Planning Inclusive Public Engagement On Climate Change
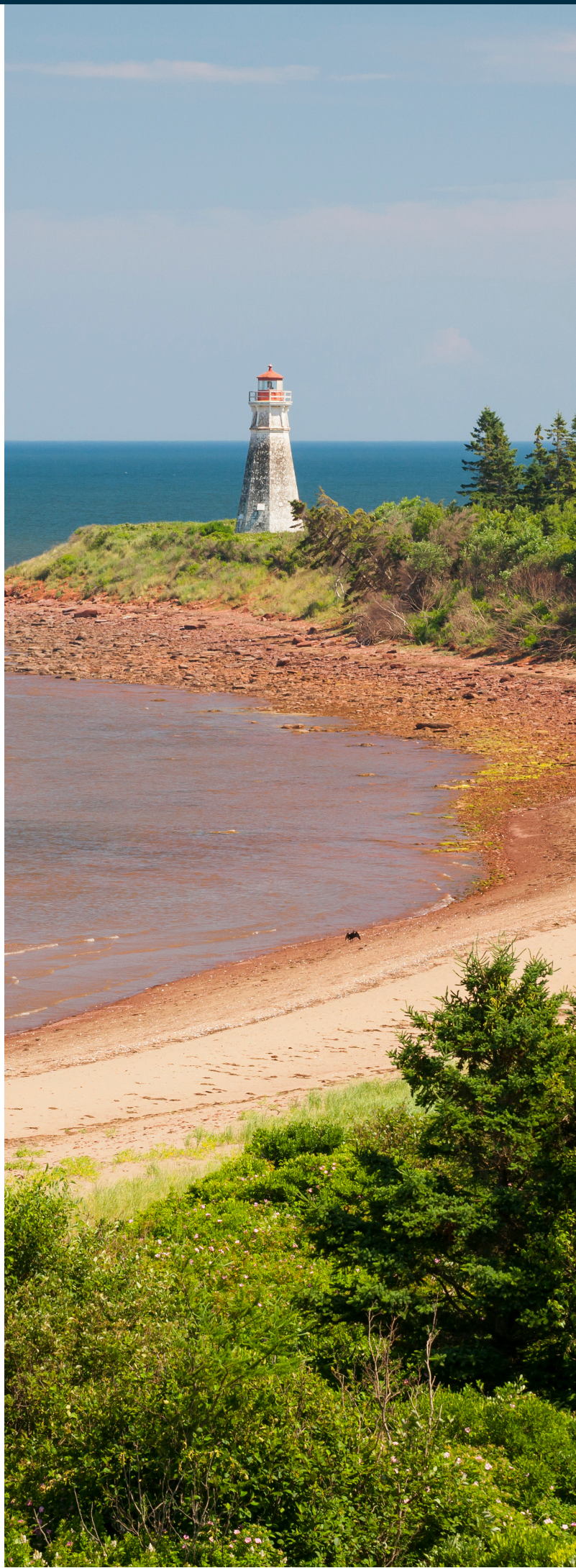
A Companion Resource for

A Facilitator's Guide for Municipal Collaboration on Climate Planning

AIM network

Prepared by

Atlantic Infrastructure Management Network

WELCOME

Welcome to your climate event planning guidebook!

If you downloaded this guide, you must be interested in hosting an event in your community to talk about climate change and what to do about it. This guide is written for municipal staff to help them inform, educate and learn how climate change impacts municipal services and how to prepare for these changes.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

While the focus audience is municipal staff, the information in this guide may also be useful to nonprofits, industry professionals, community groups and anyone else looking to mobilise local action to address climate change.

This guide was created from the experiences of five groups of communities that hosted public events in spring and fall of 2023.

It will help municipalities inspire residents to engage in dialogue to guide decisions toward environmental sustainability.

By cultivating a shared sense of responsibility and involvement, municipal staff can create impactful events that resonate with diverse audiences.

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Glossary of Terms

Accessibility - Designing environments, products, services, and systems so they are available and usable by all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities, socio-economic status, or other personal circumstances.

This includes removing barriers that may limit access due to disabilities, economic constraints, geographical location, or other factors that might affect a person's ability to participate fully in activities or benefit from services. For example, a free or pay-what-you-can activity removes financial barriers.

