

Cincinnati's Smale Riverfront Park and the Roebling Suspension Bridge that crosses over the Ohio River

Stronger Today, Prepared For Tomorrow:

A Case Study of Cincinnati's Community Engagement Process to Prepare for Climate Migration

May 2026



Eden Park, home to Krohn Conservatory, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, and the Cincinnati Art Museum, as well as wetlands and trails

In 2025, the Greater Cincinnati region embarked on a first-of-its-kind community engagement planning process to prepare for potential climate-related migration to the region. While no part of the United States– or the world– is safe from the effects of climate change, certain parts of the country, typically North and near abundant fresh water sources, have less exposure to some of the most devastating impacts of climate change. Cincinnati is one of those places, and it is among a group of cities that are leading the way in becoming climate resilient, equitable, and welcoming to newcomers. Together, they are crafting a vision for the future of this country that upholds the dignity and wellbeing of people who will move in the coming years due to the climate crisis, while strengthening existing communities and protecting the environment.

The data to understand specifically how many people will move due to climate change and to where is still in its infancy, but we do have models to project what may occur. By 2050, some estimates predict that **50 million Americans could move due to climate change.** And it's already happening. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, between 2008 and 2024, approximately **22.3 million people** were displaced in the United States due to a range of hazards, including floods, storms, and wildfires.

When cities plan ahead for climate mobility– by building "soft infrastructure," such as equitable policies, cultural competency, and social cohesion; as well as "hard infrastructure," like housing and transportation, it's more likely that displaced people will thrive, and that the lives of existing residents will also be improved. For cities to take these initial steps to prepare for climate mobility can be challenging, but it is essential, and these path breakers can inspire other cities to follow suit.

Building for the Future, a brief written by David Lubell and Daranee Petsod for Unbound Philanthropy in April 2025, provides important background and makes the case for why we need to build and nurture vibrant, multi-sector networks at the local level to prepare for climate mobility, and how philanthropic support can help cities develop mechanisms to incentivize and support these efforts and pilot multi-sector models that can be adapted and replicated across the country.

This brief follows, telling the story of Cincinnati's multi-sector climate migration planning process led by a team of forward-thinking, innovative, and committed leaders. It describes why funders wanted to support this effort, what a climate mobility planning process can look like, and the impact this engagement is already having. This case study is intended primarily for a philanthropic audience that is interested to learn about investing in local climate mobility planning, as well as for cities considering engaging in a climate mobility planning process. It will still prove useful for other actors interested in the topic of climate mobility, such as climate adaptation practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

A Note About Terminology

Climate migration is part of the spectrum of climate-related mobility, which refers to people's movement away from their homes or places of habitual residence in the context of climate impacts, and encompasses three types of movement: (1) Displacement, (2) migration, and (3) planned relocation. Populations that are either unable or unwilling to move despite severe climate hazards constitute a fourth category.

We use the term "climate migration" in this brief in relation to Cincinnati's planning process, as this is the term that the city has been using and is most widely understood. In this case, "migration" represents displacement, migration, and planned relocation. For further background, see ***A Compendium on Climate Mobility***.



Cincinnati's Mayor Aftab Pureval has been an early champion of planning for climate-related migration.

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>
> *Mayor Aftab Pureval*

The Origins of Cincinnati's Climate Migration Planning Process

In 2018, a map of the Hurricane Katrina diaspora began circulating around the Cincinnati's Office of Environment and Sustainability (OES), and they began discussing how thousands of people from New Orleans had permanently relocated to their city in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and how Cincinnati could prepare for the movement of people as a result of future climate events. OES added preparation for migration as part of their 2018 Climate Action Plan, entitled the Green Cincinnati Plan, and for several years it remained a goal on the horizon.

In 2023, Ollie Kroner, Director of the OES for the City of Cincinnati, and Anna Marandi, at HDR Consulting, participated in a fictional Tabletop scenario planning exercise on climate mobility held in Washington, D.C., hosted by Unbound Philanthropy, Democracy Fund, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The exercise was based on a fictional midwestern city preparing for the arrival of hundreds of thousands of climate-displaced people. At that time, Kroner and Marandi began discussing how they could put this kind of planning into action for Cincinnati, and the vision for engaging in climate migration planning for the Greater Cincinnati region came to life.

The City also benefited from a supportive mayor who has been an early champion of planning for climate-related migration. For Mayor Aftab Pureval, the topic of being welcoming and strengthening belonging is both personal, as well as smart, for the city. The Mayor's mother was born in Tibet and grew up in a refugee camp. His father is from Punjab, India, and together they immigrated to Dayton, Ohio. "The whole idea of being a welcoming community is not just something that I believe in, but I have lived experience engaging with," he said.

