

Stakeholder Climate Neutrality Audit

Achieving climate neutrality requires cities to move beyond general stakeholder engagement and develop a clear understanding of which actors have the greatest influence on emissions, investment decisions, innovation capacity, and implementation potential. The Stakeholder Climate Neutrality Audit is a structured assessment tool designed to evaluate the readiness, capacity, and commitment of stakeholders to contribute to the Climate City Contract (CCC) and the city's climate-neutrality pathway.

The audit builds upon stakeholder ecosystem mapping, which serves as a strategic process for identifying, visualising, and understanding the roles, relationships, influence, and interests of actors involved in the urban transition. While ecosystem mapping answers the question *“Who are the relevant stakeholders and how are they connected?”*, the Climate Neutrality Audit addresses the next critical question: *“How prepared and capable are these stakeholders to actively contribute to climate neutrality?”*

Objectives of the Audit

The primary objective of the Stakeholder Climate Neutrality Audit is to provide evidence-based insights that support stakeholder engagement, commitment-building, and implementation planning. Specifically, the audit aims to:

- Assess stakeholders' climate maturity and understanding of climate-neutrality objectives.
- Evaluate their influence on greenhouse gas emissions and their capacity to contribute to emissions reduction.
- Identify innovation potential, investment capacity, and implementation capabilities.
- Analyse willingness and readiness to participate in Climate City Contract actions.
- Detect barriers, risks, and opportunities that may affect stakeholder participation.
- Support the development of tailored engagement and partnership strategies.

Stakeholder Audit Step by Step

A Stakeholder Climate Neutrality Audit should be implemented as a structured and participatory process that combines stakeholder analysis, engagement, assessment, and validation. Rather than functioning as a compliance audit, its purpose is to understand the readiness, influence, capacities, and commitment of key actors to contribute to the city's climate-neutrality transition and Climate City Contract (CCC).

Step 1: Stakeholder Ecosystem Mapping

Objective: Identify all relevant stakeholders that influence, contribute to, or are affected by the city's climate-neutrality transition.

Key Activities

- Conduct a stakeholder mapping workshop involving representatives from different sectors.
- Review existing city strategies, plans, partnerships, and projects.
- Identify stakeholders from:
 - Municipal departments and public agencies
 - Utilities and infrastructure providers
 - Private sector and business associations
 - Universities and research institutions
 - NGOs and civil society organisations
 - Financial institutions and investors
 - Community groups and citizen representatives
 - Regional and national authorities

Recommended Tools: Power–Interest Matrix, Stakeholder Influence–Impact Grid, Social Network Analysis, Salience Model

Expected Outputs

- Comprehensive stakeholder database
- Ecosystem map showing relationships and influence
- Preliminary stakeholder categorisation
- Identification of key actors and potential gaps in representation

Added Value: This step establishes a shared understanding of the urban climate ecosystem and helps ensure that no critical actors are overlooked during the Climate City Contract process.

Step 2: Preliminary Stakeholder Screening

Objective: Develop an initial understanding of stakeholder readiness and climate-related activities before conducting more detailed assessments.

Key Activities: Distribute a short self-assessment questionnaire covering:

- Existing climate and sustainability strategies
- Climate governance structures
- Emissions monitoring practices
- Participation in climate projects
- Investment activities
- Innovation initiatives
- Partnership experience

Recommended Tools: Online surveys, Self-assessment questionnaires, Organisational profiling templates.

Expected Outputs

- Initial readiness assessment
- Baseline information for interview preparation
- Identification of stakeholders requiring deeper investigation

Added Value: This stage helps optimise resources by focusing detailed assessments on the most relevant stakeholders.

Step 3: In-Depth Stakeholder Interviews

Objective: Gather qualitative insights into stakeholder capacities, ambitions, barriers, and potential contributions to climate neutrality.

Key Activities: Conduct semi-structured interviews (typically 45–90 minutes) with key stakeholders.

Suggested interview themes include:

- Climate Maturity
- Existing climate targets and commitments
- Organisational sustainability practices
- Previous experience with climate projects
- Emissions Influence
- Areas of influence over urban emissions
- Operational and supply-chain emissions
- Potential for emissions reduction
- Investment Capacity
- Planned investments
- Access to funding mechanisms
- Potential contributions to the CCC Investment Plan
- Innovation Potential
- Research and development activities
- Participation in pilot projects and living labs
- Capacity for scaling innovative solutions
- Collaboration Readiness
- Existing partnerships and networks
- Experience with multi-stakeholder initiatives
- Openness to co-creation processes
- Commitment Level
- Willingness to participate in the Climate City Contract
- Readiness to make formal commitments
- Available resources for implementation
- Recommended Participants

Priority should be given to:

- Major employers
- Utilities
- Public transport operators
- Universities
- Developers
- Investors
- NGOs
- Community leaders
- Public institutions with significant influence on emissions

Expected Outputs

- Stakeholder profiles
- Identification of opportunities, barriers, and risks
- Evidence base for stakeholder segmentation

Added Value: Interviews often reveal strategic information that cannot be captured through surveys alone, including organisational motivations, informal relationships, and political considerations.