At-Risk Communities - At-risk communities are individuals or groups of people that disproportionately experience the impacts of climate change compared to the average resident, such as the elderly, people with visible and invisible disabilities, residents with lower-income and less access to housing or transport, people with cultural or language barriers to accessing services in an emergency or communities that have been forcibly relocated in the past to lower value or higher-risk land. This is not a comprehensive list, but can guide you to identifying these groups in your community.

Community Mapping - The process of creating a visual representation of a community to identify and analyze various aspects such as resources, assets, needs, and relationships. Community mapping can help in planning, decision-making, and understanding the needs and dynamics within a community.

Cohort - A cohort is a group of municipalities with similar characteristics, qualities, and needs which can share ideas and resources. These can be neighbouring communities in the same geographic area, or they can be communities with similar climate concerns and planning needs in different regions or even provinces.

Eco-Grief - Eco-grief refers to feelings of anxiety, stress, and helplessness related to the effects of climate change. Eco-grief can be experienced by those affected directly or indirectly by the impacts of climate change.

Environmental Equity - The impacts of climate change are experienced more by at-risk communities. At-risk communities can be such as those without the money or resources to deal with major climate events. Environmental equity refers to the need to understand these inequalities, and seeks to ensure that all people, especially those historically disadvantaged, have access to resources, protection, and opportunities to adapt to and mitigate climate impacts.

Inclusive Engagement - Public engagement that takes into consideration that communities are made of people with a variety of views and opinions, and embraces those differences by creating a forum for all to speak without fear of reprisal, judgement or aggression.

Neighbouring Communities - Municipalities that are close geographically, where an event in one municipalities is likely to attract attendees from the other(s).

Public Engagement - activities to bring citizens, community organizations, businesses, and government together to solve problems that affect people's lives and livelihood. Public engagement can be one-directional (informative), bi-directional (consultative) or multi-directional (collaborative)

Equitable Community Engagement

Considering equity in community engagement is not a one-time action to check a box off a list. It requires ongoing effort to acknowledge diverse perspectives, value the contributions of all community members, and recognize that people may have different opinions from our own.

To let all voices be heard, we can:

- accept that our perspectives may not always be right or complete.

- embrace differences by asking questions instead of debating.

- understand that under-representation and systemic inequality has created valid mistrust of government institutions in some communities and that this trust can be repaired with patient work.

- become educated on historical systemic inequality.

- confront our assumptions and biases, which can be uncomfortable, but rewarding.

- reach out to organizations working within your community to create connections, build trust, and create meaningful engagement before your event.

- maintain a willingness to change.

- consider who in the community might face barriers when trying to participate such as parents with young children, those without transportation or people with hearing or visual impairments.

Some questions to ask when planning your event:

? Which community members or demographics may be missing from the conversation?

? How can the conversation be framed in a way that relates to all who are present?

? Is the language accessible and clear to those attending?

? Who was able to participate in the past and how does that influence the conversation now?

? Are a few people speaking on behalf of the community, or is there real engagement happening to include diverse voices and opinions?

1. Introduction

Why Climate Public Engagement Events?

Municipal governments directly or indirectly influence almost half of Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions [1] and manage two-thirds of Canada's infrastructure. Local governments have a significant role to play in achieving Canada's net-zero emissions targets by 2050, and in planning resilient communities.

Despite this growing ambition for localized climate solutions, **Municipal governments across Canada face many challenges and constraints impeding their ability to take effective climate action:**

- regulatory and funding constraints,
- internal capacity limitations,
- barriers to effective community engagement, and
- competing policy priorities between regions and levels of government.

These challenges are bigger for rural and remote communities that rely heavily on climate-sensitive natural resources and who are particularly vulnerable to infrastructure disruptions due to their size and geography [3].

You can use this guide to organize a public event in a single community. However, there are many reasons to plan this type of event with neighbouring communities:

- This work is hard, and working together with others brings more ideas and better solutions.
- It will help build or reinforce cooperation and sharing resources between communities, which is necessary when many struggle to find staff.
- Climate impacts do not follow jurisdictional boundaries. Impacts are regional and solutions should be as well, based on the needs and wants of an **informed and engaged population.**
- Funding applications are increasingly complex, and sharing experience helps the learning curve.
- Funding under the National Adaptation Strategy supports collaborative efforts.