The Mayor said that what initially got his attention about Cincinnati and climate migration was an announcement in 2022 by Intel that they were choosing to build the largest semiconductor plant in the country two hours north of Cincinnati because of the region's access to fresh water, with the Great Lakes to the north and the Ohio River to the south. Cincinnati's population is influenced not just by major Fortune 500 companies, he said, but also because people are leaving big cities around the country and moving to Cincinnati.

"There's an opportunity for Cincinnati to be that climate destination, to be a soft landing spot in the interior of the country," he said. "We have to work quickly and take big swings to change our systems and accommodate that growth." Most importantly, those decisions are not just for future residents, but also for people who live there today, said the Mayor. "We need to change systems right now for existing, legacy communities."

Among the policy initiatives that the City is already embarking on include its **Connected Communities** initiative, a series of land use and zoning policy changes to increase access to affordable housing. It seeks to help the city grow into a "more accessible, people-focused, diverse, healthy, and connected community for all." The City also passed a sales tax to improve public transit, anticipated to provide an additional $130 million annually for the next 25 years. Together, these initiatives are seeking to strategically grow the city, tying affordable housing to reducing the cost of transportation.

Additionally, the city has an abundance of drinking water, and Cincinnati's waterworks utility leads the nation in water treatment and drinking quality. The city is similarly creating a model for procuring solar energy, with its **New Market Solar project**. "We are stabilizing the grid and taking control of energy pricing," said Ollie Kroner.

"We have a culture here of 'what's the leading edge' for sustainability in the region. Not just addressing the 'now', but scoping out the next thing for the coming decades," said Van Sullivan, Interim Executive Director of Green Umbrella, Greater Cincinnati's Regional Climate Collaborative and a key partner on the Green Cincinnati Plan.

Cincinnati: A City Built for Nearly Twice Its Current Residents

Cincinnati's planning for climate migration builds on a long history of leadership in **environmental stewardship** and climate action, as well as in regional collaboration. Cincinnati is also home to the "**collective impact" model**, pioneered by the local social enterprise Strive Together.

Additionally, the state of Ohio is a leader in being welcoming to newcomers. In 2011, Dayton, Ohio launched "Welcome Dayton," to support the integration of immigrants into the Dayton community, and in 2017, Dayton became the first city in the United States to be declared "**certified welcoming**" by Welcoming America, a formal designation for cities and counties that have created policies and programs reflecting their values and commitment to immigrant inclusion.

Cincinnati currently has a population of 315,000, but it was originally built for a half million people, which means that its infrastructure, including roads, sewers, and public facilities, such as drinking water, can accommodate many more people. The Greater Cincinnati Region (a 15-county metropolitan area that spans Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, and is home to 2.3 million people) hosts eight Fortune 500 company headquarters, contributing to Cincinnati having the largest GDP among Ohio's three major metros. Cincinnati has a vibrant arts scene, from street art to opera, to the Cincinnati Art Museum.

The region's population has been in decline for many years, but in 2024, the Greater Cincinnati region added more than 20,000 new residents, the highest population growth in the past decade, according to ***State of the Region, Cincinnati***, produced by Cincinnati's Regional Chamber's Center for Data and Research.

The portion of the population that is of prime working age remains low compared to Cincinnati's peers. The region's foreign-born population—a major source of growth—are much more likely to be in their prime working age than the native-born population. With changes to federal immigration policies impacting the number of international migrants coming to the United States, Cincinnati could see a drop in both its overall population growth as well as the portion that are of prime working age.

Compared to other peer cities across the country, Cincinnati's growth remains steady but modest. *State of the Region* notes that cities like Austin, Nashville, and Raleigh continue to add population at much faster rates," yet Cincinnati's balanced growth demonstrates resilience and stability."

To help Cincinnati prepare, the City of Cincinnati's Office of Environment and Sustainability commissioned the Center for Research and Data at Cincinnati's Regional Chamber to produce ***Cincinnati Region: Climate Migration Outlook.*** The report includes a series of projections which detail the population shifts that could occur under three possible scenarios grounded in current migration patterns, which include climate trends. In the modest growth scenario, Cincinnati implements strategic improvements in housing, transportation, and overall livability. "By returning closer to historic population levels," the report says, "Cincinnati can spread infrastructure costs across more residents, making city services more efficient and financially sustainable."

> ***As climate migrants choose their new homes, they will be confronted with a wide array of choices; Cincinnati must work to demonstrate the value it can provide for people leaving their regions behind, while investing in the well-being of those already here.***
>
> *Cincinnati Region: Climate Migration Outlook by the Center for Research and Data at Cincinnati's Regional Chamber*



Originally the Cincinnati & Eastern railway, Wasson Way has been transformed to a walking and biking trail. It is one section of the larger CROWN network that will include 34 miles of trails connecting residents to job centers, parks, schools, and business districts.

