

AGENTS OF CHANGE REFLECTIONS

Lessons learned by participating communities



Agents of Change
A project of ICLEI Canada
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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Over the course of 2022, ten Canadian municipalities worked with ICLEI Canada – through a cohort collaboration model – to design local volunteer engagement programs for climate action. The participating municipalities conceptualized programs, governance structures, partnership models, recruitment techniques, Indigenous engagement and equity considerations, approaches to social media, and explored many other considerations to build locally relevant engagement programs with lasting impact. Ultimately, each municipality designed a program tailored to their community and climate mitigation and/or adaptation action goals. Their stories are presented in the case studies that follow.

- [Colchester, Nova Scotia: Youth Ambassadors and Climate Crew](#)
- [Cranbrook, British Columbia: Local Partnerships Support Community Coordination](#)
- [Dufferin County, Ontario: Youth-Led Climate Action + Justice](#)
- [Grey County, Ontario: Reconciliation-Focused Land Stewardship](#)
- [Nanaimo, British Columbia: Inspiring, Educating and Empowering to Reduce Climate Impact](#)
- [New Glasgow, Nova Scotia: Evolving and Building Capacity for Greater Climate Action](#)
- [Ottawa, Ontario: Delivering Key Messaging for Greater Climate Resilience](#)
- [Vernon, British Columbia: Increasing Neighbourhood Resilience](#)
- [Victoria, British Columbia: Lessons Learned to Inform New Retrofit Program](#)
- [Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Engaging the Business Community to Reach Net-Zero](#)

Local governments and climate action

When local governments take climate action, they generally view it through two lenses: 1) their own corporate operations, and 2) the community at large. Within their operations, they exercise a great level of control that allows them to implement change, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and increase resilience. However, when it comes to the broader community, they don't have the same control and must collaborate with residents and stakeholders to achieve climate mitigation and adaptation goals.

Why Agents of Change

Simply put, taking action on climate change is everybody's business. Every group in every neighbourhood of every municipality has a role to play when it comes to taking climate action. Schools, businesses, industry, communities of faith, and all orders of government need to be engaged in the face of a wicked problem of this magnitude.

As the level of government closest to people, municipalities are uniquely positioned to mobilize climate action within their communities by providing structure, continuity, and administrative support. They can also act as facilitators, trainers, animators, and mobilizers. The [Agents of Change](#) project helped municipalities across Canada build volunteer engagement programs to engage residents in local climate planning processes to support the implementation of climate actions to achieve net zero and climate resilience goals.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge that this project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada. We would also like to acknowledge the municipal staff and organizations who were instrumental in the creation of the volunteer engagement programs for climate action presented in the following case studies.

About ICLEI Canada

[ICLEI Canada](#) is part of a global network working to achieve tangible sustainability results through cumulative local actions. We support local governments by providing them with expertise and resources to take action in their communities. To do this, we bring together a wide variety of stakeholders across government, industry, academia, and the non-profit community to build more sustainable, low-carbon, biodiverse, and climate-ready communities.

ICLEI Canada's work happens across Turtle Island which has traditionally been and is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples since time immemorial. We are committed to building relationships with Indigenous groups and knowledge keepers, knowing that Truth and Reconciliation requires ongoing learning, unlearning, reflection, and action. We endeavour to listen to and learn from Indigenous Peoples on an ongoing basis in the process of our work.

Visit icleicanada.org/project/agents-of-change/ to learn more about the Agents of Change project and access resources to develop a volunteer engagement program in your community.

Youth Ambassadors and Climate Crew

Description

The municipality of Colchester's two complementary, municipally-formed and supported youth volunteer programs, the Colchester Environmental Diversion Ambassadors (CEDA) and the Colchester Climate Crew, target GHG emissions outside the direct control of the municipality and align with the mandate and pathway outlined in [Colchester's Community Energy & Emissions Plan](#).

CEDA was created to establish a partnership between existing youth organizations and provide training for youth to become community ambassadors for waste reduction and diversion. CEDA participants collect pledges from community members, documenting their commitment to waste reduction and diversion, in order to support sustainability and lower the impact of climate change.

The Colchester Climate Crew project aims to build relationships between Climate Crew members (students) and mentors from a local environmental non-profit organization. Through Climate Crew, students will learn about climate change, climate action, and related topics from municipal staff and guest speakers. They will also have the opportunity to design and implement their own climate action initiatives focused on promoting awareness and social/behaviour change to reduce GHG emissions.

Progress to date

As of February 2023, six volunteers have been engaged in CEDA and the Colchester Climate Crew includes eight students. While CEDA volunteers have not yet started with their community education activities, the program has initiated partnerships with the 4H club, the Girl Guides and with Divert NS. The Colchester Climate Crew has also already formed a partnership with the *ÉAT S'en Soucie* volunteer program at *École Acadienne de Truro* and are working on a partnership with the local library.

During the volunteer program start-up and planning phase, the Colchester Climate Crew team identified the need to start by gauging climate literacy, attitudes, values, and motivations to better understand how to approach and implement strategies that will gain community buy-in before tackling tangible, targeted areas, such as home efficiency. The current focus of the Colchester Climate Crew is on building general climate awareness and laying a foundation for social and behaviour change.