1.1 Advantages of Regional Cooperation

- ✓ Harness shared resources and expertise
- ✓ Build lasting relationships to exchange skills and knowledge
- ✓ Enhance project impact
- ✓ Ensure policy alignment
- ✓ Expand inclusive community engagement and enhance public participation
- ✓ Maximize cost-savings through joint procurement, bulk purchasing, and shared infrastructure investments
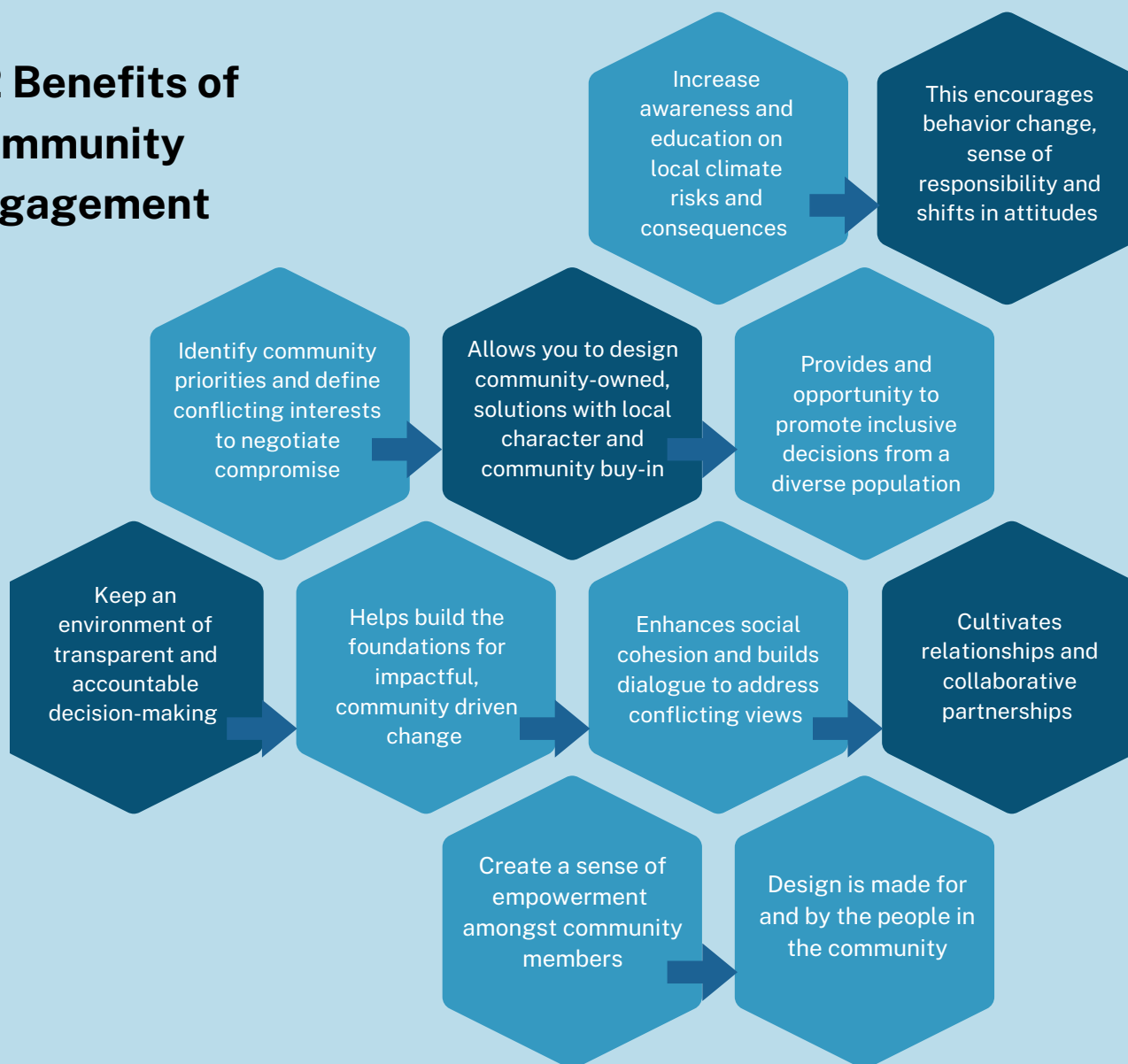- ✓ Enhance appeal for funding consideration
- ✓ Gain political support

Public Support and Engagement

Public support for climate action is crucial to meet future infrastructure planning needs. **Managing municipal services now is different than ever before.**

- Infrastructure is getting **older and more fragile,** made worse by the effects of climate change.
- **We are seeing more damages to services, property, and livelihoods.**
- Municipal revenue in many communities is insufficient to support **replacing older infrastructure and upgrading for climate impacts.**
- Municipalities are, or will be, facing difficult decisions on what services to offer, how to manage risk to those services and how to react when those services fail.

