



HIGHER EDUCATION CLIMATE CONSORTIUM

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR EQUITABLE CLIMATE ACTION

FEBRUARY 2023



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WHY HECC MATTERS

Since 2008, the Higher Education Climate Consortium (HECC) has collaborated on the vision of a carbon neutral Pittsburgh. Nationally and locally, higher education institutions have embraced their role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, developing the next generation of climate action leaders, and making breakthrough discoveries that advance our global efforts to combat our climate emergency. HECC is a strong and flexible connective tissue between Pittsburgh's colleges and universities, helping coordinate and amplify partnering schools' efforts to advance equitable climate action.

Whether HECC Members are leaders expanding existing institutional impact or those advancing new efforts and initiatives, HECC leverages the power of the collaborative to help individuals co-create scalable solutions in an iterative and evolutionary manner. In nearly fifteen years of existence, HECC has helped advance opportunities previously thought infeasible. Being part of an important, impactful, and true partnership benefits individuals, organizations, our region, and our planet.

The City of Pittsburgh and the higher education institutions that call it home share people, infrastructure, research, goals, and more. Pittsburgh's colleges and universities play a vital role in the region's success. They help prepare the next generation of leaders, advance critical basic and applied research, and collectively employ a significant number of people in the region. HECC has played a critical role in both bringing the Pittsburgh region's higher education institutions together and putting intentionality behind advancing campus greenhouse gas reduction goals, both individually and collectively.

BACKGROUND

HISTORY

Originating from Pittsburgh's 2006-07 Green Government Task Force, the Higher Education Climate Consortium (HECC) was officially designated in 2008 (Figure 1). HECC defined its own collaboration and embraced Pittsburgh's higher education sector's responsibilities to lead the way in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Founding HECC representatives also helped author the Higher Education sections of the [Pittsburgh Climate Action Plan v1](#).

From 2008 through 2011, HECC was convened and represented by the Green Building Alliance (GBA), which helped ensure the higher education sector was a key aspect of the larger Pittsburgh Climate Initiative (now defunct). This structure allowed HECC institutions to build foundational relationships through regular meetings, create benchmark greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories, and share successes, struggles, and dreams for high level climate strategies and regional carbon neutrality.

HECC has had rotating co-chairs since its founding (Appendix A), always ensuring simultaneous leadership from smaller and larger universities. As HECC evolved, member institutions took over facilitation from GBA in 2012, when they also collectively hired their first dedicated HECC Fellow to assist with collaborative action. From 2012 through 2016, HECC had five Fellows who worked to advance the HECC mission.

Since 2018, HECC has attempted to formalize its quarterly meetings, advanced quantitative GHG emissions benchmarking and goal setting, continued sharing successes and struggles, and refocused exclusively on climate action. Despite these efforts, HECC struggles with regular meeting cadence and achieving the collaborative momentum this group of leaders deserves or needs to reach its full potential.

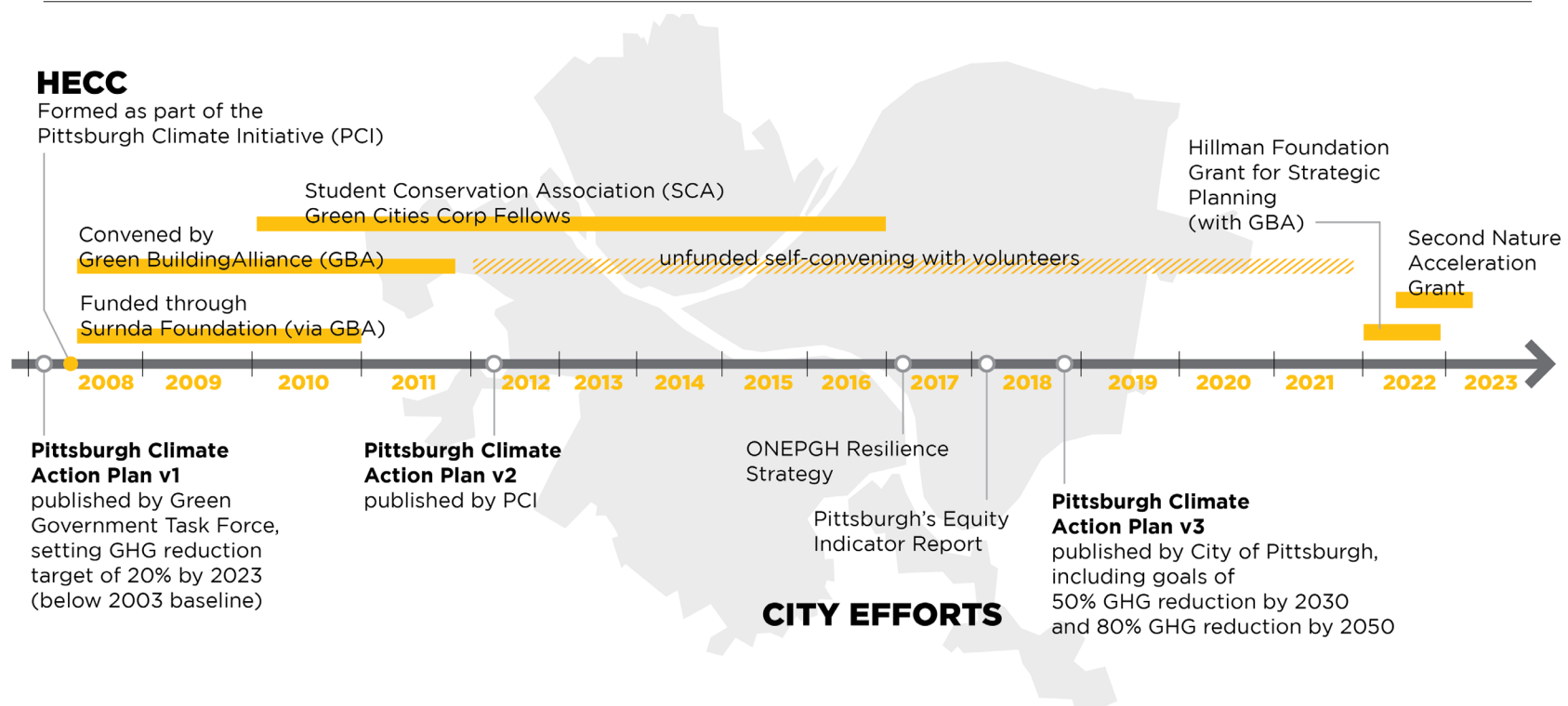


Figure 1: HECC and Pittsburgh Climate Strategy & Action Timeline

HECC TODAY

HECC remains a branded collaborative with a diverse set of representatives from Pittsburgh's higher educational institutions.

MISSION

Actively collaborate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from Pittsburgh's higher education institutions.

VISION

Strengthen the Pittsburgh region's position as a leader in climate action by achieving carbon neutrality.

In line with the mission and vision, HECC regularly brings together higher education institutions and the City of Pittsburgh to accelerate the City's climate and resiliency planning, which are complementary to global efforts.

HECC Member School	Type of Higher Education
Carlow University	Private Liberal Arts University
Carnegie Mellon University	Private Doctoral University
Community College of Allegheny County	Community College
Chatham University	Private Liberal Arts University
Duquesne University	Private Doctoral University
La Roche University	Private Liberal Arts University
Penn State Center - Pittsburgh	Center to PSU, a State-Related Land Grant Doctoral University
Point Park University	Private Liberal Arts University
Robert Morris University	Private Doctoral/Professional University
University of Pittsburgh	State-Related Doctoral University

Table 1: HECC Member Schools by Type

HECC representatives include sustainability leadership, facilities staff, and/or faculty from each member institution. HECC has no formal or binding commitments; the institutions have no current memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding their HECC commitments or collaborations. Current HECC members are listed in Table 1.

FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS

There have been several past attempts of differing strategies to provide HECC resource support. Whether with direct financial or resource support, HECC has depended on and is thankful to local and national foundations, nonprofits, and City government, including:

- **Green Building Alliance (GBA)** – Pittsburgh Climate Initiative (PCI) and HECC convener (2008 - 11), Pittsburgh 2030 District facilitator (2012 - present), & HECC partner (2008 - present).
- **City of Pittsburgh** – PCI co-convener (2012 - 18) and staff support for HECC partnership; included HECC in 2021 OnePGH Investment Prospectus concepts.
- **Heinz Endowments** – 2011 - 12 for Pittsburgh Climate Initiative including - facilitation, government collaboration, and higher education support.
- **Henry L. Hillman Foundation** – 2022 funding for this strategic planning process.
- **Pittsburgh Foundation** – 2010 - 11 to support reduction of Pittsburgh's carbon footprint through coordination of activities to implement the Pittsburgh Climate Action Plan.
- **Second Nature** – 2020 - 23 Climate Solutions Acceleration Fund grants for Oakland Energy Master Plan (Round 1) and HECC Fellows (Round 3).
- **Student Conservation Association (SCA)** – Facilitated SCA Green Cities Corps program, which provided matching support for HECC (and many other Pittsburgh climate action focused) fellows (2009 - 16).
- **Surdna Foundation** – 2007 - 11 for general climate action planning and GHG emissions reductions which included HECC-related activities.

Support has never been achieved at a level that equitably advances all HECC members, their students, or the region.

