5-50

AWARD LEVELS AND CERTIFICATION
PRIORITY AND OPTIONAL ACTIONS

The CSC Certification program is based on two types of actions:

- **Priority actions**: A group of actions that must be completed for each award level. Applicants must complete the required priority actions for each award level along with a minimum number of additional priority actions for each award level.

- **Optional actions**: All actions that are not labeled as priority. Applicants may select any optional actions to complete to earn points toward one of the award levels.

In addition to certification, CSCs can achieve several award levels: bronze, silver and gold. Award levels are based on the total points earned and the completion of selected priority actions. For each of the certification and award levels, the program specifies a minimum number of priority actions that must be completed, as indicated in Table 2, as well as a minimum number of points that must be accumulated by completion of optional actions in addition to the points earned by completion of priority actions:

The award levels and requirements are defined in Table 2.

Table 2: CSC Certification Program Requirements

Award Level	Description	Point Requirement	Minimum Pledge Elements	Required Priority Actions	Minimum Additional[2] Priority Actions	Minimum Performance/ Innovation Points
Registered Climate Smart Community	Local governments are recognized as being registered with the program upon signing the CSC pledge.	N/A	PE1	1.1	N/A	0
Certified Climate Smart Community	The initial level of certification, for local governments that have demonstrated a commitment toward climate action and have	120 points	PE1, PE2, PE3, plus 2 more PEs	1.1, 1.3	4 of 11	0

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[2] Additional priority actions include 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 7.1, and 7.3.

Award Level	Description	Point Requirement	Minimum Pledge Elements	Required Priority Actions	Minimum Additional[2] Priority Actions	Minimum Performance/ Innovation Points
	taken the initial steps in establishing climate smart policies.					
Certified Climate Smart Community, Bronze	The second level of certification, for local governments that have made a commitment and have begun to take action.	250 points	PE1, PE2, PE3, plus 4 more PEs	1.1, 1.3	6 of 11	5 points
Certified Climate Smart Community, Silver	The third level of certification, for local governments that have implemented a wide variety of climate action actions for government operations and the community.	350 points	PE1, PE2, PE3, plus 5 more PEs	1.1, 1.3	11 of 11	10 points
Certified Climate Smart Community, Gold	The highest level of certification, for local governments that have successfully taken action to address all pledge elements and can demonstrate tangible reductions in GHG emissions.	450 points	All	1.1, 1.3	11 of 11	20 points

PARTICIPATING IN THE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Once a local government adopts the CSC Pledge and submits a certified copy of the adopting resolution to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) it will automatically become a Registered Climate Smart Community. Each CSC can then implement actions at its own pace. There is no time limit between adoption of the pledge and commencement of the remainder of the certification process.

Beginning the Certification Process

This section provides some general guidance and tips on how to approach the certification process and what to expect, based on the experiences of the communities that participated in the development and pilot of the program. To get started with the certification process, local governments should do the following:

1. **Review certification materials**: Review the CSC Certification Checklist and Certification Manual and estimate how many points the local government could potentially earn and what award level could potentially be achieved. The Certification Manual describes the specific documentation requirements for each action. It is advisable not to begin the certification application process until you believe that your CSC has completed enough actions to achieve at least the "Certified" award level.
2. **Designate a project coordinator**: This could be a local government staff member or a volunteer, and probably a member of the CSC task force. It works best to have one person organizing all of the documentation and driving the process forward, although other staff members and volunteers could be enlisted to support the process.
3. **Get organized**: Establish a system for managing all of the documentation internally and keep track of your progress as you gather all of the required materials.
4. **Gather publicly available information:** Identify all materials that are publicly available for each of the actions in which you are seeking points.
5. **Request materials from local government staff members**: Identify the appropriate staff members to contact for information on various actions and request required materials well in advance of the planned submittal date. Make sure to provide specifics on all of the information required for the action.

The amount of time it will take to gather the relevant materials and apply for certification will depend on the availability of the materials and the award level the local government is seeking. Allow plenty of time to collect all of the required materials. Local governments should consider starting the process of preparing for certification approximately six to twelve months prior to the desired application date.

Applying for Certification

Local governments can follow the guidelines and requirements below for becoming certified:

- Local governments can submit documentation of actions completed toward certification at any point.

- Certification will be granted if a local government has met the minimum requirements for one of the certification levels, which include the stated requirements for minimum points, minimum

pledge elements represented in the actions completed, and priority actions, and performance and innovation points, as appropriate.