We need to take swift action to address these issues. Although adaptation and mitigation will cost a lot of money, **doing nothing and waiting for climate impacts will cost even more.** Public engagement is needed to negotiate the difficult compromises and competing needs of residents to make these difficult decisions.

1.2 Benefits of Community Engagement

Increase awareness and education on local climate risks and consequences

This encourages behavior change, sense of responsibility and shifts in attitudes

Identify community priorities and define conflicting interests to negotiate compromise

Allows you to design community-owned, solutions with local character and community buy-in

Provides and opportunity to promote inclusive decisions from a diverse population

Keep an environment of transparent and accountable decision-making

Helps build the foundations for impactful, community driven change

Enhances social cohesion and builds dialogue to address conflicting views

Cultivates relationships and collaborative partnerships

Create a sense of empowerment amongst community members

Design is made for and by the people in the community

Your engagement style will depend on your goals, the level of interest from your residents and your capacity to work with smaller or larger groups. On the next page you will find the different types of engagement with a representation of information flow and decision-making,

Informing and **consulting** are one-way communication, either from you to your residents or your residents to you. **Involving** the community is a two-way communication where information flows back and forth at different stages of decision making with ongoing interaction. **Collaboration** adds communication between stakeholder groups. **Empowering** increases the decision making power of stakeholders to cement ownership over a process or outcome. And co-creation eliminates the boundaries between you and the residents you serve.

There are many benefits to increasing community involvement, but the more in-depth approaches take additional time and effort to work through diverse opinions and interests.
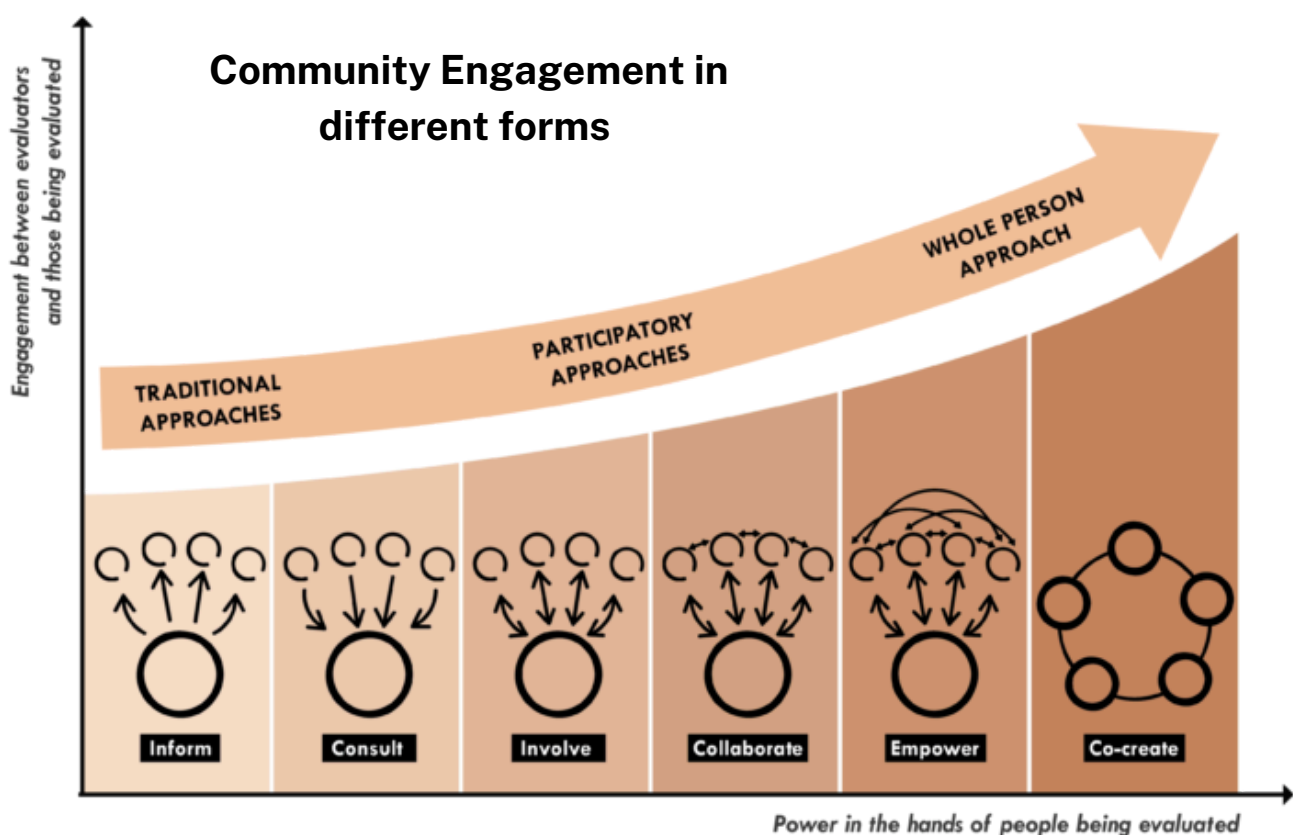
You may find AIM Network's *Community Engagement Handbook, A Guide To Citizen Engagement on Municipal Services* a useful tool to work through and record your intent.