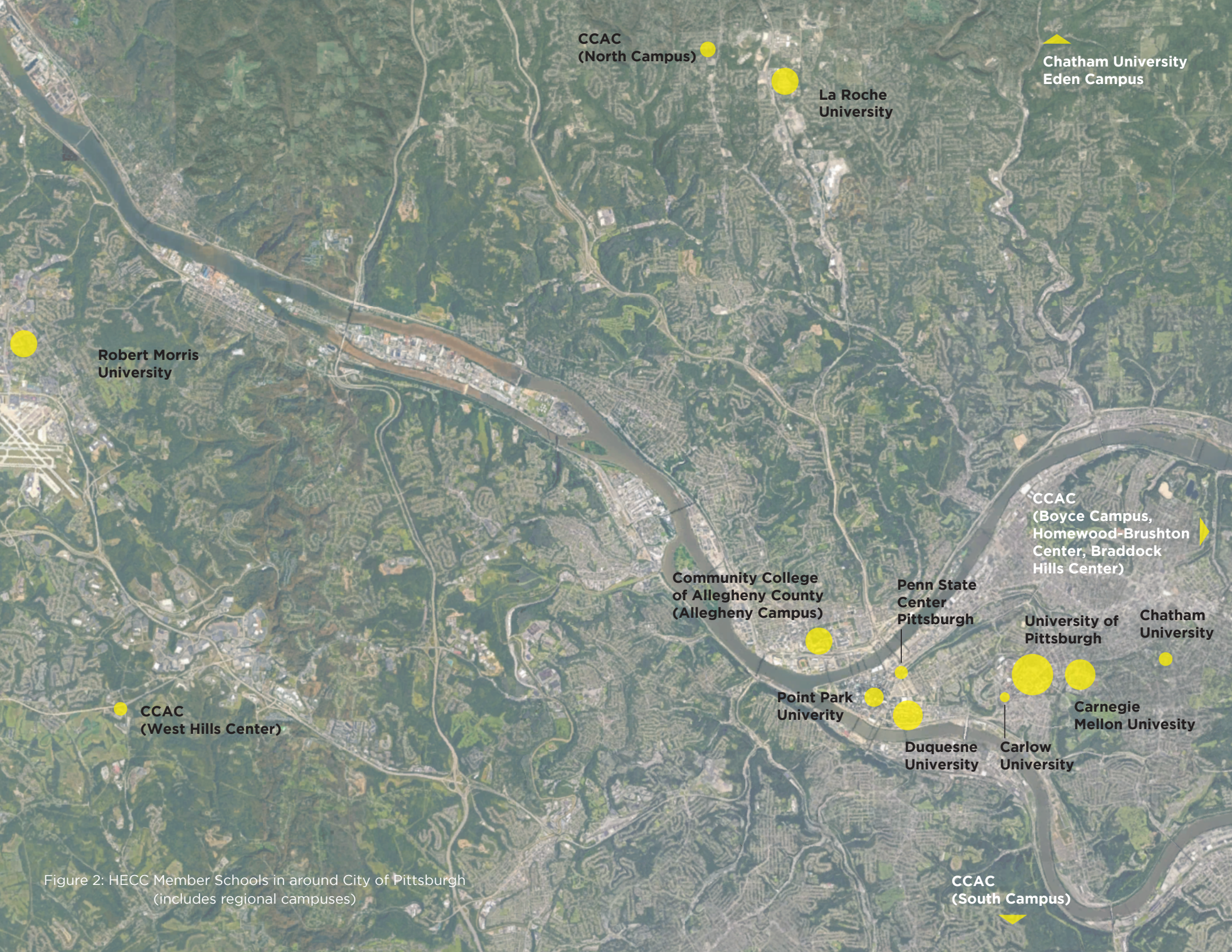


Figure 2: HECC Member Schools in around City of Pittsburgh (includes regional campuses)

CURRENT HECC FUNDING

A \$75,000 grant from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation supported HECC's 2022 expanded and continued collaboration on climate action. Green Building Alliance (GBA) is the grant's fiscal sponsor, with Steven Baumgartner of [BUSS](#) leading the planning effort as a consultant to GBA; Steven has also provided HECC pro bono support since 2015.

Additionally, HECC received a \$10,000 Second Nature's Climate Solutions Acceleration Fund grant (via Chatham University) for 2022-23 HECC Fellow support of this strategic plan and HECC's resulting strategic climate action.



Second Nature is a U.S. nonprofit focused on accelerating climate action in and through higher education institutions. Second Nature's Climate Leadership Network provides resources, networking, and national engagement opportunities for higher education institutions taking active climate mitigation and resilience steps. Second Nature's Acceleration Fund is dedicated to supporting climate action activities driven by colleges and universities and supports projects that advance decarbonization and/or campus-community partnerships and resilience goals.

Second Nature manages the Presidents' Climate Leadership Commitments (Carbon, Resilience, and Climate), which are formal commitments signed by over 440 college and university presidents committing to carbon neutrality and/or climate adaptation.

- **Carbon Commitment** - Reducing GHG emissions and achieving carbon neutrality as soon as possible. Chatham University and the University of Pittsburgh are HECC member Carbon Commitment signatories.
- **Resilience Commitment** - Climate adaptation and community capacity-building to deal with a changing climate and resulting extremes.
- **Climate Commitment** - Integrates carbon neutrality with climate resilience to provide a systems approach to mitigating and adapting to a changing climate.

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PITTSBURGH

Like many other places, Pittsburgh is often referred to as an “eds and meds” city, which speaks to the importance of educational and healthcare institutions to the local economy. According to a 2017 Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education (PCHE) report, in 2017 PCHE schools generated \$9.05 billion positive economic impact in the City of Pittsburgh.

With a large economic contribution comes a large environmental footprint. According to the City of Pittsburgh's 2013 GHG inventory, roughly 18.2% of city-wide GHG emissions are from the education sector (K-12, college and university buildings, and related transportation).

These schools primarily include HECC member schools (with the exception of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, which is not a HECC participant). HECC member schools are generally located in the City of Pittsburgh, with two participating schools outside the City's boundary. (Figure 2)

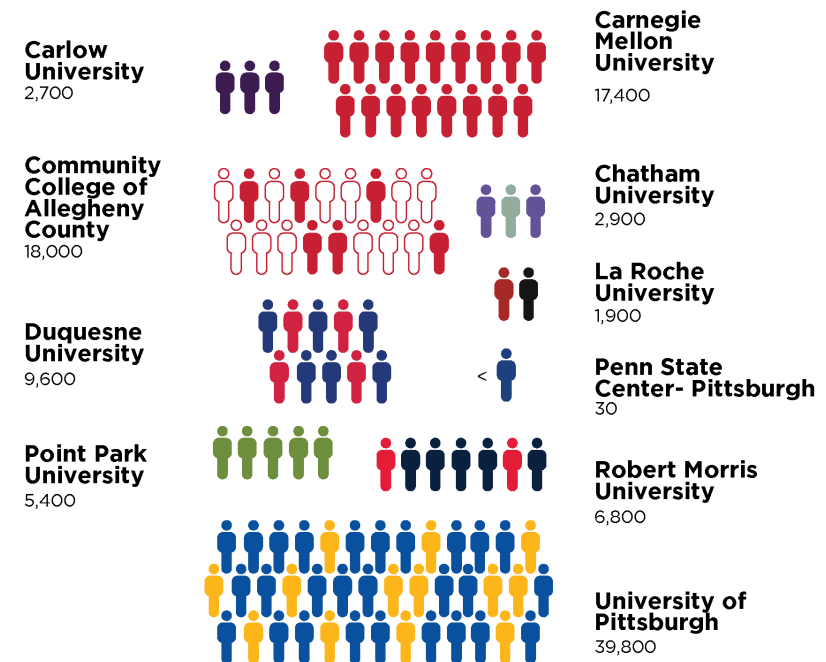


Figure 3: HECC Member Schools Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Students and Employees (2020, each figure represents 1,000 FTE)



HECC Member School	 Signed Climate Commitment?	Public-facing Climate Action Plan	Public-facing Neutrality Date (with milestone)	Completed a GHG Inventory	 2030 District Partner	 EPA Green Power Partner	 Princeton Review Green School	 AASHE STARS
 CARLOW UNIVERSITY					✓			
 Carnegie Mellon University				✓	✓	✓	✓	GOLD v2.2
 CCAC					✓			
 chatham UNIVERSITY	✓	✓	2025	✓	✓		✓	GOLD v2.1
 DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY				✓	✓		✓	SILVER v2.2
 LA ROCHE UNIVERSITY								
 PennState Center Pittsburgh				✓				
 POINT PARK UNIVERSITY					✓			
 RMU				✓				
 University of Pittsburgh	✓	✓	2037 50% by 2030 (from FY08)	✓	✓	✓	✓	GOLD v2.2

Figure 4: Matrix of HECC Member Schools' GHG Inventories and Commitments

“Conducting carbon accounting – and creating a greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory – is the primary metric for measuring progress towards carbon neutrality and more importantly for understanding your institution’s emissions contribution to climate change. It should be the guiding basis for decision-making around carbon reduction strategies. Understanding which sources of emissions pose the greatest challenges will help direct your action to critical areas.” (secondnature.org)

Figure 3 offers a visual representation of the relative sizes of HECC member institutions, which could also be extrapolated to imply individual and aggregate institutional climate impacts.

Each university is different in building space and age, commuting patterns, energy systems and solutions, and commitments to sustainability generally; however, all HECC members share a common ambition to advance their educational missions, be environmental stewards, and be partners in improving their Pittsburgh communities.

Six HECC members have completed greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories. Full GHG inventories address three scopes of emissions:

- **Scope 1:** Direct Emissions, which are physically produced on campus (e.g., on-campus power production)
- **Scope 2:** Indirect Emissions associated with purchased utilities required for campus operation (e.g., purchased utilities)
- **Scope 3:** Induced Emissions sources that are not owned or controlled by the campus (e.g., employee and student commuting, air travel, purchasing).

HECC MEMBER CARBON IMPACTS

While HECC members all share this ambition, the current state of HECC member institutional climate commitments, inventories, public facing climate actions plans, and neutrality dates (Figure 4) highlights the lack of formal commitments.