Advice to other local governments

- Partner with existing groups, programs, and organizations.
- Have a plan A, a plan B, and maybe even a plan C for recruitment in case no one signs up.
- It takes more work than you think to get a volunteer program started. Plan for more time than you think you will need.

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"It's helpful to form partnerships with youth organizations or school programs that are aligned with the volunteer program's mandate and which can facilitate recruitment and contact with young people. Youth are keen to learn and make a difference, and they serve to benefit in many ways from this type of program by gaining new knowledge, pushing the boundaries of their comfort zone, developing social and communication skills, cooperating with others, exercising their creativity, making friends, acting on an issue they care about, etc."

- Participant Joanna Burris



PARTICIPANTS FROM THE YOUTH AMBASSADORS AND CLIMATE CREW PROGRAMS IN COLCHESTER, NOVA SCOTIA.

Local Partnerships Support Community Coordination

Description

The City of Cranbrook worked with local community organizations to create Sustainable Cranbrook. Sustainable Cranbrook helps connect individuals with scientific information about climate change, identify existing and ongoing local climate mitigation and adaptation projects, and inform community members about ways they can make changes in their lives to support a more sustainable future. The program was developed with its own brand (independent from City branding) to recognize that it is not simply a City initiative, and to reduce the barriers for individuals that tend to view information from governments with skepticism.

Progress to date

Sustainable Cranbrook is working to connect with local residents and encourage them to make changes in their lives that will reduce GHG emissions. In order to support this work, the City created a volunteer management system, drawing on resources provided by ICLEI Canada and knowledge from local community groups. Once completed, the volunteer management system will help improve how the City manages volunteers across other departments.

Sustainable Cranbrook has also enhanced connections between City staff and community groups invested in the outcomes of this project. This created an opportunity to learn about climate mitigation and adaptation actions already being implemented from engaged community groups, and led to the recognition that these actions could be better coordinated. Additionally, a strategy was identified to convene community groups (e.g., cycling clubs, gardening clubs, etc.) and enhance collaboration with these groups to reach their members and effectively disseminate relevant climate action information and resources.

So far, the program has been tracking the number of volunteers that have been trained, the number of events Sustainable Cranbrook has attended, the number of personal outreach conversations, and program surveys completed as well as individual responses.

Advice to other local governments

Run volunteer engagement programs with community partners.

Many of the people in these groups have significant insight and existing community connections. They may also have experience recruiting and managing volunteers, which can really help enhance the capacity of smaller municipalities. While work can be done faster when all planning is done internally, working with community partners has more advantages.

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“Even if you already have a good idea of what you want to do for your program, make sure you walk your community partners through the process of coming up with ideas so that they are on-board with everything. Include your community partners in coming up with the project management plan.”

- Participant Evan Berry



THE SUSTAINABLE CRANBROOK PROGRAM INFORMS CITIZENS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE.

Youth-Led Climate Action + Justice

Description

The Youth Climate Activation Circle (YCAC) is a volunteer program that supports the implementation of the Dufferin Climate Action Plan and empowers Dufferin County youth to advance local climate solutions. The YCAC is made up of eight local youth (ages 16 to 25) who collectively design and implement projects that support GHG emission reductions in the County's priority sectors, while sharing their learnings and success to inspire the wider community. The primary goals of the YCAC are to:

- Advance progress on the Dufferin Climate Action Plan through annual projects that result in GHG reductions.
- Empower participants with the knowledge and skills to drive local climate action and prioritize the participation of and benefits to equity-deserving communities (e.g., racialized groups, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, persons with low-income, persons with disabilities/disabled, persons with low-literacy, women, immigrants, and refugees).
- Facilitate community conversations, peer networking, and nurture mentorship relationships.
- Foster the future generation of changemakers with exposure to 'green' career pathways.

Each year the youth cohort will participate in three program phases:

1. Training on climate change to advance climate solutions, which will be delivered by Climate Division staff and guest speakers.
2. Project Design and Implementation, through which YCAC will co-design and implement one GHG reductions project.
3. Knowledge Sharing, wherein the cohort will share success stories with the community and complete a program review.

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

On March 11, 2021, Dufferin County Council adopted the Dufferin Climate Action Plan, a strategy for the community to reach net-zero GHG by 2050 and build resilience to the current and future impacts of climate change. The YCAC program has supported Dufferin's net-zero goal by empowering local youth to become trusted messengers of change in their community. This strategic angle was deemed important because, in some families, children generate up to 85% of awareness of environmental issues.¹

Progress to date

The County of Dufferin began recruitment in August 2022 and officially launched the Youth Climate Activation Circle in November 2022. Between November 2022 and February 2023 volunteers participated in a series of climate change training sessions, completing Phase 1 of the program. Highlights of training included an eco-anxiety workshop, a Climate Solutions Fair connecting volunteers to local organizations, and a session with a community elder emphasizing the connection between colonialism and the climate crisis and how Indigenous ways of knowing are shaping climate solutions.

The YCAC has stayed true to the original vision for the program. However, an addition to the program structure that was not initially anticipated was the creation of an Advisory Team which has provided an advisory role to prioritize equity-deserving groups in program design, recruitment, selection, and evaluation. Additionally, the Advisory Team will play a key role in connecting Youth Ambassadors to community partners who may collaborate or partners who may collaborate on or support their chosen topic.