Including the community

If whole person approaches seem daunting, you can start small and grow from there!

- Begin with information sharing to ensure the public is accurately informed. This is especially important for climate change considering the misinformation, complexity, and politicization surrounding it.
- Ask your community questions - through surveys, open houses, social media forums or in-person. Make these efforts accessible, transparent, inclusive, and responsive to feedback.
- Use this feedback to inform decisions and check in with the community for more discussion as new information comes into play.
- Bring community group, Indigenous or resident representatives onto municipal committees to allow continuous feedback on your activity.
- Involve your community representatives in decision making and support them in communicating between you and your residents. Involving the public in climate change work has been proven to help combat feelings of helplessness and eco-grief [5]
- Integrate community input wholly into municipal decisions, embracing conflict as a necessary element in a community owned process and take the time and effort to mediate these differing views to a collaborative conclusion. Feelings of powerlessness can be turned into hope and action when they are properly informed. Effective activities often include information sharing, consultation, deliberation, and co-creation [4].

Source: Illustration by Paula Vinhas adapted from IAP2 and Oasis School of Human Relations. Adapted with permission.

2. Planning a Regional Climate Event

Getting Started

To get started, consider what it is you want to get out of the engagement, what are your goals and objectives as a municipality, as well as your ambitions for regional collaboration.

Engagement does not need to include hundreds of people to bring value to participants, often opportunities for small group discussion or focus groups with a particular audience can support meaningful exchanges.

What is your municipality's vision? How do you want to meaningfully engage the community in climate change discussions, planning, and implementation?

THE PLANNING PROCESS AND EVENT TYPE NEEDS TO RESONATE WITH YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE TO ENSURE YOU ARE CREATING A SENSE OF PRIDE, OWNERSHIP, AND COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION TO THE EVENT.

Respect

Demonstrate a commitment to listening and building trust.

Participatory & Collaborative

Actively involve the community from start to finish, mapping priorities and needs over time.

Getting it Right: Meaningful Engagement

Meaningful and equitable engagement is at the heart of good governance. A meaningful engagement process should uphold the following values:

Inclusive & Accessible

Seek out all voices and perspectives to ensure equitable decision-making, particularly equity and reconciliation-seeking groups.

Accountable & Transparent

Clearly define the process, openly share outcomes, and communicate promptly.

Iterative

Include mechanisms to maintain continuous engagement and follow-up.

Responsive & Adaptive

Include feedback mechanisms to ensure two-way dialogue.

3. Goals and Objectives

As a municipality, what are your goals and objectives for climate change engagement? Are you interested in a regional engagement approach?

Consider both your short- and long-term goals. There may be event specific goals which may focus on participation numbers, sponsorship, partners for exhibitor booths, etc. Your short-term event goals may also connect with your long-term goals, as you endeavour to educate participants on municipal or provincial climate action and programs.

What do you want to achieve?

Depending on your communities' priorities and resources, the event goals can vary in scale and focus. While it is important that your goals and objectives are clear, there is always flexibility in the engagement process for co-development and collaboration.

If your community is new to climate action, focusing more on sharing local climate initiatives or ways to get involved
This may look more like:
- Information and resource sharing
- Presentations on local initiatives
- Workshops and discussion groups around climate change and how it has or will impact the local community

If your community is already involved and aware of climate action, you may want to focus more on community building through engagement or networking focused events. This may look like:
- Having topic focused workshops to allow for networking
- Creating activities like vision boarding to bring participants towards action.

