Portland
City Auditor

Climate Justice Audit

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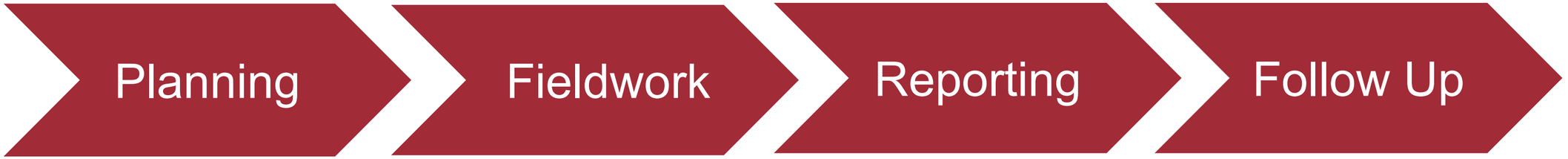
Portland City Auditor
Audit Services

We develop the audit schedule by soliciting ideas and analyzing them for potential risks

- Collect ideas
- Discuss with community
- Analyze for risk
- Finalize and share schedule publicly in June

The audit process



Source: Audit Services visualization of the audit process.

Audit Objectives

- How has the City prioritized and coordinated climate actions within the 2022 Climate Emergency Workplan?
- To what extent to has the City considered impacts to community for the 2022 Climate Emergency Workplan?
- To what extent has the City integrated community involvement into its climate action work for the 2022 Climate Emergency Workplan?

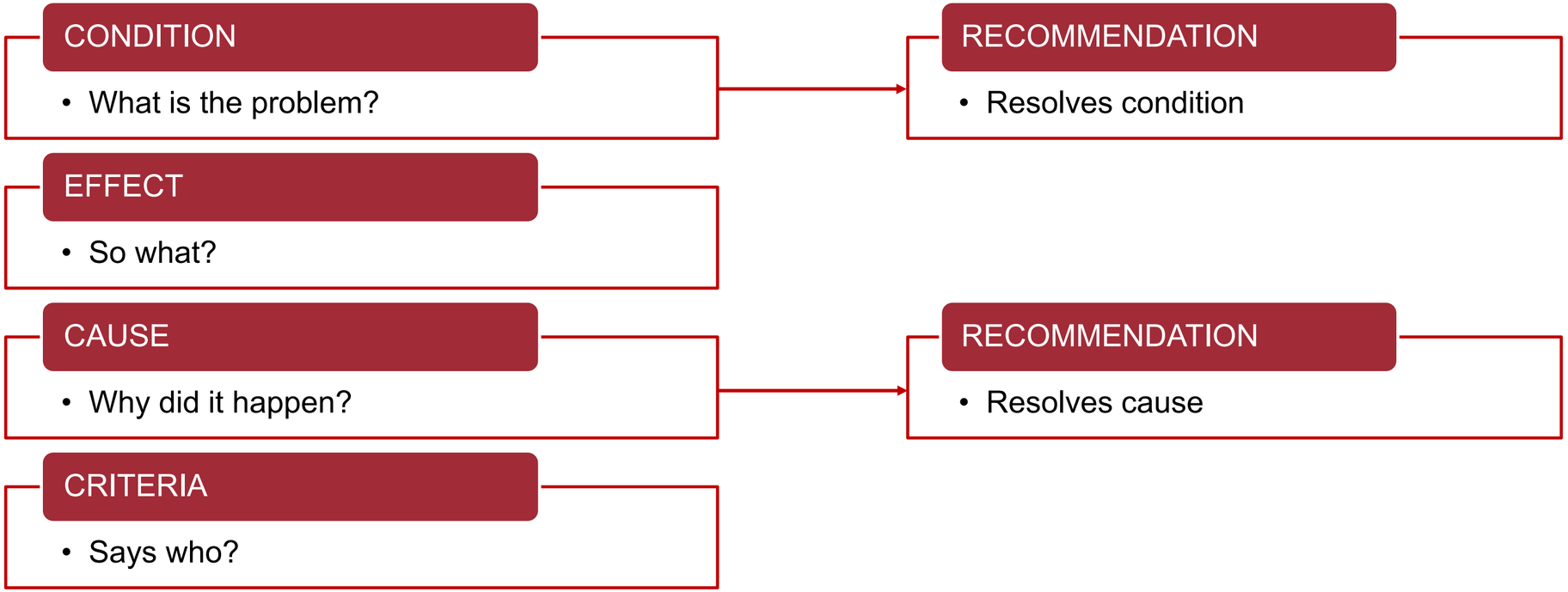
How we gathered evidence

- Interviewed City management and staff and community-based organizations
- Reviewed documentation related to community feedback, community created regional climate goals, City plans, the 2020 Climate Emergency Declaration, and the 2022 Climate Emergency Workplan
- Reviewed best practices for climate planning and government management

We used best practices as audit criteria

- UN-Habitat's Guiding Principles for City Climate Action Planning
- C40 Cities Climate Transition Framework; C40 Climate Action Planning Guide
- The Fifth National Climate Assessment
- National Association of Climate Resilience Planners (NACRP) Framework
- Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO)
- Government Finance Officers Association

Elements of an audit finding



Source: Audit Services visualization of the elements of a finding.