Figure 5 shows the greenhouse gas emissions and FTEs for HECC member schools. Data was taken from each school's most recent GHG inventory or estimated for those that do not have inventories. Estimates were calculated by multiplying the school's total FTE (students, faculty and staff) by an average GHG emissions per FTE for those schools with inventories. Although most HECC member schools have completed a GHG inventory, only three members complete regular GHG Inventories (Figure 6), and only two members (Chatham University and University of Pittsburgh) have moved beyond inventories to build public-facing climate action plans and signed national carbon neutrality commitments with Second Nature. Second Nature signatories are asked to report their GHG emissions annually, after which the data is publicly available. This transparency encourages the institutions to regularly review and focus on emissions sources, while also making progress towards their stated GHG emissions reduction goal(s).

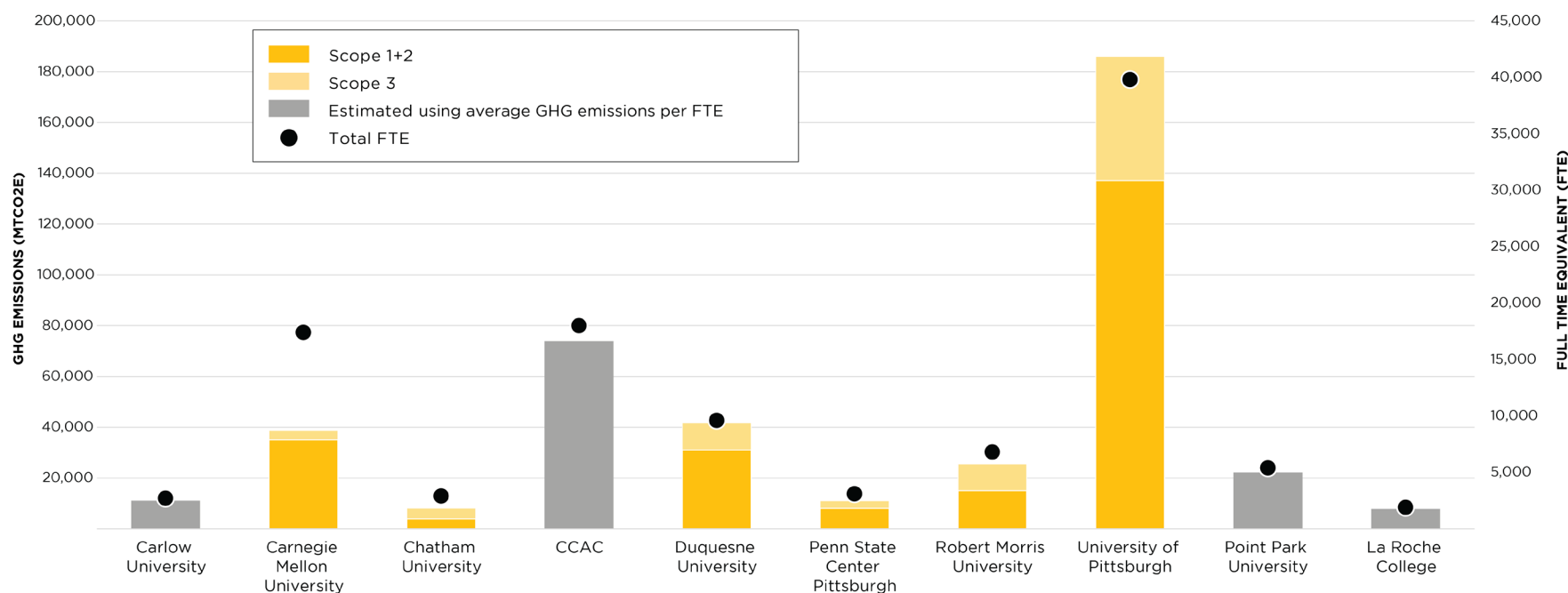


Figure 5: HECC Member School GHG Emissions

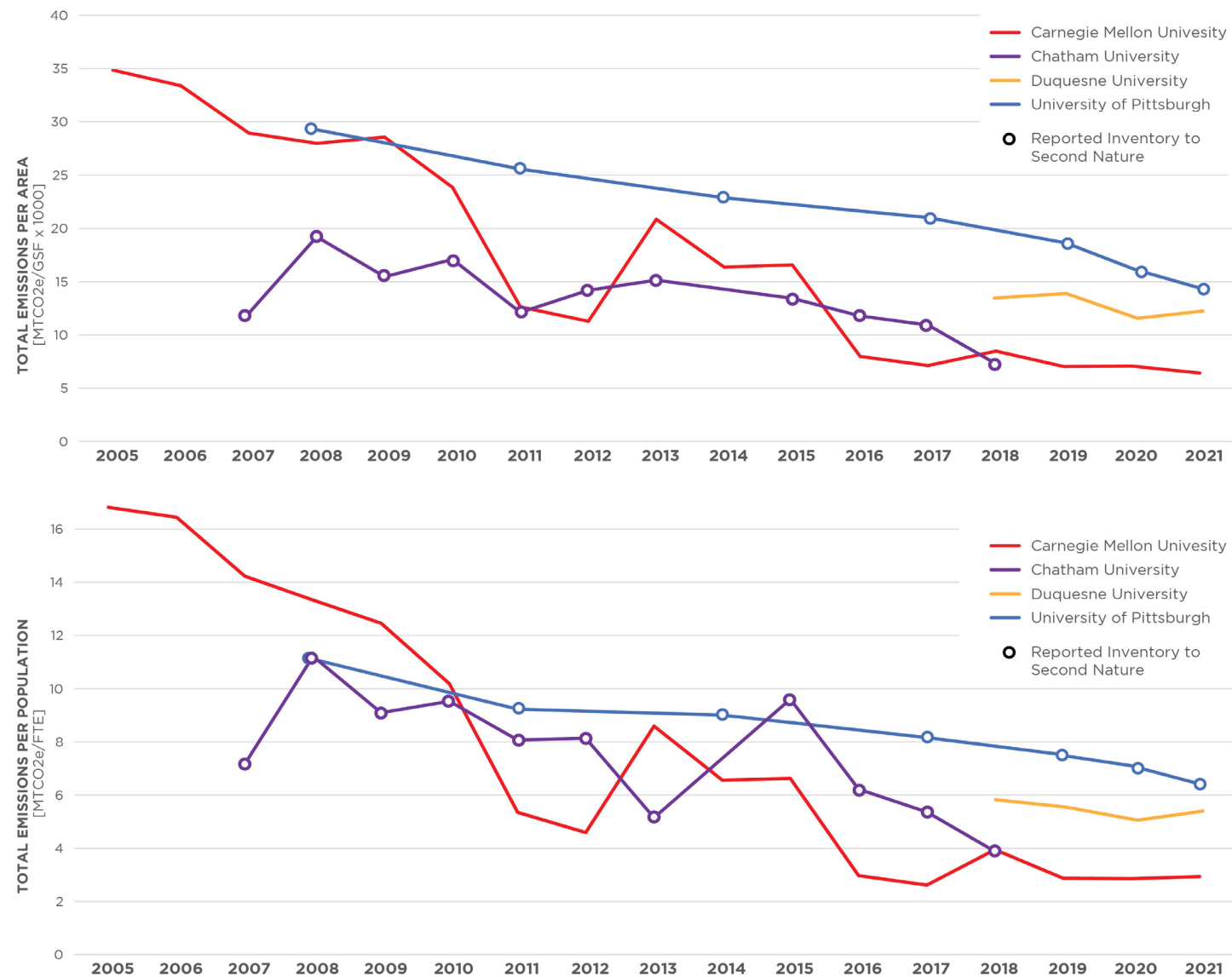


Figure 6: Trending Normalized GHG Emissions for schools* with historic inventory data
 *CMU's total emissions calculations fluctuate due to inconsistent historical data for scope 3 values.

THE FUTURE OF HECC: CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

While HECC member schools recognize the benefits of climate action and the power of the HECC collaborative, there remain a variety of challenges as HECC members shape the future of climate action in Pittsburgh.

1. GETTING UNIVERSAL BUY-IN ON CLIMATE COMMITMENTS

As mentioned above, of the ten HECC colleges and universities, only two have public climate goals (Chatham University and University of Pittsburgh), with five others committed to the building-specific climate goals of the Pittsburgh 2030 District (See Figure 7 below). Only four

HECC members have regular GHG inventory updates across Scopes 1, 2, and 3 emissions (Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham University, Duquesne University, and University of Pittsburgh).

This variance in activity and stages of commitment create the opportunity for HECC to re-catalyze collaboration between institutions with the goal of creating regular GHG inventories, setting climate targets, and outlining high-level investments to meet climate goals while elevating educational missions.

Over HECC's existence, both the City of Pittsburgh and HECC institutions have made progress on data collection, climate action planning, and goal setting. Figure 7 summarizes and contextualizes these milestones. While we have made collective and individual progress, we acknowledge this progress is not fast enough for some, has not been shared by all, nor has it been equitably achieved.