The Pictou County Climate Summit planning group used a visual board to share ideas, themes, and vision. The group consisted of municipal staff and CAOs from the represented municipalities. See page 14 for sample template.

The Climate Summit target audience was community members. By attending, residents demonstrated a motivation to take part, learn, and participate in local climate action.
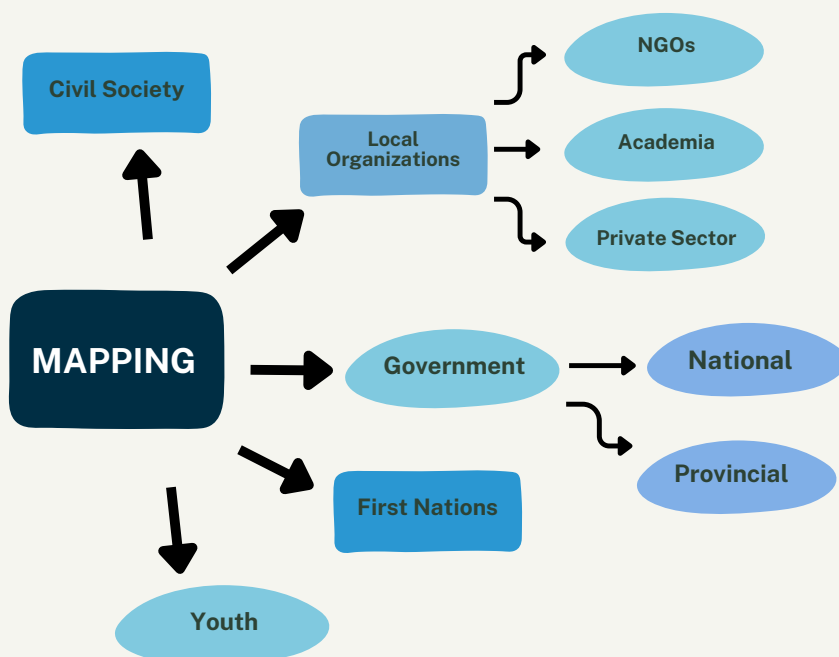
Target Audience

Who is your target audience? The approach for regional collaboration will vary depending on your target audience. If the approach is to engage elected officials in a focus group, the process will be quite different than an event designed to engage youth.

In some cases, your audience may be diverse in demographics and background, requiring different approaches for effective engagement.

Community Mapping

Understanding your community stakeholders is vital for effective engagement and a success event. Have you already identified the key individuals, organizations, and interest groups that are active in your community?

To identity key community players, we recommend a stakeholder mapping exercise to visually organize all the members of your community, considering their interests, influence, and potential contributions to the event.

This exercise will help you define your target audience and how best to reach them. It will also help you identify potential collaborators, as well as potential sponsors and partners.

Select Your Event Type

This section of the guide presents an overview of the four event types pursued by each cohort, highlighting the similarities and differences between the engagement strategies.

Climate Summit

An event that brings together multiple stakeholders and rights holders to engage in learnings and discussion on climate change. The Summit can be scaled up or down depending on your goals and target audience. It is a public facing event with a focus on learning from expert speakers, discussion amongst participants, and collaboration in idea generation. This event type most closely resembles a conference in structure.

Elected Officials Summit

An event for elected representatives to engage in climate change conversations to improve their understanding of local climate challenges and opportunities. Discussions should focus on reflecting their community's needs, plans, and budgetary concerns. Prior engagement through a survey can help gather information on community concerns to inform the discussions. Educational components from climate experts can also help to enrich the discussion.

Information Campaign

An Information Campaign is focused on providing information on local climate change work to a target audience. A campaign is not a typical structured event. The information to be shared can be defined through the initial planning phases and goal setting.

Climate Roadshow

Involves a series of events to gather feedback. The events can be public forum or town halls that allow participants to share their thoughts and ask questions to staff, experts, and/or elected officials. The event is a combination of information sharing information and feedback gathering from participants to inform future decisions. A Climate Roadshow will bring together residents, businesses, local decision makers, and community organizations.

4. Building Your Event

Time Commitment and Schedule

Should you choose to organize a regional Climate Summit or Elected Official Summit, it is crucial to understand the time commitment required for its planning and execution. Evaluate where your municipality and region are at in terms of previous community engagement. Have you already conducted a public survey addressing climate change priorities and needs in the region? Do you have a Climate Action Plan? Do you have a list of community contacts and stakeholders, or existing relationships with potential partners or sponsors? Depending on how you answer these questions, you may need to budget several months to a year of planning, keeping in mind the time required to gather feedback and effectively co-create with multiple partners with potentially differing priorities.