Overview of Audit Results

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Some recommendations will require work from the Sustainability and Climate Commission

- Recommendations 1 and 2 are directed to the City Administrator
- Recommendations 3, 4 and 5 direct the Chief Sustainability Officer and Engagement Officer to work with the Sustainability and Climate Commission

Centralized authority and defined coordination structures could help the City follow through on climate commitments

- City leadership did not effectively authorize a mechanism to hold bureaus accountable for climate work
- The 2022 Plan does not clearly define an organizational structure for bureaus to coordinate climate work
- The City's transition to a new form of government presents an opportunity to formalize organizational structures for coordinating climate work

Recommendation 1

To ensure the City follows through on climate commitments:

The City Administrator or a designee should provide centralized leadership and direction to help ensure the climate action plan is implemented. The City Administrator or a designee should also help define structures and mechanisms for effective coordination across the City to implement the plan.

A realistic funding plan could help the City prioritize its climate work

- Ongoing financial constraints make it challenging for the City to fund its climate work
- Focusing on climate action while making budget decisions is one of the City's stated values but it is not fully integrated into the budget process
- The best practice of climate budgeting could help to ensure there is a realistic funding plan for climate work

Recommendation 2

To ensure the City follows through on climate commitments:

The City Administrator in conjunction with the Mayor and other City leadership, should factor in climate cost considerations, especially related to delayed action with respect to life and safety risks, as well as financial costs, during the budget process.

Developing a climate adaptation strategy could help the City more effectively address community impacts, especially for on the most vulnerable

- The 2022 Plan does not have specific goals for climate adaptation (making communities more resilient to impacts of climate change)
- The City conducts climate adaptation work, like expanding tree planting, but a defined strategy could help improve effectiveness
- A Climate Change Risk Assessment and input from community groups can help the City to identify effective goals and strategies

Recommendation 3

To more effectively address community climate impacts:

The Chief Sustainability Officer should work with the Sustainability and Climate Commission to ensure the new climate action plan includes goals and strategies to address climate adaptation in a way that is integrated with work focused on climate mitigation. The results of the Climate Change Risk Assessment and community engagement should help inform this work.

Increased transparency could help build trust with external groups and ensure climate actions are implemented

- It is important for climate action planning to be transparent because there are many groups with an interest in or ability to influence climate action
- Transparently communicating how the City chooses and prioritizes climate actions could help build trust by demonstrating that decision-making is fair in how actions were chosen or prioritized
- Describing climate actions in more detail could also help ensure internal and external groups have enough information to implement actions

Recommendation 4

To build trust with external groups and enable achieving climate goals:

The Chief Sustainability Officer should work with the Sustainability and Climate Commission to develop a prioritization framework that ensures the next climate action plan is transparent about how actions in the plan were chosen and prioritized, while continuing to monitor progress on the Climate Emergency Workplan until the new plan is in place. The new plan should:

a) Provide sufficient detail to facilitate bureau actions and coordination.

b) Transparently communicate the multiple criteria to enable identifying actions that advance several goals at once, or that may benefit one goal while creating tradeoffs for another.

A community engagement strategy could help the City achieve its climate goals

- The City included limited community input while developing the 2022 Plan
- Developing a strategy to address engagement challenges can help community engagement to be more meaningful and have more impact
- The Sustainability and Climate Commission structure offers a new opportunity for engaging community for the next climate action plan

Recommendation 5

To build trust with external groups and enable achieving climate goals:

The Engagement Officer and the Chief Sustainability Officer should work with the Sustainability and Climate Commission to develop a community engagement strategy that enables community engagement, especially among frontline communities, at all stages of climate action work. The strategy should:

a) Consider whether community groups receive adequate resources for their involvement.

b) Integrate work the community has already been involved in.

Potential resources for implementation

Recommendation 3

- C40 Climate Action Planning Guide: Identifying adaptation strategies

Recommendation 4

- UN-Habitat Guiding Principles for City Climate Action Planning: Strategies and Actions section

Recommendation 5

- C40 Climate Action Planning Guide: Stakeholder engagement
- UN-Habitat Guiding Principles for City Climate Action Planning: Organization and Participation section

Questions and Discussion

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