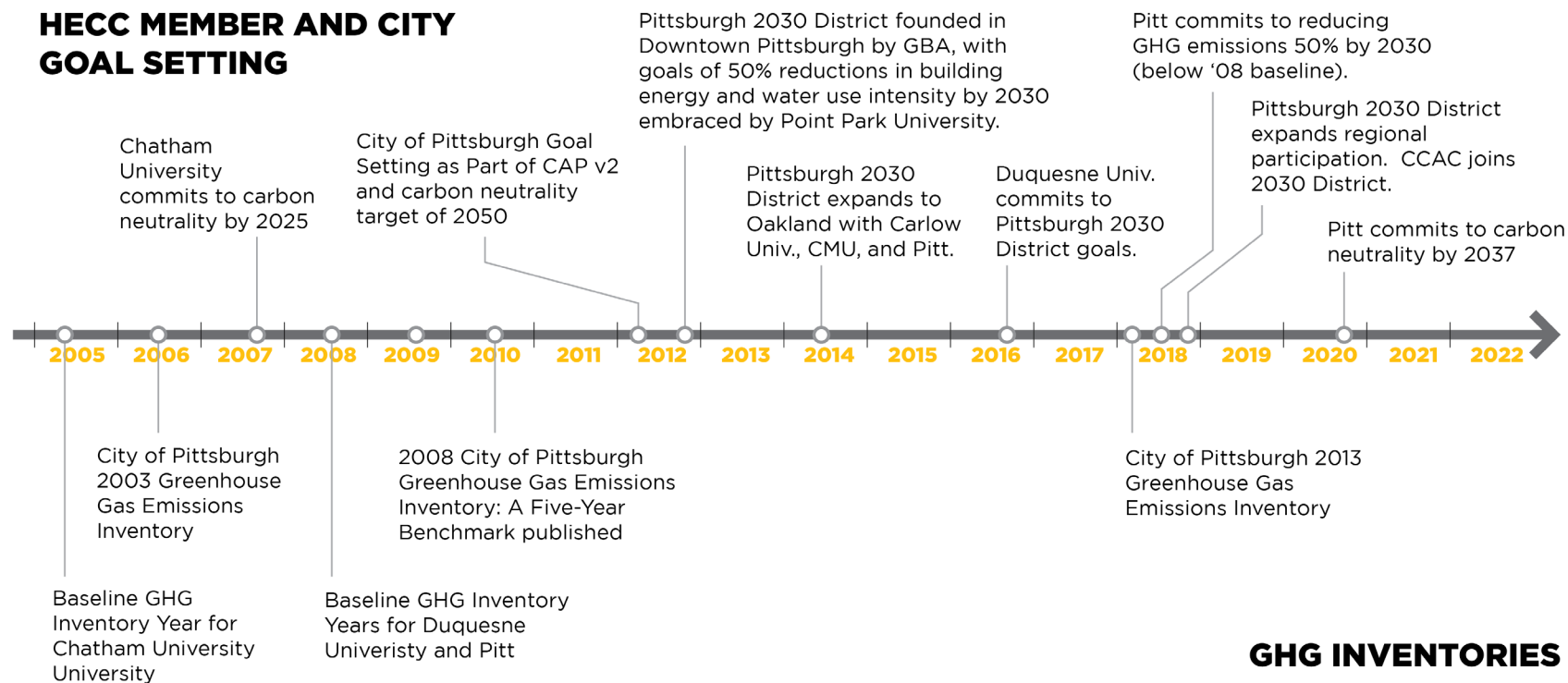


Figure 7: HECC Members Goal Setting and GHG Inventory Years



The 2030 Challenge sets specific targets for building carbon emissions, energy use, and water use reduction that align with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 District model applies this Challenge to a physical place, and the Pittsburgh 2030 District is the largest such program in North America. Upon committing to the 2030 Challenge targets, Pittsburgh 2030 District Property Partners join community organizations, utilities, designers, manufacturers, technology firms, and government officials to explore, test, and share a wide variety of approaches to reducing energy-related carbon emissions at the building, development, and campus scales.

The Pittsburgh 2030 District's success stems from its extensive community of educated, purposeful leaders that have the knowledge to positively impact building development and operations throughout the region. The HECC members who are a part of the 2030 district total roughly 28.3M sqft, which is about 24.8% of the total sqft of committed properties.

In the latest [Pittsburgh 2030 District Annual Progress Report](#) "Ten Years of Impact", results show a 38.3% reduction in carbon emissions and a 34.9% reduction in energy use over a 2003 baseline (including renewable energy credits (RECS). The Pittsburgh 2030 District is the largest in North America with over 560 buildings totaling over 86.6M square feet committed to dramatically reducing energy use, water use and emissions in buildings. Since the inception of the program in 2012, building owners have seen \$267M of cumulative energy cost savings.

2. FINDING TIME & RESOURCES

Since 2007, some HECC members have been able to manifest their own individual successes, but others need additional committed time, resources, strategies, and support to reduce GHG emissions, expand positive impact, and advance equitable climate goals and actions individually and collaboratively. It is often difficult for HECC representatives to give time to HECC when there is not always (and some representatives would argue never!) enough time to tackle what is needed on campus.

3. RISKING A SPRAWLING MISSION

HECC recognizes the importance of broader sustainability efforts and the desire to amplify everything our members are doing in this space. However, by doing so, we run the risk of expanding our scope beyond the capacity to take actionable, collaborative steps. While we do not want to be inflexible or diminish the social impact of climate change, HECC has always had and maintains its narrow focus on climate action specifically, while retaining its relevance to resilience and environmental justice.

4. COHORTS V. MIXING

One of HECC's challenges is how to best organize the many climate-related experts, influencers, and passions in Pittsburgh's higher education space. While some HECC members have a preference to include interdisciplinary voices and enjoy the mix of subjects represented at meetings, other members feel they don't have a place in the discussion if topics are too focused on issues outside their expertise.

5. LEVERAGING NATIONAL MOMENTUM

There is a bevy of national activity in the higher education sector. In addition to Second Nature, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) plays a key role in bringing groups together to inspire and catalyze higher education to lead the global sustainability transformation. HECC members are aware of, appreciative of, and (some) directly engaged in and with these national efforts, aiming to leverage them for both campus and regional progress. HECC struggles with both how to best connect these national efforts to local action and how to ensure the local HECC collaborative continues to provide value and benefit beyond national dialogues.

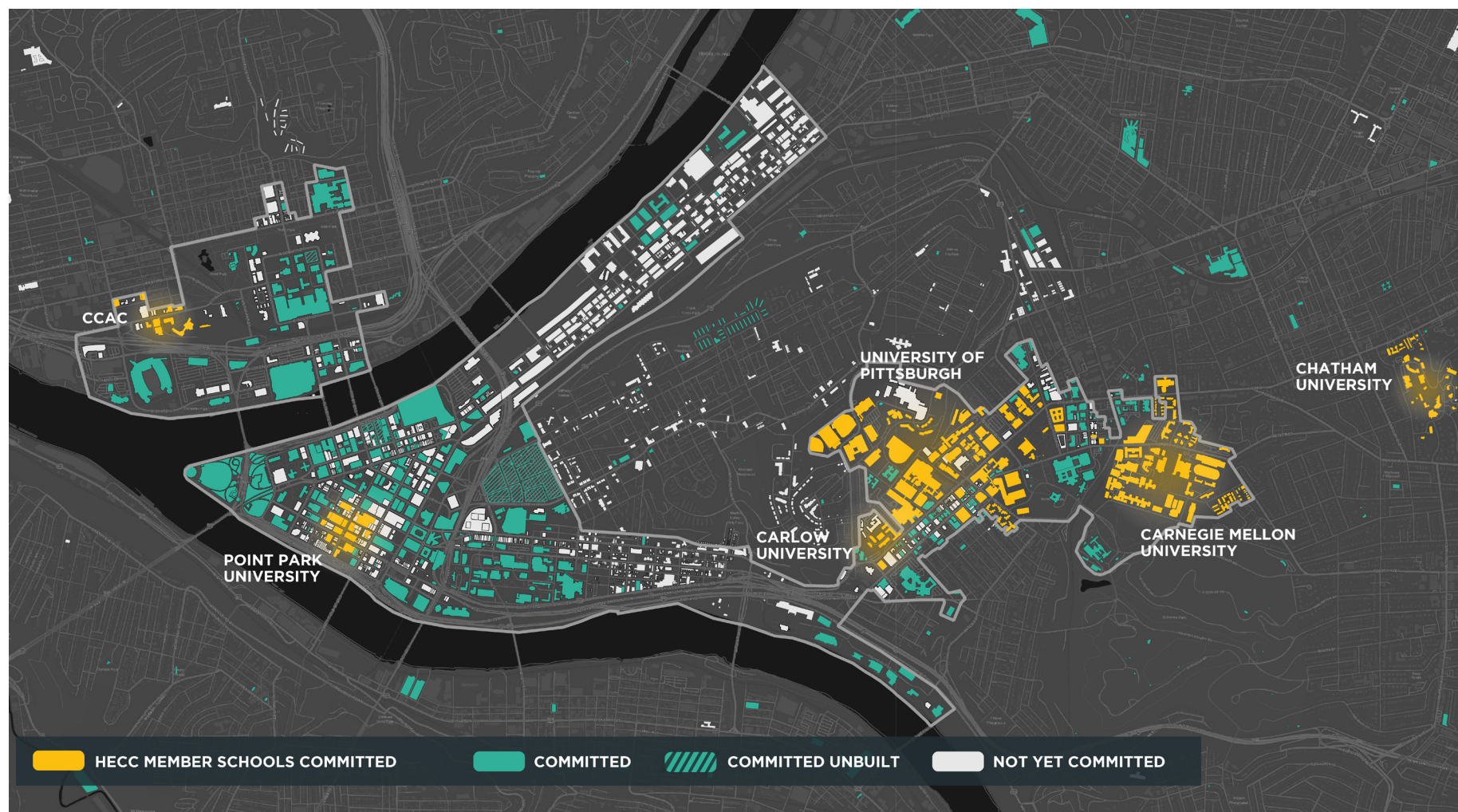


Figure 8: Pittsburgh 2030 District Boundary and Committed Property Partners

THE HECC MEMBERS WHO ARE A PART
OF THE 2030 DISTRICT TOTAL ROUGHLY **28.3M SF**

WHICH IS ABOUT **25%**
OF THE TOTAL OF COMMITTED PROPERTIES

APPROACH TO THIS PLAN

HECC took a considered approach to and through this strategic planning process, including outlining pathways for both HECC as a collective, as well as for individual HECC institutions (Figure 9).