Budget and Capacity

The type of event you host will depend on the budget and staff capacity. Evaluate your financial resources, potential in-kind contributions, volunteer and/or staff capacity, and projected expenses. This assessment will guide your decisions regarding the scale and scope of the event.

Program Close
February 2024

Follow-Up Workshops

Engagement Events

Program Launch
August 2022

Workshops & Planning
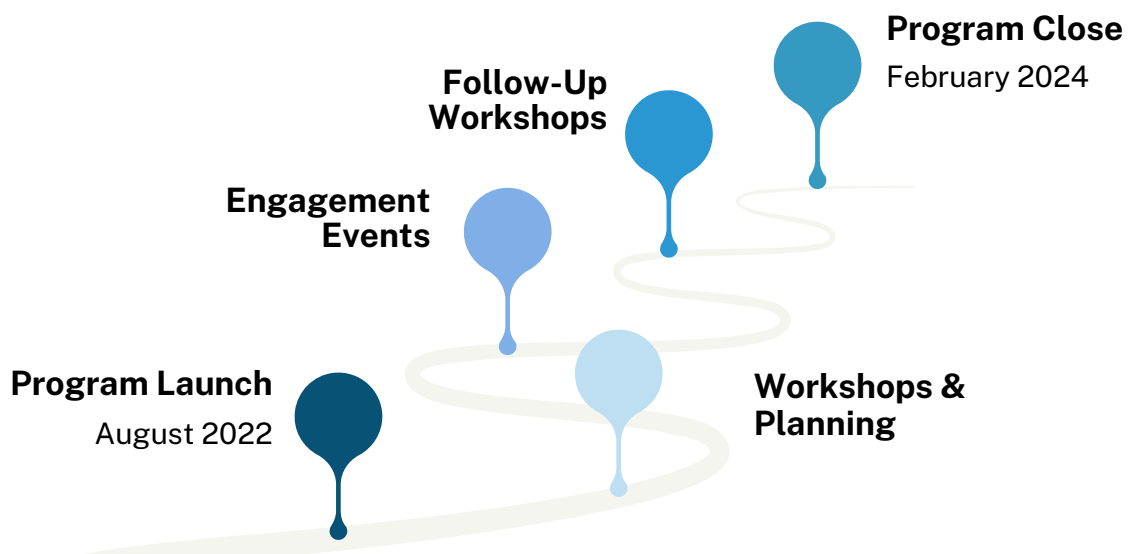
Event Format

Choosing between an in-person or virtual event depends on several factors. Consider your communities preferences, technological capacity and infrastructure, and potential challenges. Assess the advantages and limitations of each format as well as the varying preferences among different target audiences to make an informed decision.

Partnership and Sponsorship

Explore potential partnership and sponsorship opportunities to enhance the success of your event. Who are the local businesses, organizations, or government bodies that share your vision for climate engagement with which you can collaborate? Who might be interested in delivering an engaging presentation or participating as an exhibitor? Sponsors and partners might include local First Nations; local business specialists in energy efficiency, waste management services; environmental and conservation organizations; bike shops and low-carbon transit businesses; academia; regional emergency management organizations; innovation hubs; chamber of commerce; youth groups; and community organizations.

In-person
- Can build stronger relationships.
- Facilitates more collaborative participation.
- Number of attendees are limited.
- Greater time/travel commitment.

Virtual
- Can be less costly due to lack of venue and catering costs.
- Lacks human connection.
- Reach a wider audience.
- Harder to maintain audience engagement.

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PICTOU COUNTY CLIMATE SUMMIT

Register today for a chance to **win** a **FREE e-bike** thanks to Pictou County Cycle & Nova Scotia Power!

Communications and Outreach

An effective communication and outreach strategy is essential for engaging your target audience.

- Begin by reaching out to community groups and elected officials
- Tailor your message so it will resonate with your target audience
- Consider multiple channels of communication such as newsletters, preexisting email lists, social media platforms, and partner networks.
- Start looking for volunteers to help out with the event

Registration

A simple and user-friendly registration process is key to event planning. It also allows you to anticipate attendance for venue and catering considerations, track engagement success, and keep participants informed.