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"While we are eager to achieve immediate GHG reductions as an outcome of YCAC projects, we are looking to the cascading impact of the program as the ultimate measure of success. Our hope is that Youth Ambassadors will hold a lifelong commitment to climate action after their participation in the YCAC, in which they advocate for and integrate climate action into various spheres of their life."

- Participant Kylie-Anne Grube

¹ Weilmünster C. (2014). Teaching climate change: Challenge gives rise to opportunity. The Maryland Natural Resource, 18–21. https://climateinterpreter.org/sites/default/files/resources/weilmunster_-_teaching_about_climate_change.pdf

Advice to other local governments

Start at a manageable scale.

For smaller municipalities in particular, it is important that a volunteer program is established at a manageable scale. The YCAC program was designed for a maximum of eight participants for the first year to ensure a meaningful volunteer experience could be delivered. At the same time, opportunities were identified for expansion as capacity increases. For instance, in the future, the YCAC could comprise multiple cohorts – one cohort for each of Dufferin’s municipalities or cohorts at individual schools.

Prioritize the engagement of volunteers who are often excluded.

We know that climate change is an issue of justice. Those who feel the greatest impacts of climate change tend to be excluded from developing climate solutions. We encourage other local governments who are starting their volunteer engagement to be intentional about prioritizing equity-deserving communities (e.g., people of colour, newcomers, 2SLGBTQ+ persons, women, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities/disabled) in application scoring and program design. We were inspired by the City of Toronto’s Neighbourhood Climate Action Champions application criteria and highly recommend for others to look to their work as an example.

Build in flexibility.

It is difficult to anticipate all the needs of your volunteers when designing an engagement program. Whether that be accommodations, meeting time, place, or frequency. Building in flexibility means you can better adapt the program to meet the needs of your volunteers.



YOUTH CLIMATE ACTIVATION CIRCLE VOLUNTEERS IN DUFFERIN COUNTY, ONTARIO.

Reconciliation-Focused Land Stewardship

Description

Over the last 10 months, Grey County has worked in partnership with M’Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre to build a foundation for community stewardship volunteer work that strives to bring together the treaty peoples of the surrounding area – Indigenous and settler – to be in better relationship with the land and environment, through naturalization projects. The initiative has engaged five partner organizations and has reduced an estimated one tonne of CO₂ by planting 100 trees.

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

In the short-term, Grey County is realizing its program goals for climate action by increasing plantings of trees and shrubs and building awareness of nature-based climate action. But the long-term goal remains: to shift the relationship of participants to the local land, to act as better stewards and implement nature-based solutions to climate change. This project has both deepened and initiated new relationships with local Indigenous organizations and helped broaden awareness and engagement of the importance of nature-based solutions for climate action.

Progress to date

From the outset it was anticipated that this project would be emergent, focusing on relationships and reconciliation in climate action. The initial thinking was to establish a stewardship volunteer program run by Grey County focused on nature-based climate solutions, guided by local Indigenous knowledge and practices on the land. As the project progressed, partner organizations with existing volunteer management infrastructure emerged, including Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, NeighbourWoods North, and Bruce Trail Association. The approach evolved to work on relationship building to connect existing volunteer groups implementing nature-based climate solutions with local Indigenous organizations and Knowledge Keepers facilitated by Grey County.

The concept of Reconciliation-focused Stewardship Volunteering was publicly launched in October 2022 with a ceremonial tree planting event. Working closely with community partners, Grey County mobilized over 50 community members to volunteer for a naturalization event grounded in local Indigenous wisdom and Ceremony. Opened in ceremony by Lori Kewaquom, a Saugeen Ojibway knowledge keeper, the event invited participants to connect more deeply with the land and community while planting over 40 native trees and shrubs following local Indigenous protocol.

The launch event which took place at the County's corporate main office showcased Grey County's commitment to nature-based solutions, built community awareness through a visible naturalization project, and supported the key priority area of Grey County's Climate Action Plan of 'Leading by Example'. This event sought to build interest in further community stewardship volunteering centering reconciliation.



CEREMONIAL TREE PLANTING EVENT IN GREY COUNTY, ONTARIO.

Advice to other local governments

Ground reconciliation work in healthy ongoing relationships, get comfortable with uncertainty, embrace non-linear project development, and create space for ceremony and different ways of knowing and being.

A key teaching from Grey County's work with M'Wikwedong is the need for all reconciliation work to be grounded in healthy ongoing relationships. Through participation in M'Wikwedong's Giwe Sharing Circles, their model for 'Inter-organizational Coordination, Learning and Healing' has been embraced, allowing for the working through of tensions between Western "brick sensibilities" and Indigenous "roots sensibilities." This has required growing the capacity to be comfortable with uncertainty, embracing non-linear project development, and creating space for ceremony and different ways of knowing and being.

Stretch and expand what is possible, particularly in terms of process, when working to build partner relationships with local Indigenous groups.

Working to build partner relationships with local Indigenous groups requires municipal governments to stretch and expand what is possible, particularly in terms of process. The pay off for doing so is immense. Settler or "brick sensibilities" seek clarity, predictable progress, partnerships focused on mandates, and priority actions. To partner meaningfully on climate work, municipalities need to find the spaces to shift into collaborative relations that make space for and celebrate "root sensibilities" and their focus on ceremony to honour all of creation and connect participants at a spiritual level, while seeking guidance on how best to move forward with the work. It was found that the root sensibilities approach resonated with local stewardship volunteer organizations and was well received by the community.