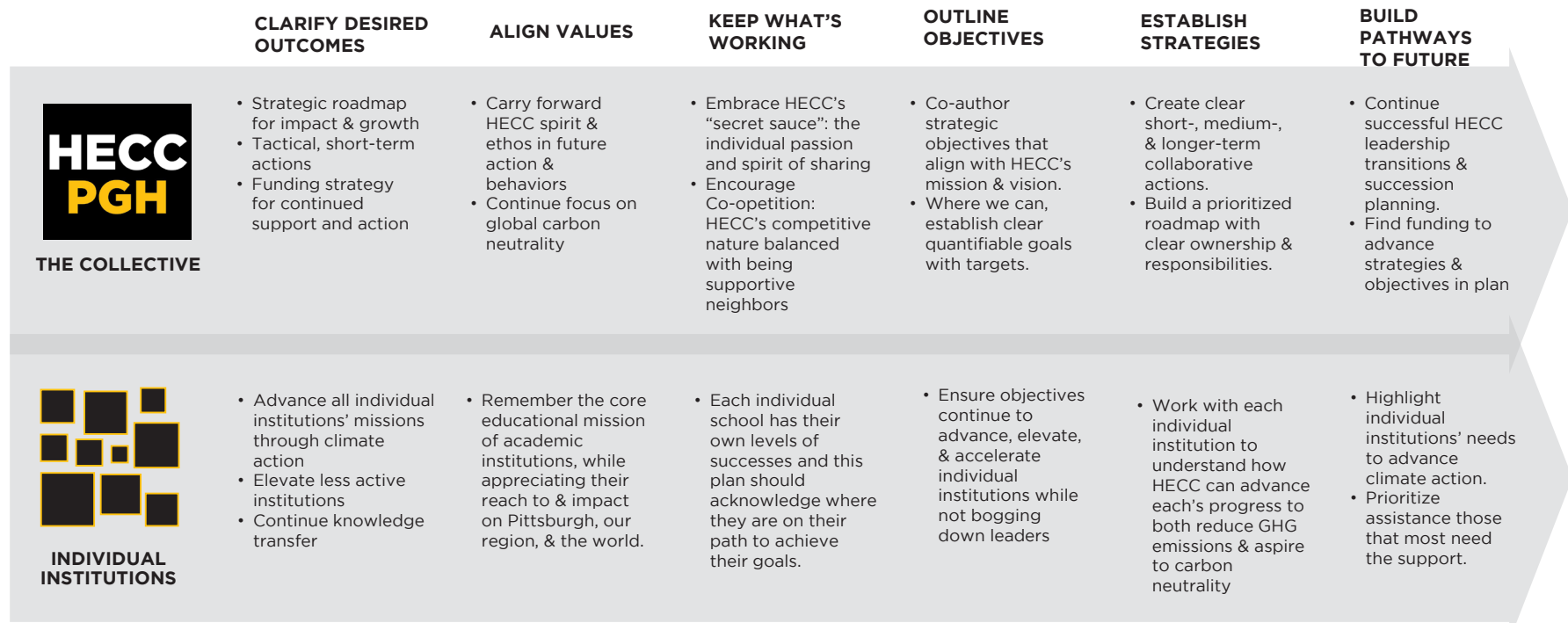


Figure 9: Approach to HECC Strategic Planning Effort

CLARIFYING DESIRED OUTCOMES

Starting in 2018, HECC discussions and the collective's progress indicated that a HECC strategic plan was required to determine how the collaborative continues to make forward progress that benefits the world, region, collaborative, and individual institutions. A conversational subtext indicated it was also critical to help individual schools advance climate action, including those less active in HECC. HECC member schools clearly appreciate the value each institution gains from continued knowledge transfer and storytelling that occurs naturally when the group gathers.

An important part of this planning effort was to continue to revisit these desired outcomes throughout the process to ensure we were finding the right balance between advancing the collective as well as individual institutions' goals.

ALIGNED VALUES

Early in the planning process, it was important to document the values that make HECC a model for cross-campus collaboration. HECC takes pride in and will consistently revisit these values to ensure our actions align with what we have set out to accomplish:

Collaborative: We hold a spirit of working together and sharing in a safe space.

Inspired: We are motivated by one another, recognizing that each of our institutions and their representatives brings exciting ideas to our collective.

Shared: We believe in honesty and non-judgment, creating spaces for sometimes difficult conversations.

Inclusive: We need to bring all campuses and communities with us on this journey.

Generous: We want to help our neighbors meet their goals as we advance ours.

Conscious: We are aware of the struggles and impacts we may have, both positive and negative.

Dedicated: The requirements of climate neutrality and environmental justice drive us.

Empathetic: We are intentionally working to fully understand the individuals, communities, and voices our decisions impact.

Impatient: We are running out of time, celebrating progress, and acknowledging incrementalism is a tension in this fight.

KEEP WHAT'S WORKING

A consistent message from HECC representatives throughout this strategic planning effort was to not lose the aspects of the collaborative that are working well now. Through engagement exercises and discussions, HECC should continue moving forward the following fundamental successes:

People: As with any collaborative, each individual has unique, recognized, and cherished value. HECC representatives are passionate, talented, and collaborative leaders in Pittsburgh and nationally. There is a breadth of strong experience, expertise, and/or connection to resources that is invaluable.

Cadence: Regular meetings are important to share updates, ideas, upcoming events, and more. HECC tries to meet quarterly. This frequency of in-person and (now) virtual gatherings is beneficial without over burdening representatives.

Storytelling: HECC provides a safe space for sharing. There is comfort in the ability for HECC representatives to be able to bring success and misses to this group. One HECC representative voiced comfort in a place “to complain about our struggles;” another added, “and find solutions to them together.” The new HECC website provides a central and public place for everyone’s story as well.

Strength in Numbers: HECC gives all members an ability to see outside of and across universities, including making goals for the collaborative. HECC inspires all who are involved to think bigger than the individual and single institution striving to keep up with those leading, while simultaneously ensuring each institution is continuing to make progress. There is also a real value in the ability to conduct high-level benchmarking and appreciate the outcomes and stories these numbers represent.

OUTLINE OBJECTIVES

Based on the values and assets identified through this planning process, a set of objectives were developed. These objectives align with HECC's mission and vision, while continuing to advance individual institutions' efforts. For each of the seven objectives, strategies have been identified to guide future action.

1 Help all universities meet minimum targets

Facilitate data collection, setting of climate commitments, and climate action planning while working as a collaborative to help all schools make progress.

2 Facilitate accessible knowledge transfer between universities in both operations and research

Build tools and processes to connect locally between our institutions as well as to national efforts.

3 Build more intentionality on equity and environmental justice

Elevate the core connections of climate to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice; create space and be intentional about advancing these topics within HECC moving forward.

4 Strengthen City connections

More directly connect with the City of Pittsburgh's administration to ensure consistent connections and active partnerships that guarantee achievement of shared equity and climate goals.

5 Enhance student connections and experiences

HECC institutions are education-centered; connect and elevate students focused on climate advocacy, action, analysis, and policy.

6 Elevate the power of the collaborative to leverage HECC positioning and influence

Bring together the influence and scale of HECC to increase awareness and accelerate impact with nonprofits, private-sector partners, and vendors.

7 Celebrate innovation and wins

Continue the spirit of co-opetition. Tell our stories and embrace our successes internally and to the world.

OBJECTIVE 1: HELP ALL UNIVERSITIES MEET MINIMUM TARGETS

Set minimum thresholds for climate and work as a collaborative to help all schools make progress.

HECC is about coming together and amplifying efforts. There is great value for all entities (those leading and those gaining traction) to elevate each other and be part of a larger story and impact. Core to HECC is helping all entities establish minimum climate action activities and targets. Success will be continuing to advance those schools gaining momentum in climate action while adding new climate commitments each year.

In the spirit of 'co-opetition', HECC members have found the balance between cooperation and competition. HECC members are eager to contribute across institutions to help all universities start regular data collection that supports setting climate reduction targets and strategic action approaches. HECC members also appreciate a sprightly sense of competition and challenge each other to set stretch targets and reach further, faster.

STRATEGIES

Each Individual Institution:

1. Join Pittsburgh's 2030 District by committing to its building-centered climate reduction targets
2. Create baseline GHG inventories and commitment to regular GHG inventory updates
3. Create outward-facing climate action plans with GHG emissions reductions targets and dates
4. Encourage setting carbon neutrality targets by 2050 or sooner, including signing Second Nature's Carbon or Climate Commitments
5. Join the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), which serves as most HECC members primary professional organization.

Collective:

1. Aim for 100% commitment from all universities on our project status table (i.e., the matrix in Figure 4 is filled with checkmarks!).

SUCCESS STORY

Through HECC representative Marcel Minutolo's introduction, a group of HECC representatives joined Marcel in a meeting with (then Interim, now) President Patrick at Robert Morris University (RMU) to discuss the importance of HECC and share stories applicable to RMU's climate action journey. As catalytic next steps on climate action, RMU is now committed to joining AASHE and the Pittsburgh 2030 District. They are also working internally to help define how sustainability should be integrated within the next strategic plan.

OBJECTIVE 2: FACILITATE ACCESSIBLE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN OPERATIONS AND RESEARCH

Build tools and processes to connect locally between our institutions as well to national efforts.

The greatest HECC asset is the knowledge embedded in its member individuals advancing climate action. There is a wealth of information from lessons learned and stories to pull from, plus a willingness to share.

Knowledge sharing is one of HECC's core accomplishments and must continue. HECC doesn't just include subject matter experts offering their knowledge; it is the face-to-face stories that only experienced (and sometimes battle-scarred) professionals can offer. It is this regular and safe space to share stories that is critically important to forward progress.