Climate Migration Planning Process Launches

In 2025, Cincinnati's climate migration planning process launched with a three-way collaborative team: (1) **The Office of Environment and Sustainability at the City of Cincinnati**; (2) **Green Umbrella,** Greater Cincinnati's climate collaborative organization; and (3) **HDR Consulting**, led by Anna Marandi, an expert in climate resilience, adaptation, and planning.

With a long history of regional collaboration and deep relationships across a multitude of sectors, from nonprofit to business, Green Umbrella has been particularly well positioned to serve as the non-profit, backbone partner on this project. Green Umbrella is a 25-year-old regional organization with a mission to lead cross-sector collaboration to accelerate climate action across Greater Cincinnati. It uses the collective impact model and is the largest regional climate collaborative in the country, in terms of programs, staff, and budget, as well as numbers of partners and members. Green Umbrella helps lead **ThriveTogether**, the first-ever regional climate action planning process, which has a strong **community engagement component.**

For the City of Cincinnati's Office of Environment and Sustainability, being able to thoughtfully plan ahead for something that feels certain to happen in the near future has been a primary motivation to engage in climate migration planning. "When we look at the evidence, we think this is a force that will shape the future of Cincinnati," said Ollie Kroner. "The more we can prepare and anticipate the way migration will impact our city, the better position we are in to successfully welcome residents and thrive under future conditions. Conversely, if this is to happen and we do not prepare, it creates a situation where we are reactive and likely under-resourced."

The planning team also recognized that there are benefits to becoming a welcoming community that supports all residents, and to demonstrating the assets that newcomers can bring. "If you're preparing to receive people, the benefit is that you are going to prepare and build resilience for people who are already there," said Anna Marandi. "It forces you to think through your existing systems. It's like cleaning your own home before you have a party. Even if no one shows up, you still have a really organized house." The team, and the community, also surfaced how growth can lead to displacement of local residents and gentrification if it's not managed thoughtfully and equitably.

There were two significant orientations for the climate migration planning project that the team discussed at the outset: First, that they would make the engagement process broader than just Cincinnati, to include the entire region. Second, that they would place a strong emphasis on listening and engaging the community in the project, to include focus group discussions.

As mentioned above, the City also sought to inform the planning process with data, and commissioned the Center for Research and Data at Cincinnati's Regional Chamber to produce a report, ***Cincinnati Region: Climate Migration Outlook***. The intention for the research was to ensure that the planning team was rooting their process in existing trends. The Chamber had recently partnered with the City on exploring what kinds of jobs would be needed to create a greener economy and green transition, in their report, "Green Workforce Landscape Analysis." This grew out of the ***Green Cincinnati Plan***, published by the Office of Environment and Sustainability in 2023. Building on to this analysis felt like a natural next step.

"When the City approached us about this research project on climate migration, we were excited about studying this, as we study migration a lot already, and track population growth and immigration to the region," said Sabina Hordinski, Research Manager for the Center for Research and Data at Cincinnati's Regional Chamber. "The root considerations in this report related to climate mobility are similar to what we are already thinking about on a daily basis, like housing, transportation, and affordability."

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>
> *Ollie Kroner, Director of the Office of Environment and Sustainability, City of Cincinnati*



Seventy-five people from Cincinnati, the broader region, and beyond attended the community engagement event in August 2025, "Climate Migration in Greater Cincinnati—Taking Action to be a Resilient and Welcoming Region."



An Engagement Process to Listen to the Community

From June to August 2025, the team conducted six focus group discussions, with 10-12 participants each. (See graphic at the right for the sectors that participated.) They also held a roundtable with immigrants and refugees with lived experience in collaboration with **Refugee Connect** (a local refugee support organization), and met with the Environmental Advisory Board from the City of Cincinnati. Among the other community members whom the team sought to engage included the local Native American community, as well as other long-time residents.

The purpose of the focus group discussions was for the planning team to create an opportunity to learn from participants about their experiences and priorities related to climate impacts and equitable development, as well as to provide further education about climate migration and welcoming. Among the questions and topics they covered included: external factors to consider in the planning process; whether there are benefits to preparing for population growth, even if it does not occur; the challenges of preparing for population growth; and people's vision for the region.

The team felt that these small group discussions were a critical component of the process. "We facilitated these discussions less as trying to convince people of something, or move to a next action step, but more focused on listening," Van Sullivan, Interim Executive Director of Green Umbrella, said. That environment seemed to help people feel comfortable and have candid conversations.

The team then held a public webinar featuring national and regional experts, to offer an overview about climate migration and what it could mean for Greater Cincinnati, and potential strategies for local and regional action. They sought to address feedback that they had heard during the focus group discussions, and to engage a wider group of people.