NATURALIZATION EVENT IN GREY COUNTY, ONTARIO.



OPENING CEREMONY WITH INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPER, LORI KEWAQUOM

NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Inspiring, Educating and Empowering to Reduce Climate Impact

Description

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) and the City of Nanaimo teamed up to launch the Acting for Climate Together (ACT) initiative. ACT is a volunteer engagement initiative created to inspire, educate, and empower individuals and community groups to work together to reduce our climate impact. The initiative was designed to encourage new and existing groups to work together to complete recommended climate actions. ACT Teams that complete “ACTions” (i.e., actions related to energy management, climate mitigation and resilience, and environmental stewardship) are awarded ACT Badges and are recognized for their efforts with prizes. Badges are awarded in the following categories:

- Transportation
- Food and Waste
- Buildings and Energy
- Nature
- Climate Knowledge
- Big ACTion

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

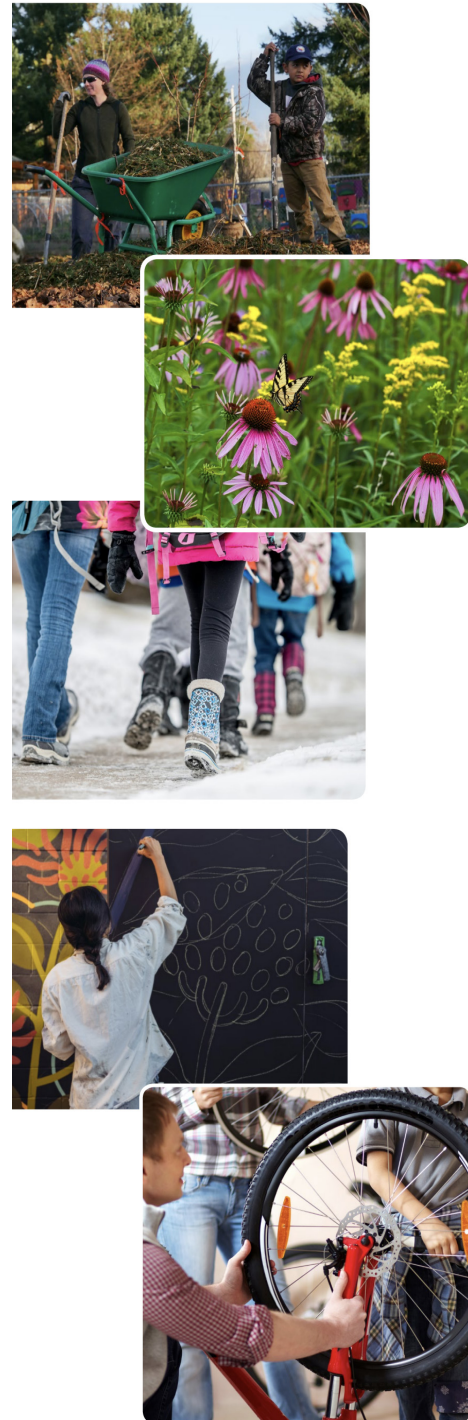
The City and RDN recognize that in order to meet our climate targets, we need strong buy-in and leadership from local residents. The ACT program was designed to encourage local groups to take positive climate action, develop local climate leaders, and ultimately increase the likelihood of reaching Nanaimo's community emission targets of 50-58% below citywide 2010 GHG levels by 2030 and 94-107% below 2010 levels by 2050, and Regional District of Nanaimo targets of reducing community GHG to 80% below 2007 levels by 2050.

Based on conversations with participants and their project submission forms, Staff assigned one expected action to each registered group and provided GHG reduction estimates for that action. The total emissions reductions for these actions is estimated to be seven tCO2e per year.

Progress to date

The ACT program officially started recruitment on January 13, 2023. Following the launch, staff hosted an information session for 26 registered individuals who expressed interest in participating in the pilot cohort. To date, 12 teams (comprising 348 individual participants) have signed up with the expectation of more sign-ups to come. Program registration was extended to February 17, 2023. A Kick-off Event has been planned for February 25, 2023, which will feature an Edler welcome, keynote speeches from local climate champions (Dr. Stephen Sheppard and Whelm King), and a round table workshop. The workshop has been developed to help build participants' capacity to create implementation plans for recommended climate actions. Beyond the Kick-off Event, City and RDN staff will meet with program participants on a monthly basis and an in-person celebration event is tentatively scheduled for June, 2023. The pilot cohort will officially wrap up in the fall of 2023, and a new cohort is planned to follow in 2024. Previous participants will be encouraged to continue to take actions and support new groups as ACT mentors

While the ACT program is consistent with its original goal to create an accessible education and behaviour change program that spans a number of sectors (building, transportation, waste, and nature), the program itself has evolved considerably from its initial concept. For instance, ACT no longer pursues the carbon calculator based program due to concerns about the accuracy and accessibility of available carbon calculators. Staff also looked into working with a local



SAMPLE BIG ACTIONS FROM THE TOOLKIT: A CLIMATE ACTION INITIATIVE FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS. WWW.RDN.BC.CA/ACTION-FOR-CLIMATE-TOGETHER

non-profit climate action group to co-develop a climate pledge program that would encourage individual climate actions and sustainable decision making in a point and prized based system; however, the City, RDN, and the non-profit decided to forgo the initial concept due to incompatible differences in messaging, decision making, and prioritization of government-supported actions while continuing to communicate and informally support each other's program. The City and RDN pivoted and developed the ACT program as a way to encourage group actions and build resilience within new and existing groups, including neighbourhoods and community organizations.