- Determine how participants will register, what information is needed, and any prerequisites.
- Ensure that your registration system is set up and organized in a user friendly way.
- Google Forms can be used online, and registration forms can be printed and handed out to various community locations such as town hall, library, etc.

Agenda

The agenda sets the course for your event. Balance is important – make it fun, informative, educational, and engaging.

How many presenters do you have? How much time does each presenter need? How much time would you like to provide for questions?

Do not forget breaks! If you want to encourage networking, make sure you build in time for participants to have conversations at their table or throughout the event.

Share your agenda ahead of time, setting expectations and objectives in advance so participants know what to expect.

Key Considerations

- ✓ Safety Procedures
- ✓ Land Acknowledgement
- ✓ Community Guidelines
- ✓ Presentations
- ✓ Breaks
- ✓ Mealtime
- ✓ Networking
- ✓ Audience Participation
- ✓ Time and Room Allocation

Despite your best efforts, you may encounter an oppositional or confrontational participant. Have a plan ahead of time for how you will handle disruptive behaviour. You may want to wait for a break to take this person aside to address their concerns. In the event of disruptive behaviour, establishing *community guidelines** ahead of time for participant behaviour can give you a good foundation to fall back on.

Venue

Key considerations for choosing a venue include:

- Location and proximity
- Accessibility
- Atmosphere
- Layout
- Capacity
- Audio-visual

Opt for venues within familiar and frequented public facilities to boost attendance. Ensure rooms offer a good view of presenters from all areas and prioritize convenience for attendees, making the experience easily accessible and welcoming.

Have participants bring reusable mugs or bottles to reduce waste!

Food

Food is a great incentive for event participation and a great way to express appreciation to attendees. Encourage early registration to more accurately estimate food quantities and to accommodate for dietary restrictions. Consider diverse restrictions and preferences, such as:

- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Gluten-free
- Dairy-free
- Halal

Minimize waste by requesting reusable dishes from your venue or caterer. Avoid single-use plastic at your climate event. If reusable dishes aren't feasible, look into compostable alternatives, composting options, and provide proper waste sorting stations in place.

Questions

- Does your community have a popular facility that residents are already familiar and comfortable with?
- Is the venue easily reachable by public transit or through a safe walking route?
- Is the facility accessible?
- What's the atmosphere like?
- What's the layout and capacity of the venue? Parking considerations?
- Are there specific catering requirements?
- Does the venue offer audio-visual technology (projectors, internet, microphones, speakers, etc)?
- Are there popular local restaurants known for catering?

5. References

1 – Vodden, K., & Cunsolo, A. (2021). Rural and remote communities: Chapter 3 in Canada in a Changing Climate: National Issues Report. Government of Canada. https://natural-resources.canada.ca/sites/nrcan/files/GNBC/Chapter%203_Rural%20and%20Remote%20Communities_Final_EN.pdf

2 – Federation of Canadian Municipalities. (2019). Climate and Sustainability. FCM. https://fcm.ca/en/focus-areas/climate-and-sustainability

3 – Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2022). 2030 emissions reduction plan : Canada's next steps to clean air and a strong economy. In Government of Canada. Environment and Climate Change Canada. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/En4-460-2022-eng.pdf

4 – Newfoundland Labrador Office of Public Engagement. (n.d.). Public Engagement Guide. https://www.gov.nl.ca/pep/files/Public-Engagement-Guide.pdf

5. Ecological grief and anxiety: the start of a healthy response to climate change? Cunsolo, Ashlee et al. The Lancet Planetary Health, Volume 4, Issue 7, e261 - e263

6. Resources for Inclusive Engagement

FCM's Guide and Resource Toolkit for Best Practices: https://fcm.ca/en/resources/fcm-anti-racism-equity-inclusion-and-reconciliation-resource-hub/best-practices-toolkit

FCM's Guide to Integrating Equity, Diversity and Inclusion into Municipal Climate Action: https://www.pcp-ppc.ca/resources/edi

AIM Network's Community Engagement Handbook, A Guide To Citizen Engagement on Municipal Services: https://www.aimnetwork.ca/

Guide for Integrating Climate Change Considerations into Municipal Asset Management https://fcm.ca/sites/default/files/documents/programs/mamp/guide-for-integrating-climate-change-considerations-into-municipal-am.pdf

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement: A Guide for Practitioners: https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/dialogue/ImagesAndFiles/ProgramsPage/EDI/BeyondInclusion/Beyond%20Inclusion%20-%20Equity%20in%20Public%20Engagement.pdf

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