Step 4: Stakeholder Assessment and Scoring

Objective: Evaluate stakeholders against a common set of criteria to support prioritisation and engagement planning.

Key Assessment Dimensions

The audit should evaluate stakeholders across several dimensions listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Dimensions for evaluation

Dimensions for evaluation	Description	Key indicators
Climate Maturity	Assessment of the stakeholder's awareness, experience, and strategic commitment to climate action.	Existence of climate or sustainability strategies Previous climate-related projects and initiatives Experience with emissions reduction measures Alignment with climate neutrality objectives
Emissions Influence	Evaluation of the stakeholder's direct or indirect influence on greenhouse gas emissions within the city.	Operational emissions footprint Influence over energy consumption, mobility, buildings, or industrial processes Capacity to affect emissions through products, services, or policies
Implementation Capacity	Assessment of the stakeholder's ability to contribute to the delivery of climate-neutrality actions.	Human resources and expertise Organisational capacity Technical capabilities

		Project management experience
Investment Capacity	Evaluation of the stakeholder's ability to mobilise financial resources for climate action.	Available financial resources Access to funding mechanisms Investment potential Capacity to co-finance climate initiatives
Innovation Potential	Assessment of the stakeholder's ability to develop, test, and scale innovative climate solutions.	Research and development activities Participation in innovation projects Involvement in living labs and pilot initiatives Capacity to support technological and social innovation
Collaboration Readiness	Evaluation of the stakeholder's willingness and ability to engage in multi-stakeholder cooperation	Previous partnership experience Participation in networks and collaborative initiatives Openness to co-creation processes Commitment to knowledge sharing
Commitment Level	Assessment of the stakeholder's readiness to formally support and contribute to the Climate City Contract.	Willingness to make public commitments Readiness to allocate resources Long-term engagement potential Support for climate-neutrality targets
Stakeholder Influence	Evaluation of the stakeholder's strategic importance within the urban climate transition ecosystem.	Institutional influence Market influence Community reach and credibility Ability to mobilise other actors

Risk and Resistance Assessment	Identification of potential barriers, concerns, or resistance that may affect implementation.	Potential opposition to climate measures Organisational constraints Regulatory or financial barriers Perceived risks associated with the transition
Social Inclusion and Just Transition Impact	Assessment of the stakeholder's contribution to a fair, inclusive, and socially balanced climate transition.	Engagement with vulnerable groups Contribution to social cohesion Support for energy poverty reduction Promotion of equitable access to climate benefits

Recommended Tools: Multi-criteria assessment matrix, Weighted scoring model, Stakeholder dashboards

Expected Outputs

- Stakeholder ranking
- Comparative assessment results
- Priority stakeholder groups
- Identification of capacity-building needs

Added Value: The scoring process creates a transparent and evidence-based foundation for engagement and commitment strategies.

Step 5: Stakeholder Segmentation

Objective: Classify stakeholders according to their strategic importance and readiness to contribute to climate neutrality.

Suggested Categories

- **Champions** – highly committed actors capable of leading climate initiatives.
- **Enablers** – organisations that provide resources, expertise, or infrastructure.
- **Followers** – stakeholders willing to engage but requiring support or incentives.
- **Critical Actors** – organisations with significant influence on emissions whose participation is essential but may be uncertain.
- **Laggards or Detractors** – stakeholders with low engagement or potential resistance to change.

Expected Outputs

- Stakeholder engagement strategy
- Tailored communication plans
- Priority actions for each stakeholder group

Added Value: Segmentation enables cities to allocate resources efficiently and develop differentiated engagement approaches.

Step 6: Validation Through the Stakeholder Forum

Objective: Review and validate audit findings through a transparent and participatory process.

Key Activities

- Present results to the Stakeholder Forum.
- Facilitate discussions on stakeholder classification and priorities.
- Validate findings and assumptions.
- Identify missing stakeholders or emerging actors.
- Refine engagement and partnership strategies.

Recommended Methods: Stakeholder Forum meetings, Co-creation workshops, World Café sessions, Focus groups, Consensus-building exercises.

Expected Outputs

- Validated audit results
- Improved stakeholders buy-in
- Shared understanding of roles and responsibilities

Added Value: Validation strengthens trust, legitimacy, and ownership of the Climate City Contract process.

Step 7: Integration into the Climate City Contract

Objective: Translate audit findings into concrete Climate City Contract commitments, actions, and investment priorities.

Application of Results

- **Commitments:** Identify stakeholders ready to make formal commitments.
- **Action Plan:** Align responsibilities with stakeholder capacities and expertise.
- **Investment Plan:** Mobilise investors, businesses, and public institutions capable of financing climate actions.
- **Governance Framework:** Define stakeholder roles within implementation and monitoring structures.

Expected Outputs

- Stakeholder commitment framework
- Partnership development roadmap
- Climate-neutrality implementation ecosystem

Resources

Collaborative platforms, <https://netzerocities.eu/case-studies/>

A DIVERSE ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORTERS, <https://netzerocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/CCC-Highlights-A-diverse-ecosystem-of-supporters-2024-12-16.pdf>