



# Climate Change Mitigation

**SUMMARY:** Climate mitigation activity is ramping up rapidly around the world, driven by escalating climate effects and renewed government efforts. Governments are setting ambitious emissions-reduction goals, the private sector is treating climate as a strategic issue, and wealthy funders are starting to make impactful investments. Climate change will be a front-burner issue throughout the 2020s, affecting associations and their members in profound ways.



## Forecasts

- The 2020s will see intensified carbon-reduction efforts as governments, businesses, and the public take more seriously the efforts needed to avoid catastrophic climate impacts. A variety of solutions will be tried, and constituencies will form around preferred, sometimes competing, approaches.
- Equity will be a core feature of resilience efforts going forward. Policy decisions will increasingly take into account the distinct risks of climate change for disadvantaged groups.
- Geoengineering, which explores ways that humans can cool the planet through science and technology, will become a serious contender among mitigation solutions, generating both controversy and potential business opportunities.
- U.S. climate policies will oscillate with political shifts but may become consistent as businesses seek stability in the face of climate disruption and bipartisan forces cohere around mitigation and resiliency strategies.

## Key Uncertainties

*How consumer behavior will change—or need to change*

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*Which climate change solutions emerge as frontrunners*

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*The rate of necessary technology development*

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*Whether high-emissions countries meet their emissions-reduction targets*

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*Whether renewable energy sources can expand rapidly enough*

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*The rate of calculated and unexpected effects of climate change*

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## Supporting Trends

- **Climate change pressures.** The effects of climate change are growing. These include increased flooding, unprecedented wildfires, and shifting habitats for plants and animals.
- **U.S. fears over climate change are growing.** Bipartisan majorities of Americans say the federal government should be doing more to mitigate climate change and to ramp up renewable energy.
- **Business support for climate action.** About a third of companies in the S&P 500 have set ambitious emissions-reduction targets; meanwhile, some financial firms are restructuring capital loans to include environmental as well as repayment milestones.
- **“Whole-government” strategies.** Some governments, including those of Denmark and the United States, are weaving climate considerations—in foreign aid, trade, education, and more— into government policies across the board.
- **Climate change and the poor and vulnerable.** Concern is growing about risks related to climate change and their effects on vulnerable populations, as these peoples lack access to resources, alternative options, and often have insufficient infrastructure in place to help mitigate the effects of a changing climate.
- **Impact investing.** Investing to promote environmental, social, or governance benefits grew 42 percent globally from 2019 to 2020, from \$502 billion to \$715 billion.
- **Socioeconomic issues and climate change.** Concern is rising over the effects of climate change on economic growth, inequality, terrorism, and migration.

### Related Drivers of Change

- The Splintered Society
- American Inequality
- Beyond Recycling (archived)

## Notable Data Points

### BUSINESS STEPS UP

More than 400 U.S. businesses  
signed a pledge to  
**cut U.S. emissions  
to at least 50%**  
of 2005 levels by 2030.

Source: MarketWatch.

### BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

In 2020, majorities of Americans from both  
parties said the government should  
**use regulatory policy to  
advance renewable energy**  
and give businesses a tax credit for using  
carbon-capture technology.

Source: Pew Research Center.

### EUROPE'S AMBITIONS

For the EU to meet its goal of cutting emissions  
by 55% by 2030,  
**it's primary energy  
consumption must  
fall by 27%.**

Source: Wood Mackenzie.

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## Strategic Insights

- 2020 was a watershed year for climate change mitigation. The Paris Agreement's first five-year pledge updates came due, the United States elected a mitigation-friendly administration, and many countries significantly raised their emissions-reduction targets.
- To meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal for 2050, emissions must fall rapidly across all sectors, not just the energy sector. Industrial processes will need to be made even more efficient. Infrastructure-building will require intensive, protracted effort. Public and private funding are starting to pivot toward these new priorities. Associations will help members think through their industries' unique opportunities and threats arising from these significant shifts.
- Soon every association will need a climate strategy that captures their position on climate change and their understanding of effects on their activities and those of their industry or field. More industries and fields will be drawn into climate issues, and, by 2030, few will be exempted from accountability for their activities. By then, many leading organizations will have helped to define and model effective mitigation and resilience.
- Climate equity is maturing as a concept and becoming reified in practical tools. For instance, equity mapping uses GIS (geographic information systems) to identify the specific climate risks faced by local neighborhoods. Associations need to ensure that equity is central to their climate strategies and help their members do the same.
- Climate change policy fragmentation will mean that some associations will face geographic divisions as members and chapters encounter different local conditions and take different stances as a result. These divisions could create policy tensions in national and international bodies.

### Timing

- **Stage:** Growth, varying by geography and culture.
- **Speed:** Accelerating, driven by increased attention to climate change.

### Potential Alternative Futures

- **Disaster breeds urgency.** Mega-disasters that appear to be climate-driven override political differences, uniting diverse publics to take urgent and broad action.
- **Overwhelmed.** Climate impacts rapidly outpace mitigation and resiliency efforts. The costs of these impacts skyrocket, crowding out other priorities.
- **Geoengineering changes the game.** Geoengineering strategies show promise for reducing carbon in the atmosphere. Although emissions still need to be curtailed, the worst effects seem preventable.

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## Take Action

- **Draw connections between the environment, your mission, and members.** Members in some industries may have given little thought to how their actions might help or hinder climate change mitigation. They might struggle to get beyond abstract political and scientific issues to see how they do contribute to the larger ecosystem. Once you know what makes a difference, teach these practices, encourage them as a marketplace differentiator, and encourage adherence through credentialing and ethics codes.
- **Take a risk analysis approach.** How will climate change shift risks in your field? Will extreme weather events disrupt your business or conference locations? What are your business continuity plans? If many members experience a climate-related disaster, are you suspending dues or offering services to help them get back in business? Are there potential threats to employee health and safety under extreme weather conditions? There's no downside to understanding risk and putting your Plan B in place.
- **Start with small, concrete actions.** Select centralized conference site locations where members can travel efficiently. Expand your range of virtual learning and networking experiences. Reduce conference waste (print, food, and swag) and sustainably source food and other products and materials. Embrace telecommuting and subsidize employees using public transportation. When you move, choose a LEED-certified building.
- **Spur solutions with innovation grants.** Help members and constituents experiment with new ideas and solutions that create climate change resiliency. Small grants can build grassroots engagement and position your industry as a champion for finding better ways to work in harmony with the environment.

## Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms alone or in combination:

*climate change, carbon emissions, state climate policies, Biden plan for climate change, EU 2030 Climate Target Plan, BlackRock and climate change, Science Based Targets, climate activism, Climate Justice Alliance, socioeconomic and climate change, Sunrise Movement, Protect Our Winters, youth climate lawsuits, geoengineering.*

### Who Will Be Affected

All businesses and organizations will be affected by efforts to mitigate climate change. Associations representing industries and businesses perceived to have significant environmental impact already have major initiatives underway to organize member response. Global and national associations and businesses operating across regions must respond to variations in political urgency, regulatory regimes, and best practices.

### About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and line of products to provide association professionals with a continual stream of intelligence about the changes facing the association industry, including

- Regularly updated action briefs;
- Tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- Guidance in performing environmental scans;
- Opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight in their associations and to lead their organizations confidently into the future.

Check the [asaecenter.org/foresightworks](https://asaecenter.org/foresightworks) webpage and follow ASAE Research Foundation on [LinkedIn](#) for updates on new findings and events.