HECC meetings allow universities to share successes and challenges. Typical HECC meetings start or end with a round robin share a successful or positive advancements of climate action on each campus. In addition, meetings typically include university-to-university sharing sessions on subjects that a HECC member requested be shared or wanted to learn more about.

Because regular HECC meetings are such a successful means of knowledge transfer, there is a need to expand the circle of those who benefit, while keeping the spirit of these safe, shared spaces. Building from the existing Pittsburgh 2030 District program (in which most HECC members are also engaged) is an obvious opportunity. However, bringing more research from HECC members institutions to the Pittsburgh 2030 District is also an opportunity.

STRATEGIES

1. Encourage University participation in monthly Pittsburgh 2030 District partner meetings through attendance or group presentations.
2. Establish continued discussion with HECC research cohort to explore best ways to utilize HECC to connect researchers across universities.
3. Translate research outcomes to those who can most benefit, such as an annual HECC symposium.
4. Establish a HECC knowledge sharing tracker, a living tool for topics and knowledge-sharing events.

5. Utilize the wealth of information on climate tracking and action available from AASHE and Second Nature; ensure all Universities have access.
6. Continue quarterly HECC meetings and regular knowledge sharing; ensure future discussions balance high-level wins, detailed subject matter expertise from within the Pittsburgh higher education community, forward looking and innovative opportunities, and pragmatic solutions to all schools' challenges.

SUCCESS STORY

Duquesne University (DU) is forming their Sustainability Committee to bring together cross-campus leaders, stakeholders, and decision-makers. Creating governance is key to advance decision making in climate action and broader sustainability at DU. In support of their new direction, DU has worked closely with other HECC members instrumental in establishing Sustainability Committees at other institutions. Cross-departmental and formal Sustainability Committees have helped set strategy, targets, and approach at both CMU and Pitt. Through HECC, DU has access to charters, governance structures, and lessons learned from others' journeys.

OBJECTIVE 3: BUILD MORE INTENTIONALITY ON EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

Elevate the core connections of climate to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice and create space and voices to advance these topics within HECC moving forward.

To advance equity and environmental justice in our work, HECC aims to advance strategies in four primary areas: our culture and values; our planning processes; our community connections; our education and knowledge transfer.

HECC also acknowledges that there are resources available to support this work. In further exploring diversity, equity, and inclusion in climate action, HECC members met with Climate Reality Project (CRP) representatives, who shared what they are doing to advance climate equity regionally — and offered opportunities for connecting work.

Though not DEI-related, many HECC representatives have also attended national CRP climate education trainings (including one held in Pittsburgh in 2017 with former Vice President Al Gore)— and some are active with the Pittsburgh CRP chapter.

STRATEGIES

1. Find the spaces and places for discussions, sharing, and advancement of issues core to the intersection of climate impact, equity, environmental justice.
2. Ensure every potential partner and collaborator understands and complements our commitment to equity in climate action.
3. Include diverse perspectives and voices in this HECC strategic planning process, future planning, and implementation efforts.
4. Explore cohorts of connected experts across universities to advance this effort.
5. Acknowledge both the positive outcomes and potential negative impacts of climate action, working to avoid and minimize the latter.
6. Leverage and amplify the equity and environmental justice efforts of our respective institutions' diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and offices.
7. Support regional just transition discussions and efforts.
8. Support and advance efforts and programs that help to translate HECC work and climate-focused research to communities in a means they can engage with and access it.
9. Leverage, connect, and highlight HECC member research related to the intersectionality of climate and environmental justice locally, nationally, and globally.
10. Thoughtfully connect to the work of nonprofits, think tanks, and community groups whose missions are aligned to these issues.

OBJECTIVE 4: STRENGTHEN CITY CONNECTIONS

More directly connect with the City of Pittsburgh's administration to ensure consistent connections and active partnerships that guarantee achievement of shared equity and climate goals.

Historically, HECC activities have been supportive of and aimed to advance the City of Pittsburgh's climate goals. As integral members of the 2006-07 Green Government Task Force (initiated by the City of Pittsburgh), HECC representatives helped author the City's first, second, and third Climate Action Plans.

In its [Climate Action Plan 3.0](#) (CAP 3.0), the City of Pittsburgh expanded and adopted the following climate goals, which are aligned with HECC institutions' goals: 20% GHG emissions reduction by 2023; 50% GHG emissions reduction by 2030; and 80% GHG emissions reduction by 2050. In [2021](#), the City also committed to carbon neutrality by 2050. This alignment of goals creates a natural opportunity for collaboration and connection.

As highlighted in this document, HECC members understand the critical intersection of climate action and equity, Strengthening HECC-City connections provides the opportunity to accelerate shared goals.

The City's Office of Equity "seeks to normalize social and racial equity within city government and our communities... staff works closely with community partners, government agencies, experts and communities to inform and implement equitable policies, programs, procedures and expenditures to make Pittsburgh a community for all." Additionally, the City's [2022 Transition Report](#) calls attention to both climate action and equity in its recommendations and highlights that in City Planning, "sustainability and equity should be an umbrella over all".

STRATEGIES

1. Continue to support annual City of Pittsburgh GHG inventories, including alignment with HECC data tracking and goal achievement.
2. Support implementation and evolution of the City of Pittsburgh's Climate Action Plans, including a higher education-focused section and goals.
3. Highlight the intersection of the City's equity work with its climate action goals.
4. Develop collaborative climate action strategies that harness the power of local government and higher education.

OBJECTIVE 5: ENHANCE STUDENT CONNECTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

HECC institutions are education-centered; connect and elevate students focused on climate advocacy, action, analysis, and policy.

Students play an integral role in higher education climate action. On every campus, students are the largest portion of the campus community -- and take the climate emergency seriously. The very existence of HECC indicates that HECC members have understood the urgent pressure of climate change for 15+ years; ensuring a healthy planet and equitable future for all means we must connect to and find motivation from student energy and perspectives about climate action.

Simultaneously, HECC institutions are helping educate students as our future sustainability professionals and responsible global citizens. With every job being a climate job, HECC must connect students across the region to enhance their academic, civic, and professional experiences relating to climate action.

In this vein, HECC can approach student collaboration from multiple angles. We have already started mapping existing student-led climate initiatives among HECC member. HECC can also identify common interests and goals of students. Then build upon proven successes of connecting faculty and staff and facilitate connections across campuses that amplify and focus those student-led efforts. HECC's student engagement can include student organizations, research, career preparation, and civic engagement. HECC has also already engaged students directly in its strategic planning and operations via two 2022-23 HECC Fellow positions.

STRATEGIES

1. Evaluate the need for student collaboration and assess how it benefits students.
2. Continue student representation within HECC through HECC Fellow funding from local and national sources
3. Convene students across universities for sharing and network building.
4. Find project opportunities to leverage multi-school resources and impacts.

SUCCESS STORIES

Assessing Student's Interests and Desire for Collaboration

Rather than making assumptions about what students want, HECC asked students directly what aspects of climate action interest them, whether they have collaborated with their or other institutions in the past, and what future collaboration would best serve them. In November and December 2022, a survey was distributed by HECC Representatives at each HECC Member Schools. Questions addressed how students are already getting involved in climate action, which academic disciplines they are pursuing, and inquiry about ideas of how HECC can support students. Finding commonalities across HECC Members will allow HECC to form new connections and optimize its student engagement.

Results indicated over 65% of students would be interested in collaborating with students from other institutions on climate action. Another 25% said it would depend on the type of collaboration. Interest in climate action ranged across many topics, but climate justice and social equity were the most popular.

Smeal MBA Sustainability Case Competition

In Fall 2022, a HECC Fellow formed a graduate student team with representatives from multiple HECC Member Schools to compete in the Penn State Smeal College of Business MBA Sustainability Case Competition. The team consisted of students from Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham University, and University of Pittsburgh. The case competition focused on the business response to climate change, specifically examining whether carbon offsets play a reliable role in combatting climate change. The participants reported having a positive experience working with students from other institutions. Moving forward, HECC hopes to continue amplifying HECC member events that allow for student collaboration.

OBJECTIVE 6: ELEVATE THE POWER OF THE COLLABORATIVE TO LEVERAGE HECC POSITIONING & INFLUENCE

Bring together the influence and scale of HECC to increase awareness and accelerate impact with nonprofits, private-sector partners, and vendors.

Institutions of higher education that are advancing climate action within their campus(es) and communities recognize the importance of partnerships, collaboration, and cooperation. There is a value for all entities participating in HECC (those leading and those gaining traction) to connect, to listen, to join, to share, and to act, together. Individuals and their schools can leverage the power of the collaborative.

There is an acknowledgment of the need for HECC to connect to community partners who are also advancing climate action; Appendix B lists nonprofit organizations and community groups that HECC members work with in a variety of forms to accelerate climate action and related objectives. HECC aims to explore and organize partnerships with impactful Pittsburgh-region nonprofits – both existing and emerging.

From the start, Green Building Alliance (GBA, supporter of this planning effort) has been HECC's strongest partner. GBA is a longtime Pittsburgh climate leader, original HECC convener, technical green building partner, and facilitator of the Pittsburgh 2030 District.

A few other strong, local nonprofit partners include:

1. **Sustainable Pittsburgh** – Convener of local sustainability practitioners, they also provide sustainability-focused designations for local workplaces and restaurants that HECC partners participate in. sustainablepittsburgh.org
2. **BikePGH** – Over 20 years, BikePGH has helped make walking and biking commonplace for all Pittsburghers, including by transforming streets and activating university communities. bikepgh.org
3. **POGOH** – Pittsburgh's nonprofit bike share system helps residents, students, and visitors take active trips around Pittsburgh. Depending on location, HECC member students and employees utilize the system frequently. pogoh.com
4. **Tree Pittsburgh** – Protecting and restoring the urban forest through tree planting and care, education, advocacy, and land conservation. Their work motivates HECC member students while providing local carbon sequestration. treepittsburgh.org

In the private sector, HECC members are partnering with a wide variety of product and service vendors and other companies who are eager to connect to and within the higher educational ecosystem.