- Points will be awarded for actions that were achieved by a local government prior to adoption of the CSC Pledge. The eligibility timeline for each action specifies the maximum amount of time (prior to the date of documentation submittal) by which the action must have been completed to qualify for points.

- Local governments may earn points for some specified actions only once when applying for certification and are not able to earn multiple points if one of these actions is completed several times[3].

- Certification will be in effect for a five-year period, which will commence upon notice by DEC, or its designated agent, of certification. No further action by the community will be necessary to maintain "Certified" status during the five -year period.

- Local governments may apply and earn one of the higher award levels upon initial certification, provided they meet the minimum requirements for that award level, and once certified, may submit action documentation for points toward higher award levels at any time.

Submitting Documentation for Certification

- All documentation should be submitted to DEC's Office of Climate Change by e-mail at climatechange@dec.ny.gov . If hard copies must be submitted, they should be mailed to

    New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
    Office of Climate Change
    625 Broadway
    Albany, N.Y. 12233-1030
    Attn: CSC Certification

    Contact the Office of Climate Change to arrange transfer of large files (greater than 25mb).

Communities with no or slow access to the Internet should contact the Office of Climate Change for alternative submittal instructions.

    Review procedures are still under development for a few of the actions described in the certification manual. Documentation of these actions may not be submitted at this time.The Action Checklist available at http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/96511.html indicates the few actions for which the Office of Climate Change is not yet able to accept documentation.

- Local governments should complete the Document Submittal Form for each action for which they seek to earn points. The Document Submittal Form should include a list of all of the documents or website addresses to be submitted as evidence of completing the action, along with a brief summary of how the documents demonstrate completion of the action.

- For larger documents in which only a portion of the document is relevant for the action, local governments must specify the relevant pages to be reviewed on the Document Submittal Form.

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[3]Local governments may submit several projects for consideration for the Innovation bonus, provided each project is unique, unrelated, and substantially different.

- Local governments may submit links to documentation or websites online, instead of submitting PDFs or hard copies of documentation.

> **Note: Review and approval of documentation submitted through the Climate Smart Communities certification program does not constitute approval for the purposes of any regulatory or other agency program and should not be interpreted as such.**

Collaborating with Partners to Complete Actions and "Substantial Involvement"

Local governments can earn points for actions that they implement alone or in partnership with other entities, such as counties, neighboring jurisdictions, or regional organizations. To earn points for an action in which the local government is not the lead actor, the local government must demonstrate *substantial involvement* in the action. Substantial involvement could include, but is not limited to, a commitment of resources or other political support, such as the following:

- Financial investment or resources
- Staff resources
- Provision of property or other in-kind resources
- Local government resources or services to support an event, such as security or recycling pickup
- Participation on a board or committee
- Participation in a planning process
- A resolution of support
- Commitment to support an action in a plan, policy, ordinance, or other adopted document
- Adoption, enforcement, implementation of a countywide policy, plan, or ordinance

For actions in which a local government seeks to earn points for which it is not the lead actor, but is substantially involved, it must submit evidence demonstrating its involvement and explain its involvement on the Document Submittal Form.

If a local government has collaborated with another community on an action for which both seek to earn points, each local government must submit documentation separately as part of its individual application for certification.

Recertification

Local governments can follow the guidelines and requirements below to maintain their CSC certification:

- Recertification is necessary within five years of initial certification and every five years thereafter. The guidance for each action indicates the recertification requirements for that same action. Any local government that does not recertify will remain a Registered CSC participant and can seek to attain certification or a higher award level again at any time.

- Certified CSCs may begin submittal of documentation to support their application for recertification up to 60 calendar days prior to the fifth anniversary date of certification, as described above. All documentation must be submitted by the fifth anniversary date. A 30-calendar day grace period will be allowed.

- CSCs applying for recertification must demonstrate that all priority and non-priority actions are still in effect or have been completed or repeated during the maximum period allowed since initial certification or the most recent recertification, as indicated in the guidance for each action.

- Communities that have submitted all required documentation to support recertification by the end of the grace period will retain their "Certified" status until the CSC agencies, or their designated agents, have completed their review.

- Certified CSCs that either fail to provide required recertification documentation by the end of the grace period, or fail to meet the recertification requirements will no longer be designated "Certified."

- The recertification requirements are specified for each action in the Certification Manual. However, these requirements are subject to change in future versions of the manual.

- Upon applying for recertification, local governments may earn points for the same actions for which they earned points upon initial certification, as described in the section on recertification.

Award Levels

- A Certified CSC may apply for a higher award level (bronze, silver, and gold) upon documentation of completion of the designated priority and optional actions sufficient to achieve the designated point totals.

