



# City of Spokane Youth Focus Group Summary

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## Overview

The City of Spokane is planning for climate change with a commitment to equity and climate justice. Climate justice recognizes that the changing climate disproportionately harms certain populations and prioritizes the health and safety of those most at risk—often referred to as overburdened communities. Overburdened communities were identified in the City’s Spokane Climate Impacts Analysis and Justice Memo, including youth. Youth may be more vulnerable to climate change as they are still developing physically and emotionally, and are dependent on adults for their safety and well-being. To inform the Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment, the City of Spokane aimed to hear directly from youth. Focus groups provide an opportunity to collect in-depth feedback from groups within the community that may be underrepresented in other public engagement opportunities and engage in more targeted discussions.

The City of Spokane hosted a youth focus group with 11 youth ages 14 to 18. Participants shared their lived experiences and concerns, offered ideas for reducing emissions and building a more resilient Spokane, and discussed barriers to participating in climate action. Insights from this focus group informed the development of the Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment. The key takeaways and notes below have been anonymized and synthesized.

<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	Monday, April 28 6:00-7:30 PM
<b>Location</b>	Online, via zoom
<b># of Participants</b>	11
<b>City and Consulting Attendees</b>	Meg Horst, facilitator, Cascadia Consulting Sarah Farbstein, note taker, Cascadia Consulting Logan Callen, City of Spokane



# Objectives

- Collect in-depth feedback from groups within the community that may be underrepresented in other public engagement opportunities and those who will face disproportionate impacts from climate hazards (e.g. overburdened communities and vulnerable populations).
- Identify equity considerations/unintended consequences of implementing actions within the Climate Element (e.g., who benefits? Who is burdened? How can the disproportionate impacts be addressed?).
- Identify top priorities and key considerations of climate resilience policies.

# Key Takeaways

- Empowerment through knowledge is key: youth feel motivated when they understand both the problem and how they can help.
- Air quality and wildfire smoke are the most immediate and disruptive climate concerns for the youth focus group participants.
- Heat is isolating youth from outdoor activities, recreation, and social-emotional outlets.
- Young people see a strong connection between nature access and mental health.
- There's growing anxiety about long-term ecological shifts and disconnection from the natural world.
- Public transit and bike infrastructure are critical areas for improvement to support climate action.
- Youth want climate education and sustainability integrated into schools and curriculum.
- Green jobs are appealing, but they must offer economic stability to be viable options.
- Climate change is seen as worsening social inequities and youth with fewer resources suffer more.
- There's a desire for systemic change, not just individual action. There is a need for large-scale infrastructure changes to make environmentally friendly individual actions more accessible (e.g. improve public transit to encourage ridership).

# Discussion Questions

1. What climate impacts are you concerned about when it comes to your daily life? What climate impact worries you the most?
  - Concern about water availability (e.g., wells drying up).
  - Worsening air quality and wildfire smoke impact daily life and physical activities.
  - Decreased snowfall is affecting recreational opportunities like skiing.
  - Mental health impacts from reduced outdoor time and climate anxiety.
  - Hotter summers and more extreme heat make outdoor activities difficult or dangerous.
  - Concerns that younger generations aren't forming connections to nature.
  - Climate change will limit outdoor access, which helps with emotional wellbeing and coping.

- Decline in pollinators and long-term ecological changes are worrisome.
  - Heat and smoke are changing seasonal habits and daily routines.
2. How do you think climate change will impact the places and activities that matter most to young people in Spokane, like schools, parks, or community spaces?
- Parks and trails may become unsafe or unpleasant due to heat and fires.
  - Air conditioning access (or lack thereof) affects comfort and safety.
  - Extreme heat leads to missed school and sports, and worsens mental health.
  - Concerns about loss of unstructured outdoor play and independence.
  - Outdoor access was seen as vital for problem-solving, social connection, and emotional escape.
  - Water access (like rivers) may diminish due to changing stream flows.
  - Fear of over-reliance on technology and decreased physical activity.
  - Climate stress adds to an already anxious generation.
  - Increased social isolation from inability to go outside in extremes leads to more anxiety
3. What ideas do you have for ways Spokane can reduce emissions and become more resilient to climate change? What changes would you like to see in your neighborhood or city?
- Improve public transit: more stops, better frequency, easier access.
  - Expand bike infrastructure: wider, safer, more consistent lanes.
  - Promote car sharing and ride-share options.
  - Recognize limitations of biking in suburban areas; focus on electric buses.
  - Make transit feel safe and approachable, especially for young people.
  - Education and outreach about how to use transit and reduce emissions.
4. Spokane’s climate planning will reduce emissions and build resilience to climate impacts. What other benefits of climate planning are most important to you? For example, making Spokane more walkable, improving air quality, creating green jobs for young people, or making transportation more accessible.
- Public transit should be fast, safe, and convenient.
  - Green jobs must be well-paying to be appealing.
  - Urban trees improve aesthetics, air quality, and cooling.
5. What barriers exist for young people in Spokane to take climate action?
- Lack of required environmental education or knowledge about recycling.
  - Cost and convenience barriers (e.g., unsustainable options are often cheaper/easier).
  - People don’t act unless they’re shown how; need for direct education and leadership.
  - Youth are overworked, leaving little time or energy to act on climate issues.
  - Stigma or lack of clarity around what counts as climate action.

6. How could Spokane better support young people in taking action on climate issues?
- Environmental education in schools is critical.
  - Youth-focused climate action programs like internships and service learning.