The City and RDN have secured funding to support the ACT program into 2024 and beyond, and have developed materials and content to support the program. The City and RDN team hired a graphic designer to create a logo, brochure, participant toolkit, and PowerPoint slide template. A project website has also been designed, launched, and program materials created to date have been reviewed by a professional copy editor to make them more accessible and engaging for potential participants. All materials have also been designed to be used for numerous years.



'ACTING FOR CLIMATE TOGETHER' COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA.



ACT WAS CREATED TO INSPIRE, EDUCATE AND ENCOURAGE EXISTING GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS TO WORK TOGETHER TO TAKE ACTION.

Advice to other local governments

Start engaging with local groups early and allow for flexibility.

It is important to engage with local groups early and, in doing so, communicate constraints and expectations early on. The project was considerably delayed due to the need to pivot once the City and RDN learned they were not able to work with the non-profit they were initially going to partner with.

Develop materials that resonate with your audience.

Develop a strong brand and test materials on people outside the local government, particularly those within the program's specified target audience group. Testing materials helped the City and RDN modify materials in order to ensure ACT is accessible and engaging to a wide audience.

Evolving and Building Capacity for Greater Climate Action

Description

The Town of New Glasgow's Climate Action Volunteer Program brings together a cohort of residents to engage the broader community in climate action. The program prioritizes initiatives that lead to targeted GHG reductions in the residential and transportation sector which, combined, account for 64% of community GHG emissions in New Glasgow. In addition to mitigation initiatives, the program also supports activities that strengthen the community of New Glasgow's adaptive capacity and resilience, such as tree planting, clean ups, and home emergency preparedness training.

Over a period of several months, 10 core volunteers work collaboratively to design and host community events and initiatives with the aim of reducing GHG emissions. In alignment with the Town's Community Climate Action Plan, potential initiatives for the Climate Action Volunteer Program to pursue include initiatives that:

- Increase local participation in Efficiency NS programs and Clean Energy Financing
- Encourage the uptake of EVs
- Promote active transportation

To build volunteer capacity, the program incorporates workshop and training opportunities on topics including municipal volunteering, community engagement, and climate action. Following the training period, volunteers have the opportunity to work directly with key Town staff from relevant departments including Climate Change and Sustainability, Active Transportation, and Community Development. Using a collaborative and community-led approach, this program co-creates local climate action events that are high-impact and meaningful.

NEW GLASGOW, NOVA SCOTIA

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

The Town of New Glasgow has recently renewed its commitment to climate action and sustainability. Over the past two years, the Town has worked to build a strong foundation through the development of GHG emission inventories, climate action plans, and reduction targets. Equipped with council-approved climate action plans, the Town is now actively working to implement adaptation and mitigation activities, and recognizes that citizen and business participation is crucial for achieving New Glasgow's climate and resilience goals. As this work is relatively new and many residents remain unaware, the Town has struggled to effectively engage the community in climate action. So far, five people have signed up for New Glasgow's Clean Energy Financing Program, thanks to an outreach and information session event at the farmers' market – one of the five program events that have taken place to date.

Progress to date

Participating in ICLEI Canada's Agent of Change project has fast-tracked the development of New Glasgow's municipally-led Climate Action Volunteer Program. During the program design phase, the Town developed its program structure, communication materials, brand and identity, recruitment strategy, and program content. With communications, education, and engagement activities woven into each focus area of New Glasgow's Community Climate Action Plan, the Town is now positioned to mobilize its core volunteers, enabling citizen participation, and accelerating the adoption of key behaviour change and climate actions necessary to reach key climate change goals and objectives.

The Climate Action Volunteer Program was initially envisioned as a larger cohort with multiple trainings and a longer program commitment from volunteers. However, due to challenges with volunteer recruitment, staff capacity, and the impacts of tropical storm Fiona on timelines, the program was scaled back for its pilot year and its launch was delayed to January, 2023. This flexible approach allows the program to hold true to its core objectives and evolve in its implementation over the coming years.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND INFORMATION SESSION EVENT IN NEW GLASGOW, NOVA SCOTIA.

Advice to other local governments

Do not rush the process.

Designing and launching a volunteer program takes time. Sometimes it may feel like a chicken and egg situation.

Engage with residents to understand their needs.