The community engagement process included a roundtable with immigrants and refugees in Cincinnati to hear about their experiences with existing welcoming infrastructure. Shown here: Through events like Cincinnati Zoo Lights, RefugeeConnect hosts Family Day events that brings families, navigators, and community volunteers together.



Sectors Involved in Community Engagement Process

- Local and Regional Governments
- Nonprofit and Philanthropic Sector
- Organizations Working on Housing & Homelessness
- Transportation & Utilities
- Anchor Institutions
- Economic & Urban Development
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Members
- Native American Community Members
- Long-Time Residents of Cincinnati Region

The focus groups and webinar fed into a day-long, in-person convening at the end of August 2025, *Climate Migration in Greater Cincinnati– Taking Action to be a Resilient and Welcoming Region*. This event was also planned and executed with the help of national organizations, such as ICLEI-USA and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Seventy-five people from Cincinnati, the broader region, and beyond attended, with representatives from government, local refugee and immigrant support nonprofits, direct service organizations, and business leaders. The purpose of the convening was to assess the region's readiness for climate migration, to get a better understanding of the wide variety of needs and concerns within the metro Cincinnati region, and for different sectors to consider climate migration impacts and cross-sector preparation.

The day began with a panel, moderated by David Lubell, Senior Climate Mobility and Cities Fellow with ICLEI-USA, including: Mayor Aftab Pureval, Kristin Baker, Executive Director of LISC Greater Cincinnati, and Melissa Bertolo, Senior Director of Certified Welcoming with Welcoming America. They discussed the similarities between welcoming climate-displaced people and welcoming immigrants, and how welcoming policies like language access can benefit everyone; the challenges and opportunities in addressing housing needs for existing as well as future residents; and a vision for the future for Cincinnati.

The panel was followed by a workshop on fostering belonging, facilitating inclusion, and building local economic development strategies that support climate resilience and migrant integration; and a scenario planning exercise led in partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. (See ***Climate Migration in Greater Cincinnati: Becoming a Resilient and Welcoming Region***, for further details about the findings.)

Key Points From the Focus Groups and Scenario Planning Exercises

Throughout the focus group discussions and the scenario planning exercises, land use and housing emerged as the most persistent challenges, with economic development, transportation and utilities also highlighted as areas that participants anticipate being most impacted by climate migration. Overall, people discussed how planning in advance could help avoid replicating past planning mistakes and instead, create intentional policies from the beginning.

In 2024, Cincinnati experienced one of the fastest growths in rents of any city in the United States. Around 30% of current residents can't afford housing, and the 70-year-old housing stock requires major rehabilitation and funding. For the groups who work on housing and the unhoused, one of the concerns expressed is Should Cincinnati prepare for decades down the road when there are urgent concerns today? A recent article by New America, ***Rehab Cincy, Rehab***, offers a deep dive into the housing problem, and potential solutions, for Cincinnati.

Participants discussed how to manage growth in an equitable manner, and the risk of gentrification by higher income newcomers and displacement of existing residents. There were cautionary tales shared about the extremely rapid growth in other cities, like Nashville, TN. Participants saw an opportunity to cast a vision for desired future development, including mixed-income housing models proven to work in maintaining community wealth. Participants also discussed the importance of high-density housing.

Another challenge raised was around transportation– participants said that current public transportation access provides limited ability for residents to reach services and amenities, and would need to be expanded. Participants discussed transit-oriented development, and creating pedestrian and bike-friendly infrastructure. Participants raised the difficulty of moving past the car culture in Ohio, and in general in the region. Participants also discussed how regional trails and public transit would benefit from increased investments in preparedness, regardless of population growth.