- CSCs applying for higher award levels must demonstrate:

    a) All priority actions for certification are still in effect or have been completed or repeated during the maximum period allowed since initial certification or the most recent recertification, as specified in the CSC Certification Manual; and

    b) Completion of optional actions, as described in the CSC Certification Manual, is sufficient to earn at least the minimum number of points for the award level.

- Certified CSCs may submit documentation to support their application for an award level on a rolling basis; however, achievement award levels will be announced only once per year at a date to be determined.

- DEC, or its designated agent, will review the submitted documentation and notify the community of the total number of points awarded and the award level achieved, if applicable.

- Communities will be permitted to "skip" award levels as their completed actions warrant.

- Award levels will be in effect for five years from the *original certification anniversary date prior to notice of the award level to the community.*

- *As noted above, Certified CSCs must apply for recertification by the fifth anniversary date of their certification. Communities may apply for action points concurrently with their recertification application and will receive higher award levels as applicable, provided they continue to meet all certification requirements.*

HOW TO USE THIS CERTIFICATION MANUAL

The Certification Manual is intended as a reference for local governments to learn about the various actions, understand the requirements for receiving points for each action, and obtain basic guidance and best practice examples on how to implement each action. The actions are organized by the pledge element with which they are most closely associated; the actions associated with each of the 10 pledge elements are organized into. A "checklist" of all actions included in the manual is also available. Actions can be easily identified in the summary and clicked on for a more detailed overview of each action. The search function at the top of the PDF can also be used to find specific actions by keywords.

Definitions

The key terms used in the certification program and rating system are defined below:

1. **Award level**: A level of recognition a local government can achieve by earning a specified number of points certified, bronze, silver, or gold

2. **Action**: An initiative undertaken by a local government to demonstrate progress toward fulfilling a pledge element. Points are associated with actions depending on the effect of the action in the community and the level of difficulty of implementing that action. The certification program includes the following types of actions:

   - Education and Outreach
   - Partnerships and Collaboration
   - Inventory, Assessment, Survey, or Report
   - New Policies, Laws, or Zoning
   - Operational Changes
   - Plan Development
   - Programs, Services, and Incentives
   - Facilities and Infrastructure

3. **Action Pathway**: The process by which local governments move through the Climate Smart Communities Program. The action pathway is divided into five phases.

   - Commit
   - Assess, Plan and Govern
   - Build Capacity
   - Implement
   - Monitor and Report

4. **Award Level:** Any of the following designations awarded by the Climate Smart Communities Certification Program: Registered, Certified, Bronze, Silver and Gold.

5. **Category**: A designation used to organize and group actions within a pledge element to help local government staff identify actions that are relevant to their jurisdictions.

6. **Certified Climate Smart Community**: A New York State village, city, town or county that has met at least the minimum requirements of the CSC Certification Program.

7. **Eligibility Timeline**: The time prior to the application date in which an action must have been completed to qualify for points. Some actions must be in progress or currently active to qualify for points. The following terms are used to describe the time period for eligibility:

- Currently active. The action must be operational or in-progress, or activity related to this action occurred within one year prior to the application date to be eligible for points.

- Within X years prior to the application date. The action must have been implemented or completed within the designated number of years prior to application for CSC certification to be eligible for points.

- Any time prior to the application date. The action may have been completed any time before application for certification to be eligible for points.

8. **Innovation Bonus Points**: The innovation section is specifically designed to allow for bonus points for actions that are completely new to the state or that are existing actions that are implemented in a unique way. The innovation bonus points encourage the communities that want to advance do so, while not creating undue burdens on communities that are not yet ready to innovate.

9. **Optional actions**: All actions which are not labeled as priority. Applicants may select any optional actions to complete in order to earn points toward one of the award levels.

10. **Performance Bonus Points**: Bonus points can also be achieved by documenting and reporting achievements in performance, e.g., reductions in GHG emissions or overall energy use.

11. **Pledge Element**: One of the ten commitment areas of the Climate Smart Communities Pledge. The certification program uses the Climate Smart Communities Pledge as a framework.

12. **Point**: Each action has a set of points associated with it. Some actions have a range of possible points or tiered points determined by the degree of implementation of the action, whereas others will simply have a total possible point value. Bonus points can be achieved through innovation and performance reporting, as described below.

13. **Priority Actions**: A group of actions which must be completed for each award level. Applicants must complete the required priority actions for each award level along with a minimum number of additional priority actions for each award level.

14. **Registered Climate Smart Community**: A New York State village, city, town or county whose legislative body has adopted the Climate Smart Community Pledge in its entirety.