One of HECC's greatest opportunities is leveraging the purchasing power of the collective. Over the years, HECC members have discussed collaborative green power and renewable energy credit purchasing. To date, the complications associated with shared procurement have been insurmountable, given varying procurement policies and timeframes across universities. However, harnessing this type of thinking could have great economies of scale for HECC members – and benefit for the region and planet. In addition to shared purchasing, leveraging the power of the HECC collaborative could support efforts focused on mobility, carbon offsets, food systems, and more.

STRATEGIES

1. Create quarterly explorations with key nonprofit groups to find shared opportunities to advance missions.
2. Establish protocols to bring HECC purchasing opportunities to the group for vetting and explorations to utilize the collaborative for scaled impact.
3. Explore ways to support collective work across the climate action spectrum, such as electricity, mobility, and carbon offsets.

OBJECTIVE 7: CELEBRATE INNOVATION AND WINS

Continue the spirit of co-opetition. Tell our stories and embrace our successes internally and to the world.

As previously mentioned, HECC has and will continue to embrace a spirit of “co-opetition,” a healthy mix of cooperation and competition. Cross-campus storytelling and celebration of accomplishments has been part of Pittsburgh’s DNA. In 2008, a grant from The Heinz Endowments encouraged CMU, Duquesne, and Pitt to advance sustainability on university campuses. In addition to funding new classes incorporating sustainability concepts, Pitt hosted a multi-university Student Sustainability Symposium to showcase student sustainability efforts alongside university-wide sustainability initiatives and progress. This cross-campus symposium unfortunately only occurred twice; however, inspired by the experience, Pitt has held its own Student Sustainability Symposium every semester since, highlighting student course projects and annual awards.

To assist with sharing HECC successes with the world, in 2021 a new HECC brand was established and rolled out across a fresh HECC website and Twitter account. While these are a starting point, the website and social media account need attention to stay relevant, updated, and to actively push stories to HECC members and the public.

STRATEGIES

1. Explore a city-wide higher education climate symposium with annual HECC awards, including for research and leadership.
2. Promote HECC cross-campus research and operational activities nationally.
3. Keep the tone of ‘all wins are important’. Encourage sharing of all universities’ efforts.
4. Continue to build on-line and social media presence.

SUCCESS STORIES

HECC at the 2020 Higher Education Climate Leadership Summit in Atlanta

In February 2020, HECC representatives led a national conversation on “Collaborative Models to Scale Up Climate Action and Resiliency Efforts.” Aurora Sharrard (Executive Director of Sustainability at the University of Pittsburgh, representing HECC) was joined by Dennis Carlberg (Sustainability Director at Boston University representing the Boston Green Ribbon Commission) and Ciannat Howett (Director of Sustainability Initiatives at Emory University, representing Atlanta-local collaboratives and cross institutional water efforts).

This discussion included a panel and interactive working session which highlighted national collaboratives in which partnerships were established for compounded benefits. Stories from Pittsburgh, Atlanta, and Boston helped attendees think beyond their campus boundaries and traditional approaches to address issues surrounding climate change.



PATHWAYS

BUILD PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE

HECC to date has been nimble, relying on leaders and their dedication and time. HECC has also punched above its weight as a collaborative with limited to no funding.

Modest resources are needed to foster the connective tissue that is HECC, which benefits HECC members. Yes, Institutions can and should invest in climate action in their own operations, but investment is also needed for the HECC community to think beyond individual / campus walls. HECC is a powerful tool that can advance the individual, the collective, and Pittsburgh at large. HECC is invaluable to its members and a powerful tool for our City.

To sustain as a collaboration, HECC needs to retain its strong bonds; this can be managed with simple housekeeping, guidance, organization, and administration. In addition, HECC requires some facilitation for sustained knowledge transfer. HECC representatives are eager to take advantage of and provide expertise, but need the space and regular cadence of in-person meetings to enable that transfer. Additionally, many HECC representatives and institutions could flourish with technical advisory and assistance to advance their climate action agendas.

HECC is exploring various funding models recognizing the value for all institutions in this to advance together and leverage the whole; regardless of these, funding is required to make the progress our planet requires.

WHAT DOES HECC NEED?

- A. Consistent and Dedicated Convener** = “Just being in the same room” is one of the values most often voiced by HECC members. A dedicated and emotionally- invested convener is needed to schedule bimonthly meetings, organize virtual and in-person spaces, engage the group to build consensus and direction, drive agendas, and ensure progress is made between meetings. More regular HECC meetings would allow for storytelling, sharing best practices, and the advancement of Pittsburgh-specific climate and higher education issues, while more deeply exploring collaboration opportunities across universities. This convening could also include facilitating gatherings for students and researchers.
- B. Subject Matter Expert (SME) on Greenhouse Gas Inventories and Climate Action Planning** = Some universities have formal commitments to GHG emissions tracking, GHG emissions reductions, and Climate Action Plans; however, most do not have the internal resources, technical knowledge, and/or partnerships to advance this work. HECC needs a shared resource to bring the smaller and less-resourced universities into a consistent GHG inventory process and high-level climate planning. A SME is needed to create a robust city-wide university benchmark and activity framework to establish activities, GHG emissions measurements and reductions, shared and normalized metrics, and momentum for action on individual campuses and for the collective.
- C. Implementation of the Strategic Plan** = While some of the objectives and strategies highlighted in this plan can be accomplished with little to no funding, many of the goals require additional funding support to properly enact and carryout.

WHAT DO INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS NEED?

A. Data inventories and climate action plans for all schools

- Getting started on Scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions estimates
- Build normalized GHG emissions data over time (i.e., by FTE, square footage, etc.)
- Benchmarking GHG emissions, reduction targets, and climate action planning against other schools
- Tell energy and/or transportation-related stories
- Aligning climate action plans to institutional strategic directions and growth

B. Messaging on current efforts and why they matter

- Get the word out on existing climate action efforts
- Tell energy or transportation-related stories
- Support with developing graphics, website content, videos, communications, etc.
- Benchmarking climate action and communications against other schools

C. Pan-campus engagement on issues related to climate, equity, and environmental justice

- Workshops, charettes, and/or town halls
- Surveys setting baselines and gauging campus communities on interests and aspirations
- Spaces and places to challenge ideas and have difficult discussions about action and progress

D. Education on key climate change, adaptation, and resilience issues affecting campus communities and the Pittsburgh region

- GHG emissions and climate action 101, 201, 301, etc.
- Lectures and connections to subject matter experts
- Links to higher education sector resources and papers (AASHE, Second Nature, etc).
- Links to research and think tank climate action resources and papers (GreenBiz, Rand Corporation, etc.)

E. Enabling, Positioning, & Buy-in

- Making the case for HECC resources alongside climate-focused resources and hires for individual institutions
- Facilitate in-person discussions with individual institution's leadership about climate commitments and their alignment with strategic direction of the University.
- Make the case for making commitments, taking action, and setting targets peer-to-peer (leadership to leadership, facilities to facilities, etc.).

APPENDICES

- A. HISTORICAL LIST OF HECC CHAIR LEADERSHIP & FUNDING PARTNERS**
- B. HECC NONPROFIT COLLABORATORS**
- C. STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AND ENGAGEMENT**
- D. REPORT TERMINOLOGY (GLOSSARY)**
- E. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

APPENDIX A: HISTORICAL LIST OF HECC CHAIR LEADERSHIP & FUNDING PARTNERS

The following list was built according to the knowledge currently available.

Year	Funding Partner	HECC Chair(s)	Fellow(s)
2008	Surdna Foundation via GBA for Pittsburgh Climate Initiative	Aurora Sharrard, GBA (Convener) Deb Lange, Carnegie Mellon University Stan Kabala, Duquesne University Lisa Kunst Vavro, Chatham University	-
2009			Miriam Parson*
2010	Student Conservation Association via matching grants for Fellow facilitation & coordination		
2011			John Jameson*
2012			
2013		Laura Zullo, University of Pittsburgh Mary Whitney, Chatham University Barb Kviz, Carnegie Mellon University Elaine Sadowski, CCAC	Megan E. Davis*
2014			Megan E. Davis* Faith Nicholas*
2015			Faith Nicholas*
2016			Michelle Cong*
2017		Erika Ninos, University of Pittsburgh Mary Whitney, Chatham University	Michelle Cong*
2018			-
2019		Aurora Sharrard, University of Pittsburgh Mary Kate Ranii, Duquesne University	-
2020			-
2021			-
2022	Hillman Family Foundation via GBA Second Nature (Acceleration Grant) via Chatham University	Aurora Sharrard, University of Pittsburgh Marcel Minutolo, Robert Morris University	Alyssa Martinec, Labdhi Kagdi

*HECC Fellows via Student Conservation Association (SCA) Green Cities Corps program