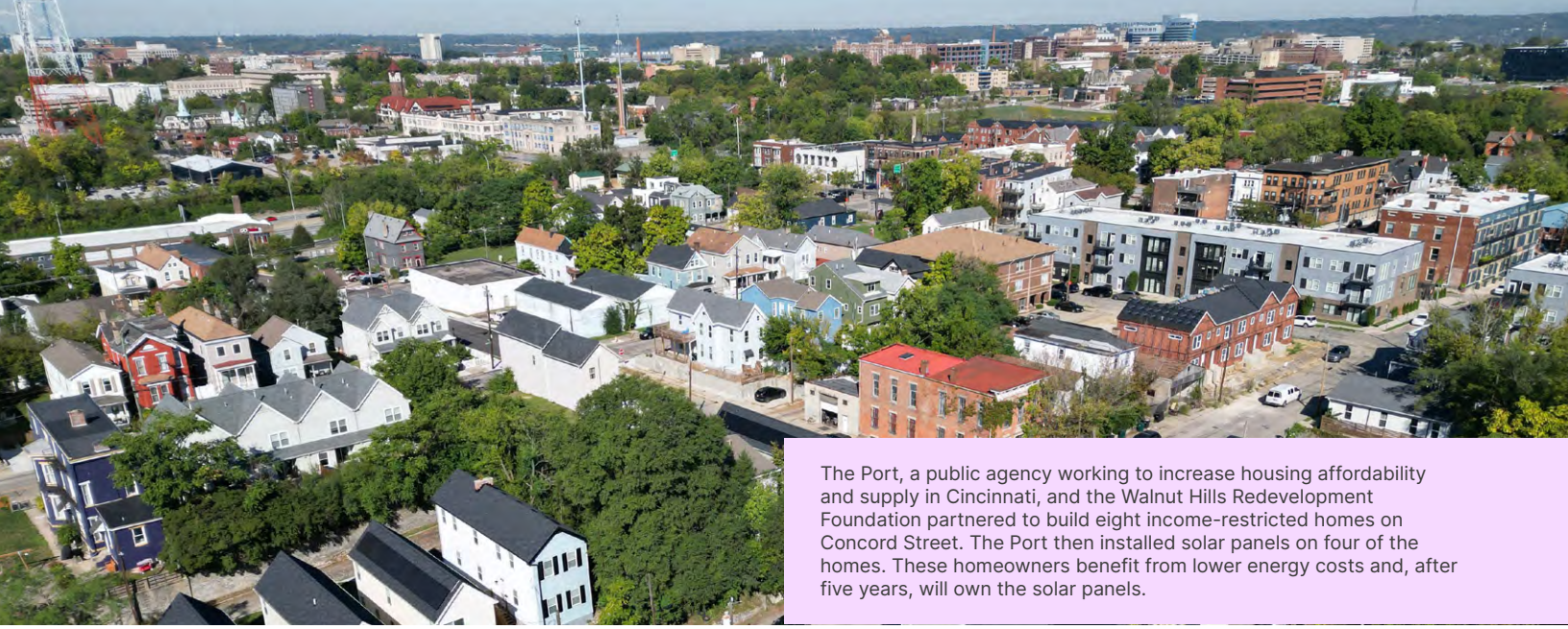
Conversations with immigrant and refugee leaders during the focus groups and during the scenario planning exercises also revealed the importance of infrastructure related to welcoming and belonging, and that there is more Cincinnati can do in this area. "That's just existing infrastructure, let alone forthcoming infrastructure," Van Sullivan said. "If we want to be a successful, welcoming region that can have the capacity to welcome folks who may (or may not) move here en masse, we have a lot of work to do. We're ahead in a lot of ways, and yet, being able to learn from these immigrant and refugee leaders about the ins and outs of some of their struggles, was really powerful." Cincinnati is now embarking on becoming a certified welcoming city. "Learning that there is a framework for welcoming migrants has been really helpful," said Ollie Kroner.

The planning team asked participants about their vision for the region. Among the rich variety of responses, a few stand out: Community members envision residents having self-determination in their housing choices, with transit-oriented housing to avoid urban sprawl and safe and affordable housing; a focus on retaining current residents and not just attracting new ones; investing in the region's natural beauty and assets, and creating connected trail and bikeway networks; and clean, reliable power generation.

> ***This was my first introduction to the idea of climate migration; it's not something that people are talking about in my township yet.***
>
> ***Jeff Weckbach, Township Administrator, Colerain Township***



This bus stop is outside of Children's Hospital in Cincinnati. A major job center, the hospital district will soon be served by Bus Rapid Transit, which will have high service frequency, dedicated bus lanes, and improved bus stops to reduce travel times and improve riders' experience.



The Port, a public agency working to increase housing affordability and supply in Cincinnati, and the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation partnered to build eight income-restricted homes on Concord Street. The Port then installed solar panels on four of the homes. These homeowners benefit from lower energy costs and, after five years, will own the solar panels.

Space to Think Long-Term, Together

The team reports that the planning process has led to relationship building, and the space and opportunity to think long-term, not just about hard infrastructure and development, but also the soft infrastructure of welcoming and belonging, and environmental stewardship. It has also led to a greater number of people across sectors now thinking about climate migration and how it relates to their area of focus. For example, this project has connected team members to Welcoming America's efforts that support partners in creating more inclusive communities that can thrive by ensuring that everyone belongs. The City of Cincinnati is taking next steps to receive a **Certified Welcoming designation** for the first time in its history, and Green Umbrella is collaborating with local governments across the region to explore this program as well.

"We have urgent crises– like a 40,000 housing unit shortage," Van Sullivan said. "At the same time, we are a very diverse region that wants to honor existing needs and welcome incomers. We are focused on what work we need to do– socially, culturally, and systems wise– to attend to that." Sullivan said that there are all kinds of partners speaking to all those needs now, whereas it seemed more siloed before. "We now have new collaborative crossover such as stormwater professionals connecting with immigrant and refugee support organizations, ensuring that infrastructure investment can be informed by critical demographics. And so the transformation is that we're increasingly on the same page, and that page is focused on welcoming, belonging, inclusion and climate preparedness, all at the same time."

