MUNICIPAL PROFILE:
POPULATION: ~121,621 (2016 Census)
LOCATION: Northwestern Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Superior
SIZE: 2,556.81 km²
TOTAL PRIVATE DWELLINGS: 57,146
GREAT LAKES WATERSHED: Lake Superior

BACKGROUND
The City of Thunder Bay has been pursuing climate change initiatives for quite some time. The City has experienced major storms with large hail and extreme winds in 2011, extreme flooding that caused the City to declare a state of emergency in 2012, major snowstorms in the springs of 2013 and 2014, and extreme cold temperatures that have stressed water utilities during winter. In 2015, the City adopted a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy to address these impacts, called “Climate Ready City.” The focus of the Climate Adaptation Strategy is to build on the City’s existing strengths and align current resources to increase the resilience of the Corporation. Over 170 people including members of City Council, City managers and staff, key professionals and stakeholders, and EarthCare (the City and Community’s sustainability initiative) were engaged in the process. After completing the Strategy, it became clear that the impacts of climate change stretched beyond the municipality to members of the community. The City used this opportunity to launch a new project that involved reaching out to residents and learning from their lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings on climate change in order to connect and support adaptation at the personal level.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
A single source platform to access information about climate change impacts and actions has been highly requested in Thunder Bay.

In March 2017, the City initiated the development of a new climate change website with locally relevant information to the Thunder Bay community. The website is intended to be a centralized source of tools to understand, talk about, and adapt to climate change. The project was created to fill a gap in place-based awareness-raising about climate change in the Thunder Bay community context. The website is unique in its approach to community engagement and motivation. It presents several different avenues for users to engage and share, and provides an accessible platform for communication about the physical and emotional impacts of climate change. To facilitate this, the website was built on three guiding principles:

HEAD: The website is intended to be a place to learn about local climate change science, potential climate change impacts, and the local government’s strategy. Information on climate change fosters a connection with users at the cognitive level.

HEART: A portion of the website allows users to collect and share stories about impacts that people have experienced due to climate change, and what people feel as a result of climate change. The website will allow for photo messages to be shared to the website and through social media as a means of sharing feelings, ideas, and to motivate and empower users to make a change. This method of engagement and connecting with people’s hearts is an expansion of the climate change Photo Voice that was undertaken in 2015-2017 by EarthCare’s Climate Adaptation working group.

HANDS: The website provides information on actions (big and small) that can be done to help adapt to the impacts of climate change, including how to talk about climate change.
The website can be accessed by visiting https://climatechangetbay.com/

OBJECTIVES
The City identified four goals for the website:

- Create a local online climate change resource center;
- Educate Thunder Bay residents on climate change and adaptation;
- Evoke emotions to engage Thunder Bay residents in action; and
- Promote practical, locally relevant ways to take action to build community resilience.

PROJECT PLANNING
Planning for the website began in early spring of 2017. The project was originally developed as an extension of a successful Community Action Project called Photo Voice.

Support for the creation of the website was secured through Council, particularly since the creation of a public engagement tool related to climate change has been identified in the City of Thunder Bay Climate Adaptation Strategy and the EarthCare Sustainability Plan.

To start, the Project Lead researched websites built on similar principles to develop a framework for the new platform. Websites that developed a balance of both emotional and actionable features were helpful. The Project Lead worked primarily with their partner Lakehead University on building the framework and designing the website. Once the platform was designed, two students from Lakehead University were employed to research and populate website content, specifically local climate change resources. This aspect was very research-intensive, as the website intended to become a centralized source of locally relevant climate information. The existing EarthCare Climate Adaptation working group was also engaged to contribute photo messages for the interactive portion of the website. The final evaluation and selection of resource links was completed by the Project Lead and the Lakehead University partner.

Collaboration with the Corporate Communications team was necessary to ensure streamlining of the new website with the existing EarthCare Thunder Bay web page, which housed limited climate-related information prior to the creation of the new website.