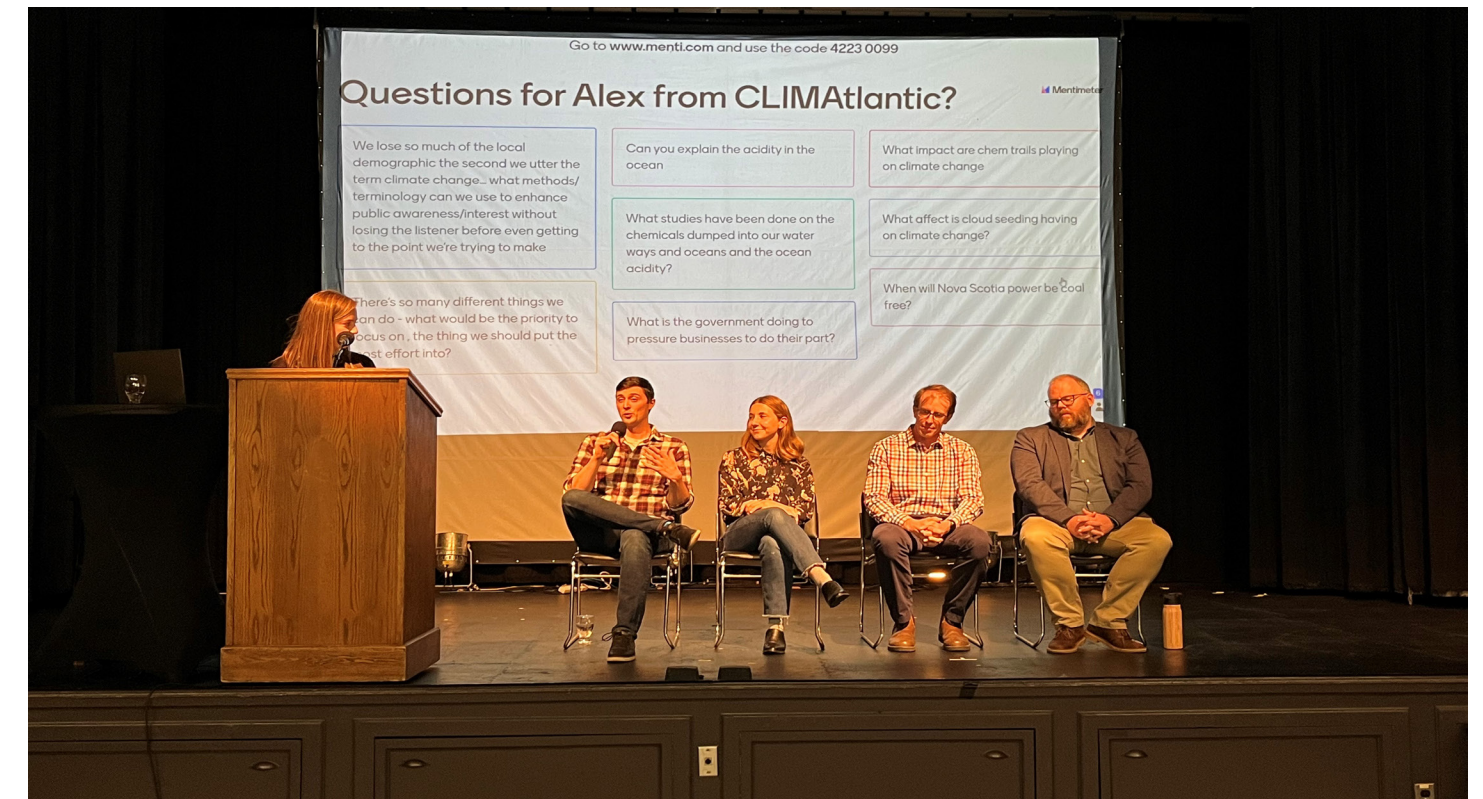
Resident input and participation are crucial to developing a program that is responsive to the needs of the community.

Use a collaborative and community-led approach.

Collaboration will build a more sustainable and higher impact program.

Stay flexible.

A multi-year volunteer program will, by nature, be constantly evolving.



PANELISTS ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT CLEAN ENERGY FINANCING PROGRAM IN NEW GLASGOW, NOVA SCOTIA.

OTTAWA, ONTARIO

Delivering Key Messaging for Greater Climate Resilience

Description

The City of Ottawa developed the Ottawa Climate Volunteers program, which includes two phases. The first phase focuses on building individual and community climate resilience. For this phase, the City is partnering with Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES), an Ottawa-based environmental non-profit, to recruit volunteers to host community dialogues on climate resilience. These community dialogues are intended to raise awareness of the top climate risks facing Ottawa and to facilitate discussions on how the community can take action to build resilience. The second phase will build upon lessons learned through community dialogues in phase one and scale up the project to include climate mitigation work and create widespread behaviour change. Additional funding from the Ottawa Climate Action Fund will enable the program to build capacity within a partner organization, which will act as the long-term co-leader of the program.

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

To achieve the scale of emission reductions required to meet the City's climate targets, climate action needs to be taken by the whole community. Currently, City staff don't have the capacity to support the peer-to-peer learning that leads to effective climate action. There is also a lack of capacity within organizations in Ottawa to do this type of work. The Ottawa Climate Volunteers program was designed to help fill this gap.

Through the volunteer program, the City will expand the scope and reach of climate resilience engagement in the community. The goal of partnering with CAFES and using volunteers to host community dialogues is to increase climate literacy levels, build community capacity, and encourage behaviour change on key actions that build climate resilience. By having trusted community members lead the dialogue sessions, the City hopes to reach audiences that would not typically engage with the municipality.