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>
> *Van Sullivan, Interim Executive Director of Green Umbrella*

National Implications

Cincinnati is also exchanging learning with peer cities that are engaging in climate mobility through a cohort organized by ICLEI-USA. In the fall of 2025, 26 cities from across the United States met three times to discuss different topics related to climate mobility planning. David Lubell, who is a Senior Climate Mobility and Cities Fellow for ICLEI-USA and founder of Welcoming America, praised Cincinnati for the process it has begun, including the desire to say, "'We don't just want to do this and write a report or put a thing in a resilience plan. We want to listen to the community, and work with the community to create a plan that works for everybody.' That's a model that communities are going to need." Cincinnati was one of the big "stars" of the cohort, and leaders like Ollie Kroner made other cities feel like this was something they could actually replicate. ICLEI is working to distill lessons and practices from the Cincinnati experience into tools on climate mobility it is developing for cities and other stakeholders.

To a room full of people working in climate, government, immigration, and business, at the convening in Cincinnati on August 20, 2025, David Lubell said: "Realize that this is a moment in this field of climate mobility that people will look back on. Remember when Cincinnati did that meeting, and no one else had done it before. And you are all part of it."

Dean Bigbee, Climate Migrant Living in Cincinnati

Dean Bigbee had been living in New Orleans for over a decade when they realized they weren't sure if they could build a sustainable future there.

"I was out of town, and a friend of mine's like, 'Hey, your car is underwater. And it's up almost to your front door,'" Dean said.

Dean lost their car twice during their first year living in town. And when it would rain heavily, the pumps would often fail, leading them to lose their apartment to flooding multiple times, once with four feet of water from a single rainstorm. Another apartment was lost to untreated termite infestations due to repeated storm damage. Electrical fires are also common in New Orleans due to repeat flooding affecting wiring underneath houses, and Dean has seen multiple friends lose everything to this.

"You see the water coming up and up and up. You're putting towels down, and suddenly the doors burst open, water rushing in. And you put the things that are most expensive to you up high. And then, it's like, you just gotta get out."

Dean said that there's the issue of dealing with the weather itself, but also the effects of the weather for much longer. "You're stuck for two or three weeks without power, but you can't work and your income is falling apart. And it's not just a storm; it's like the entire ecosystem. It requires so much flexibility that you may not have."

Dean didn't attach to material things very much. What they would come to miss most after disasters was their community, which felt like family, in a way. When they would have to move again, even if it was 20 blocks away, they would find themself in a new community.

There came a time when Dean realized that they wanted to think longer term about buying a house and building a family, things that require more stability and longevity. "It got to the point where I was like, I think I have to leave the place I love," Dean said. "I remember clearly one day I heard a voice in my head. It felt like the voice of the city saying, 'I can no longer protect you.' That was weird to me...I ignored it, and the longer I ignored it, the more it kept getting louder, and louder."

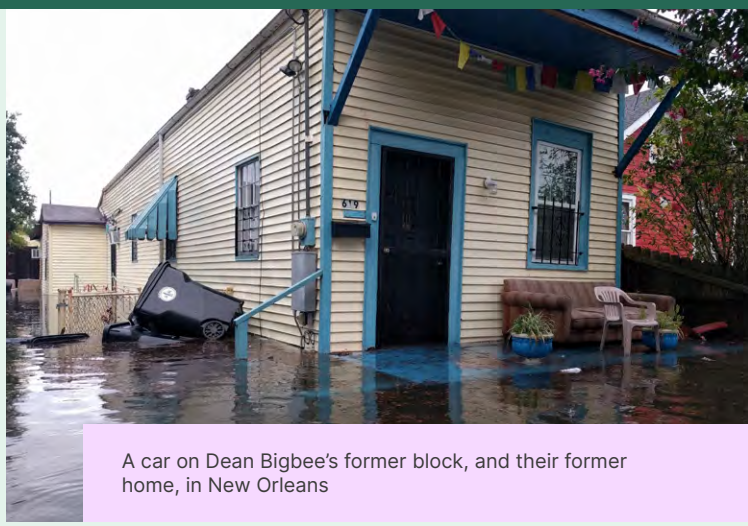
Dean went on the road, evaluating places across the country they might move to, based on factors like affordability, income potential, and climate-related impacts. The Midwest kept popping up for them. Dean lived in different parts of the country for a year.

In 2023, Dean landed in Cincinnati, bought their first house, and started a family. Dean loves the community. "Every house on the block has young kids, and everything's walkable." Most importantly, they said, "I feel stable in my bed."

"I feel like Cincinnati has enough going that's in favor for it to work out for me."