The photo message portion of the website was launched in early Fall of 2017. The full website is set to launch in Spring of 2018.

A promotional campaign was also developed, including a media strategy, press release, media advisory, notices in Thunder Bay and EarthCare newsletters, as well as inclusion in a municipal magazine that is delivered to residents. To facilitate the spread and uptake of the new website, the City has set up a variety of opportunities to showcase the project.

FUNDING
Funding for the project was supported by the $7,000 grant from the MOECC for participating in the Collaborative Implementation Group project. The City of Thunder Bay and Lakehead University both matched this support through in-kind development expertise and student research.

PARTNERSHIPS
The project’s success was partly due to a strong existing partnership with Lakehead University, the Thunder Bay Climate Adaptation Working Group, EarthCare, and EcoSuperior.

One of the partnerships highlighted was that with Lakehead University. The University provided access to staff who had expertise in communicating climate change, and was an integral component of the website’s interactive framework. Additionally, the support of the student assistant and website designer were key to the creation of the website and populating it with up-to-date, locally relevant information.
CHALLENGES
Four key challenges were encountered during the creation of the website.

TIME AND MONEY: Timing and funding were among the biggest challenges facing staff, especially when taking on a new project in relatively unfamiliar territory (i.e. developing a website). The Project Lead expressed that it was sometimes difficult to allocate or delegate enough time to working on the project while staying within the timeline and budget established with the project partners.

COORDINATION: The creation and success of the new website required frequent collaboration with the City of Thunder Bay’s own web and communications staff. Meetings were necessary to ensure the logistics and content of the new website met communications guidelines and were feasible within the City’s communication mandate. The Project Lead made sure to involve the Communications Team as much as possible early on in the project to ensure a smooth procedure.

ENGAGEMENT: One of the most difficult aspects of launching a new web platform is making sure that the target audience knows about and has access to the product. Community engagement is the focus of the website, and therefore promotion, outreach, and uptake were a focus of project planning and implementation. To ensure the website reaches as many people as possible, the Project Lead has invested in the development of a media campaign, a launch event, as well as other opportunities, to reach the Thunder Bay community at public events.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES
The positive outcomes associated with the project are threefold:

PARTNERSHIP WITH UNIVERSITY: The City of Thunder Bay benefited from and strengthened its partnership with Lakehead University. The University’s knowledge and expertise in climate change communication and community empowerment is a resource that the City can continue to draw from for future climate change initiatives.

ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY: The goal of the website was to start a dialogue about climate change within the Thunder Bay community. The sharing of stories and photos, as well as the wealth of climate change information that is available through the website, has the potential to significantly impact community resilience. In addition to providing users with practical, actionable ideas for improving resilience, the website will hopefully inspire the community within Thunder Bay to become more passionate, engaged, and motivated on the issue of climate change.

COLLECTION AND AWARENESS OF LOCAL RESOURCES: The process of researching and populating the website with locally-relevant climate data, actions, and information will be beneficial for Thunder Bay residents, EarthCare, and City staff alike. The website can foster more comprehensive understanding of climate impacts facing Thunder Bay, and what options are available to address them. It provides ease of accessibility through a centralized, organized location and makes climate action much more accessible to those who are only beginning to investigate the topic in their work or personal lives.
The Collaborative Implementation Groups (CIG) project targeted 12 municipalities throughout the Great Lakes watershed to identify and implement an adaptation initiative in their community over the period of one year (January 2017 – December 2017). The CIGs came together at various stages to share experiences, challenges, and opportunities on such items as measuring progress through indicators, project financing, budgeting, scheduling, evaluation, monitoring, and reporting. Ultimately, the CIGs were an opportunity to bring together practitioners struggling with implementation challenges to create a peer support network that brings these individuals together (both online and in person) to collectively work through the implementation of an identified action and share the resulting experiences.

**Acknowledgements**

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The Collaborative Implementation Project Collaborative Implementation Groups

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