In the long-term, the City anticipates that the volunteer program will support the co-development of carefully developed key messaging among environmental groups in Ottawa to help residents understand what climate actions they can take to make the most impact. The strategic key messaging will be delivered by volunteers to have a greater impact and spur behaviour change.

Progress to date

The need for a program that brings multiple community partners together to align climate messaging and reach a variety of audiences has been identified by the City, and the scope of the volunteer program is much larger than initially planned. Funding provided through ICLEI Canada enabled greater engagement with community partners and was used as leverage to secure additional funding that will allow the City to build staff capacity within a local environmental non-profit and support the development of a long-term co-branded volunteer program. The City is looking for the right local non-profit partner to co-lead the program and is investing more time in the development of the program than initially anticipated to set it up for success and ensure its longevity.

To support program volunteers host community dialogues during the first phase of the program, a modular resource hub is being developed. The resource hub includes City and external resources such as sample presentations, infographics, social media posts, and toolkits. The resources will focus on Ottawa's changing climate



OTTAWA'S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TO FOCUS ON KEY CLIMATE MESSAGING TO BUILD RESILIENCE AND REDUCE EMISSIONS.



conditions, its top climate risks and most at-risk populations, practical actions that individuals and communities can take, and prompt questions to help frame dialogue sessions. The resource hub will be publicly available on the [Climate Resiliency Strategy page of the City's engagement website](#) in February 2023.

As part of the first phase, volunteers are anticipated to host approximately 10 community dialogues to discuss climate resilience between February and June, 2023.

During the second phase of the program, volunteers will receive extensive training on key action areas to reduce GHG emissions in Ottawa (i.e., electrifying personal vehicles, home energy retrofits, and organic waste diversion), ways to build climate resilience (i.e., home flood protection, neighbourhood resilience plans, and emergency preparedness), as well as climate communications and facilitation. Volunteers will also be provided with the support needed to find opportunities for community and peer-to-peer engagement such as attending community events, presenting at community group meetings, hosting home energy retrofit tours, and media interviews.

Advice to other local governments

Building relationships with community partners is worth the time and effort.

Building working relationships with community partners takes time and effort, especially because timelines and priorities do not always align; however, it allows municipalities to co-develop impactful programs and work towards the common goal of taking climate action.

Increasing Neighbourhood Resilience

Description

In 2019, Vernon established a Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC) consisting of community engagement specialists, climate scientists, and other community members with a range of relevant backgrounds to advise on the development of their climate action plan. The CAAC launched the Climate Ambassador Program later that year – a community volunteer program to engage the community on the climate action plan. The idea was inspired by the UK climate communications organization Climate Outreach, who recognized the need for effective communication and active engagement of the public beyond the usual environmentalist groups in order to accelerate action on climate change with the full buy-in and participation of the public. The Climate Ambassadors Program was based on the idea that climate information is best received when offered by a trusted representative. The primary objective of Vernon's Climate Ambassador Program is to train trusted messengers that can reach their own peer networks and use narratives and language that are tailored to their target audience's sense of identity, basic beliefs, and hopes for the future.

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

The Climate Ambassadors Program mobilizes action on the eight focus areas of Vernon's Climate Action Plan: health and wellbeing, core services and infrastructure, governance, land use and transportation, ecosystem health and biodiversity, buildings and real estate, economic development, and agriculture and food security. Each focus area articulates specific calls to action for community members. Vernon plans to grow the program by developing a series of targeted workshops that ambassadors can deliver that will walk community members through a menu of potential climate action initiatives from active transportation to building energy efficiency and even climate art. The ambassadors will also be equipped to facilitate discussions on next steps and implementation.

Vernon seeks to empower organizations and individuals, to get involved with projects they are passionate about and have the funding, competencies, and resources to undertake them. The ambassador-led climate action workshops also give the City a platform to share important climate resilience information developed by various departments to specific audiences. For example, workshops for the business community allow Vernon to share information on low carbon tourism strategies, business continuity, and adaptation planning for specific risks around wildfire and flood hazards. There is also the opportunity to hold sector-specific workshops to identify stakeholders and convene industry dialogues on promoting and supporting home energy retrofits in the community.

Progress to date

In 2019, the CAAC trained over 30 ambassadors which reached over 1,000 community members in a wide range of groups, including service organizations, non-profits, professional organizations, clubs, religious organizations, and business associations. Training sessions focused mainly on building the capacity of the ambassadors to deliver an interactive, customized 20 minutes slide presentation to raise awareness of, and seek community input into, the proposed Climate Action Plan. As part of the Agents of Change program, Vernon sought to develop and hold resident workshops on climate resilience and build neighbourhood resilience kits as well as grow their volunteer base and look for ways to engage different demographics outside of the usual suspects. Due to staff turnover as well as delays as result of municipal elections and forest fires, Vernon was unable to meet the tight timelines of the Agents of Change program; however, Vernon remains fully committed to developing the Climate Ambassadors Program into the future.

Advice to other local governments

Engage groups and residents that have not traditionally been included in municipal climate action discussions and projects.

When engaging residents on climate action, there can be a tendency to engage community groups that are already supportive and informed about climate change. Municipalities need to find novel ways to find common ground to engage groups and residents that have traditionally not been included or have been more challenging to bring onside.