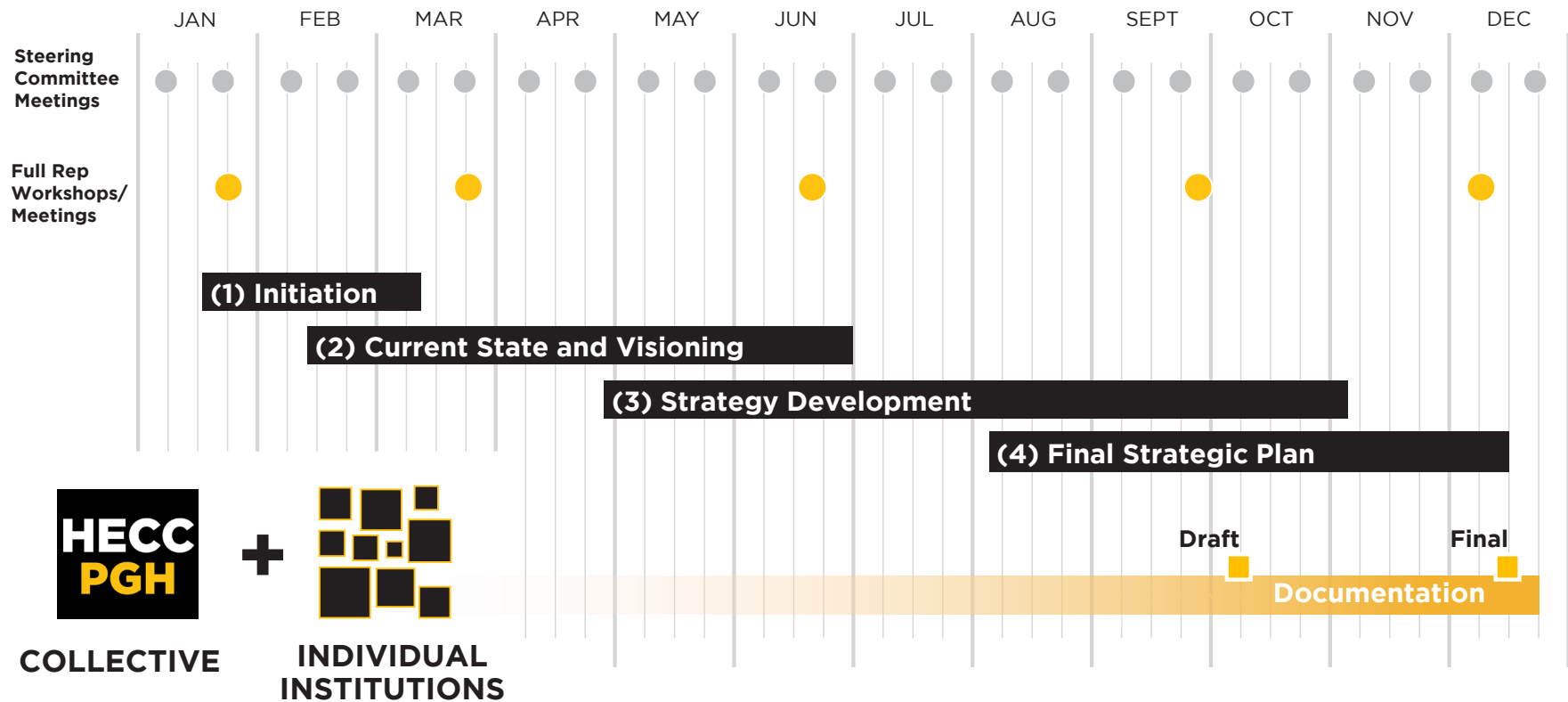
APPENDIX B: HECC NONPROFIT COLLABORATORS

The following list was generated at a 2022 HECC Rep meeting based on input from attendees:

Nonprofit Organization	Link
350.org	world.350.org/pittsburgh
African American Chamber of Commerce	aaccwp.com
AIA Pittsburgh	alapgh.org
Allegheny Conference on Community Development	alleghenyconference.org
Allegheny County Health Department	alleghenycounty.us/healthdepartment/index.aspx
BikePGH	bikepgh.org
Breathe Project	breatheproject.org
Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future	pennfuture.org
Climate Reality Project	climaterealityproject.org
Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC)	cotraic.org
Free Ride Pittsburgh	freeridepgh.org
Global Links	globallinks.org
Green Building Alliance (GBA)	gba.org
Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP)	gasp-pgh.org
Hazelwood Initiative	hazelwoodinitiative.org
Hispanic Community Affairs Council	hcac-ac.org
NAIOP Pittsburgh	naioppittsburgh.com
National Association of Black Engineers, Pittsburgh Chapter	pghnsbe.org
New Sun Rising	newsunrising.org
Northside Chamber of Commerce	northsidechamberofcommerce.com
Oakland Business Improvement District (OBID)	oaklandpittsburgh.com
Oakland Planning and Development Corporation (OPDC)	opdc.org
Oakland Transportation Management Association (OTMA)	otma-pgh.org
Oasis Farm and Fishery	oasisfarmandfishery.org
Omicelo Cares	omicelocares.org
Operation Better Block	homewood-collaborative.org/the-homewood-collaborative/operation-better-block/
Pennsylvania Resources Council	prc.org
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy	pittsburghparks.org
Pittsburgh Regional Transit	rideprt.org
POGOH Bike Share	pogoh.com
Rebuilding Together	rtpittsburgh.org
Riverlife Pittsburgh	riverlifepgh.org
Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission	spcregion.org
Student Conservation Association	thesca.org
Sustainable Pittsburgh	sustainablepittsburgh.org
Uptown Taskforce	uptowntaskforce.org
Venture Outdoors	ventureoutdoors.org
Wilksburg Community Development Corporation	wilksburgcdc.org

APPENDIX C: STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT

In 2021, the Higher Education Climate Consortium (HECC) of Pittsburgh was awarded a grant from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation. Green Building Alliance is the fiscal sponsor and project management team; local consultancy (BUSS) was engaged to support GBA and HECC in a ten-month strategic planning process.





Images from 2022 HECC Planning Workshops and Discussions

APPENDIX D: REPORT TERMINOLOGY (GLOSSARY)

HECC – The Higher Education Climate Consortium is a voluntary collaborative of like-minded local Pittsburgh higher education leaders advancing climate action at their institutions, in the Pittsburgh region, and nationally.

HECC Co-Chairs – Rotating slate of two (2) HECC representatives who guide and coordinate HECC-related activities.

HECC Fellows – Past and present individuals supporting HECC’s collaboration (i.e., Americorps and/or graduate students).

HECC Members – Pittsburgh region colleges and universities that participate in HECC meetings, discussions, and initiatives.

HECC Representatives – The individuals from the member schools that participate in HECC-related activities; each member generally has a primary point of contact, though several HECC Members regularly have a number of representatives across departments and expertise (e.g., operational staff, faculty, students, etc.).

HECC Steering Committee – Three (3) HECC representatives advancing this strategic planning effort.

APPENDIX E: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

* HECC Co-Chairs 2022
(Bold) Primary HECC Contact
(Blue) Steering Committee for Strategic Plan
 for Equitable Climate Action

HECC MEMBER SCHOOLS & REPRESENTATIVES

HECC Member School	Name	Title
Carlow University	Emily Gaspich	Director of Capital Planning
Carnegie Mellon University	Steven A. Guenther	Assistant Vice President for Facilities Management and Campus Services & University Engineer
	Deborah Steinberg	Green Practices and Sustainability Manager
	Martin H. Altschul	Director of Strategic Facilities Initiatives
	Alexandra Hiniker	Director of Sustainability Initiatives
Chatham University	Mary Whitney	Sustainability Director
Community College of Allegheny County	Carlo Vazquez	Chief Facilities Officer
	Devin Wilson	Assistant Vice President of Facilities Moved to Chatham University as Director of Facilities in Fall of 2022
Duquesne University	Mary Ranii	Graduate Program Coordinator & Program Administrator
	John Stolz	Director, Center for Environmental Research and Education
	Philip Reeder	Professor, Bayer School of Natural and Environmental Sciences
	Maria Mlinarcik	Graduate Assistant
Penn State Center - Pittsburgh	Tom Bartnik	Director of Penn State Center Pittsburgh
Robert Morris University	Marcel Minutolo*	Professor of Strategic Management
	Tim Kirsch	Senior Director, Maintenance & Operations
	Matthew Hyatt	Associate Director of Facilities and Maintenance
University of Pittsburgh	Aurora Sharrard*	Executive Director of Sustainability
	Samantha Chan	Assistant Director of Sustainability
	Nick Goodfellow	Sustainability Coordinator, Business & Auxiliaries
Point Park University	Chris Hill	Vice President of Operations, Physical Plant
La Roche University	JR Young	Associate Vice President for Facilities Management

LEAD PARTNER & FISCAL SPONSOR

Green Building Alliance

Megan Zeigler, *Vice President of Planning & Policy*

Chris Cieslak, *Chief Operating Officer, Vice President of Programs*



FOUNDATION PARTNER

Henry L. Hillman Foundation



CITY PARTNER

City of Pittsburgh

Sarah Yeager, *Climate and Energy Planner (Left City in November 2022)*

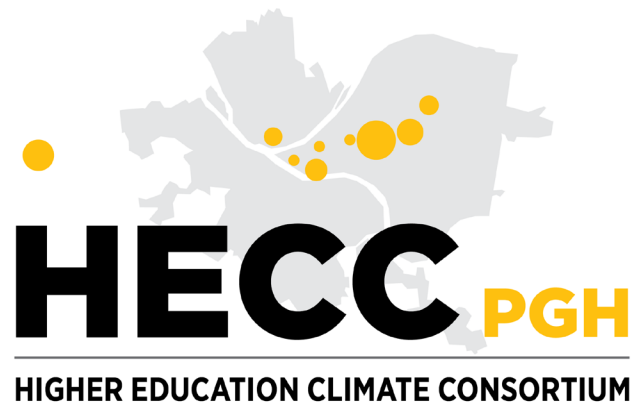
Flore Marion, *Energy Advisor*



CONSULTANT

Steven Baumgartner, *Director and Founder*, Baumgartner Urban Systems Strategy ([BUSS](#)).





STRATEGIC PLAN FOR EQUITABLE CLIMATE ACTION

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