> ***I remember clearly one day I heard a voice in my head. It felt like the voice of the city saying, 'I can no longer protect you.' That was weird to me... I ignored it, and the longer I ignored it, the more it kept getting louder, and louder.***
>
> ***Dean Bigbee, who left New Orleans due to climate impacts and relocated to Cincinnati***



A car on Dean Bigbee's former block, and their former home, in New Orleans

Philanthropic Investment Supports a City Ready to Dive In

Cincinnati's climate migration planning project was supported by the City of Cincinnati and Unbound Philanthropy, a private foundation with a mission to contribute to a vibrant, welcoming society and just immigration system in the US and UK, as part of a pluralist and inclusive democracy. Unbound Philanthropy saw a multitude of reasons to invest in this project– a skilled and energetic team ready to dive in; a supportive mayor; a history of welcoming; and a city that was already grappling with all of the right questions.

"Local governments, peer funders, and other stakeholders were asking what it looked like to plan ahead for climate mobility. When Cincinnati jumped at the chance to pilot a planning process, we couldn't pass on the chance to learn in partnership with local leaders about what it takes to do it well," said Stephanie Teatro, US Program Director at Unbound Philanthropy. "There's a lot to be said about the willingness and leadership of the people there who are diving in and have the right level of curiosity and humility, and are actually dedicating city resources to make it happen." The stars were aligned for this project, Unbound felt, with a supportive mayor, as well as key staff and local partners.

Additionally, because Ohio has a deep history of engaging in welcoming newcomers, there are many leaders who are already clear about the role that immigration plays in their communities and in their state. "It's not just that it's a place that is expecting or wants to draw climate-related migrants from within the US. They have an analysis and clarity about the particular assets and nuances of welcoming foreign-born people to your community, understanding how to think not just about population growth but also social cohesion and immigrant inclusion," said Teatro.

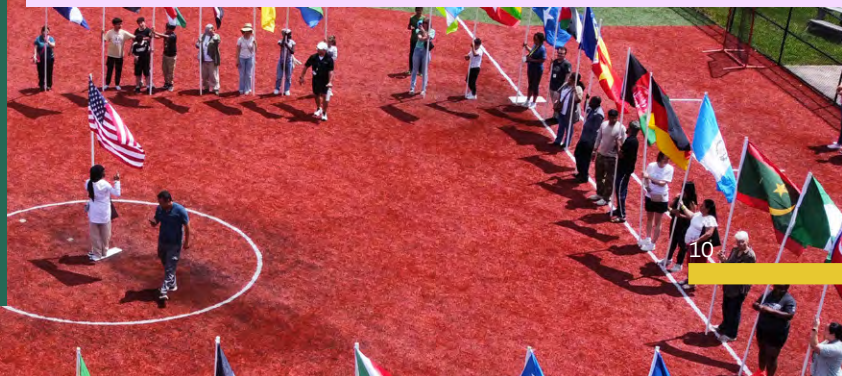
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> ***If cities are prepared, then local residents will be much more inclined to see climate-related migration not as a threat, but something that they've been thinking about and are ready for, and migration will be more likely to contribute to shared prosperity for all.***
>
> *Taryn Higashi, Executive Director of Unbound Philanthropy*

Cincinnati is home to a number of community organizations that have been working to include and welcome immigrants and refugees from diverse backgrounds. Cincinnati also has a significant Native American population, and has been working to ensure that their voices are listened to. "It's a place with a culture of community consultation and an appreciation of diversity, as well as an understanding of the challenges growth brings– such as pressure on housing, transportation, and energy, which they are planning for," said Taryn Higashi, Executive Director of Unbound Philanthropy.

"If cities are prepared, then local residents will be much more inclined to see climate-related migration not as a threat, but something that they've been thinking about and are ready for, and migration will be more likely to contribute to shared prosperity for all," said Higashi. "New arrivals will be able to find the things they need in order to adjust quickly– the schools, health care, getting around, knowing where to go to have their needs met. I think planning is really an enormous benefit."

At Refugee Connect's 2025 World Refugee Day celebration, families, partners, and community members gathered at the Cincinnati Reds Youth Academy to honor the strength and resilience of refugees and the cultures that make the region stronger.





A school orchard installation led by Green Umbrella with the Common Orchard Project

What's Next

There is a tremendous amount of activity underway to capture lessons from the first phase of this work and to offer a roadmap for other cities, as well as to advance the planning process for Cincinnati. See the following reports:

- ***Climate Migration in Greater Cincinnati: Becoming a Resilient and Welcoming Region***, by Green Umbrella, with support from: City of Cincinnati's Office of Environment and Sustainability, Cincinnati Regional Chamber's Center for Research and Data, HDR Inc., ICLEI-USA, and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
- ***Climate Migration Readiness Plan***, by the City of Cincinnati's Office of Environment and Sustainability
- ***Cincinnati Region Climate Migration Outlook***, by the Center for Research and Data at the Cincinnati Regional Chamber

Greater Cincinnati is engaged in a phase two to develop training and additional engagements about climate migration and welcoming that will be applicable to regional governments, businesses, nonprofits, and schools, and to scale action at the regional level. Among the highlights of this work includes a climate migration workshop at the **Midwest Regional Sustainability Summit**, taking place in June 2026, hosted by Green Umbrella; the development of a planning module on climate migration for Green Umbrella's **Climate Action Fellowship**, which will engage regional governments during summer 2026; engaging additional focus groups to elevate welcoming and resilience among major anchor institutions in the region; and the establishment of a regional working group dedicated to climate resilience and welcoming.

Recommendations for Funders

Unbound Philanthropy continues to engage with and support Cincinnati's climate migration planning work. Unbound is also supporting ICLEI-USA to scale this local planning model and is investing in other local communities with pathbreaking leaders ready to plan ahead. ICLEI is scaling this model not just for climate "destination" cities, like Cincinnati, but also for **different city archetypes**. These archetypes include "recipient cities" – such as Orlando Florida – that are likely to receive the most climate migrants in the short-term due to their proximity to those places facing the highest climate risk and "vulnerable cities," like New Orleans, Louisiana, that face the highest climate risk, and thus are likely to lose population over time.

Philanthropy can support the replicating and scaling of climate mobility planning at the local level through city based networks like ICLEI, as well as Welcoming America.

Philanthropy can also support an Ohio-wide network of interested cities that could learn from Cincinnati.

Philanthropy can support multi-sector leaders and interested cities with resources for general planning; scenario planning exercises that include stakeholder engagement; and for alignment and coordination to develop this burgeoning field.

Philanthropy can also support efforts resulting from the scenario planning process to better prepare for the future. For example, coming out of the scenario planning processes, the city of Cincinnati has requested technical assistance from New America to assess solutions to increase the supply of affordable housing in the city.

Philanthropic funding can incentivize and leverage public investments at the local and state levels, particularly through public-private partnerships.

Funding for policy and advocacy can encourage local and state governments to integrate climate mobility into planning; put in place policies, practices, and resources that support the needed infrastructure; and work in collaboration with other actors in the ecosystem.

Local governments consistently ask for accurate data on how many climate-displaced people are in their cities, and how many are likely to come in the years ahead. Some predictive, localized models are being developed, but they are still early-stage, and are not yet accessible to the cities and counties that need them. Philanthropy could help bridge this important gap in the field.

Unbound Philanthropy has been convening a community of local, regional, and national funders who have an interest in learning about climate mobility and building the field. The **Climate Mobility Strategy Table** seeks to spur philanthropic investments aimed at scaling the ecosystem of organizations working to develop cutting-edge solutions that build climate resilience for both current populations and new arrivals, ensuring that everyone has what they need to not only to withstand climate change but also contribute and thrive individually and collectively.

If you are interested in participating in an active learning and grantmaking community focused on climate mobility in the US, please reach out to climatemobility@unboundphilanthropy.org to learn more.

Credits

This case study was written by Elyse Lightman Samuels and designed by Reason First. David Lubell, Taryn Higashi, Stephanie Teatro, Julia Yang-Winkenbach, and Zoe Moskowitz partnered on the project.

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Photo 8: The City of Cincinnati

Photo 9 + 10: Dean Bigbee

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Photo 12: Kelly St. Charles, Green Umbrella

Appendix

The organizations that have participated in Cincinnati's community engagement process to prepare for climate migration:

Archdiocese of Cincinnati
Center for Local Government
Cincinnati Regional Chamber of Commerce, Center for Research and Data
Cincinnati Compass
Cincinnati Health Department
Cincinnati Stormwater Management
City of Cincinnati
City of Fairfield
City of Milford
City of Newport
City of Oxford
CMHA
Colerain Township
Cincinnati Public Schools
CVG Airport Authority
Duke Energy
City of Cincinnati Environmental Advisory Board
EquaSion
FifthThird Bank
Greater Cincinnati Foundation
Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition
Green Umbrella
Groundwork Ohio River Valley
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati
Haile Foundation
Hamilton County
HDR
HOME Cincy
HomeBase Cincinnati
ICLEI-USA
Immigrant and Refugee Law Center
JobsOhio
Legal Aid
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
LISC - Greater Cincinnati
Metro/SORTA
Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
Mill Creek Alliance
Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati
Cincinnati NAACP
National Partnership for New Americans
OKI Regional Council of Governments
REDI Cincinnati
TANK
Tri-County Economic Development Corporation (BeNKY)
TriState Trails
Urban Native Collective
Vega
Vibrant Ohio
Welcoming America
World Resources Institute