VOLUNTEER CLIMATE AMBASSADORS PROGRAM IN VERNON, BRITISH COLUMBIA, WAS LAUNCHED TO PROMOTE NEIGHBOURHOOD RESILIENCE.

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Lessons Learned to Inform New Retrofit Program

Description

The purpose of Victoria's volunteer engagement program is to inspire, empower, and motivate individuals and groups to take action on climate change, with a primary focus on making changes in their homes (i.e., energy retrofits). While the program is yet to be launched, its broader objectives are to increase climate literacy in the community, to improve participation in existing programs, and to empower individuals through peer-to-peer engagement approaches that will in turn spur more meaningful and widespread climate action in the community.

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

Victoria's new program will put participants and their networks on a pathway to helping meet the City's climate action targets, starting with addressing building energy usage which accounts for just over half of the City's total emissions. The first phase of the program will include an array of easily adoptable activities from an action guide and toolkit where participants will first complete in-person training. A "train-the-trainer" approach will be used where individuals will, as an example, guide others towards a new retrofit support program, the [Home Energy Navigator](#), which helps homeowners through every step of their retrofit journeys, regardless of where they are. Meeting the program's registration targets are essential to meeting the City's desired deep retrofit rate of 2% of all buildings per year. Another component of the program will be for participants and their networks to increase climate and home energy literacy which will also help reverse the current trend of increasing natural gas connections, which locks homeowners into 15-20 years of continued fossil fuel reliance.

Progress to date

The City has chosen to hire a consultant to co-design this program, with the intention to integrate important lessons learned from the previous City of Victoria Climate Champions program. The choice to hire a consultant was made due to limited staff capacity to thoughtfully design and implement a new program, and in recognition of the value that subject matter experts bring to program development.

A train-the-trainer approach, which includes low-barrier methods to program participation with respect to individual constraints such as time and ability, will be used. Given the importance of an equitable approach, training and support will be provided to participant trainers to ensure that equity-deserving groups are not overlooked by their activities. A comprehensive program structure is in the process of being designed to meet the following priority areas:

- Climate actions focused on what citizens can do to meaningfully contribute towards Victoria's Climate Leadership Plan targets.
- Climate actions that showcase specific retrofit-related activities, such as neighbour presentations by City staff, heat pump show-and-tell, and thermal camera activities.

- Inclusivity and accessibility for participants of different ages, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, personal ability/confidence, etc.
- The provision of continuous support to participants following orientation.
- Consideration of participant motivations and potential incentives such as recognition, prizes, or other methods.
- The leveraging of existing City programs such as [My Great Neighbourhood Grants](#) for groups wishing to develop their own activities or projects and require funding.
- A flexible program structure that allows for future topic modules to be incorporated into the program (i.e, transportation, zero waste, food security, trees, etc.).
- Materials designed for easy adoption by individuals or existing groups in the community, that avoid duplication of efforts or the perception of programs being in competition.



HOUSEBOATS ON THE WATER IN VICTORIA, BC.

Advice to other local governments

Engage equity-deserving groups in the planning process when designing a program.

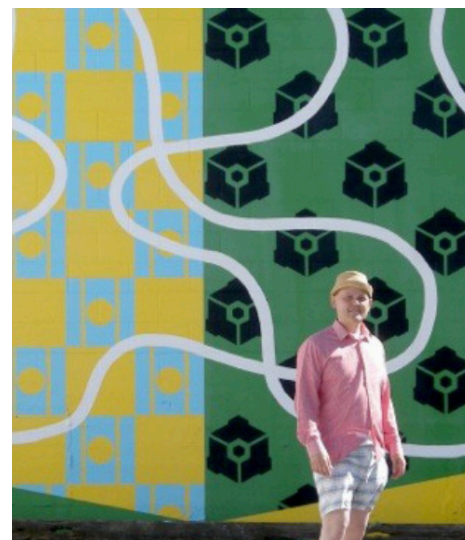
For local governments to meet their climate targets, each community member will need to be empowered to take desired actions. Community volunteers in Victoria have traditionally consisted of older, semi-retired, often Caucasian, homeowners who have the time, resources, and ability that enable participation in such programs. With this in mind, staff should meaningfully engage with equity-deserving groups early in the process of designing a program, in order to build relationships and to learn about their barriers to participation.

Carefully consider how to remove barriers to initial engagement and participation.

Careful consideration must be given on how to remove barriers to initial engagement or program participation, such as: preliminary identification of key equity-deserving groups, providing stipends, choosing different modes of outreach, selection of suitable times and locations, and other considerations. As an example, City staff have learned through previous targeted door-to-door outreach of oil-heated households that many individuals are elderly, renters, and are non-native English speakers. Each had highly specific barriers to completing retrofits and it is likely that each group receives their information from different mediums and tailored messaging should be developed.

Approach climate action based on the interests and motivations of people.

There is a lot of appetite from many age demographics within the community to address climate action, and there are already lots of other groups and organizations doing similar work out in the community. But regardless of the willingness to address climate action, it is evident that climate literacy and an understanding of which actions can be used to meet climate targets is lacking for many. While it is advised to tell people about concrete actions they can take, individuals have different interests and motivations which can affect their comfort levels towards one climate action over another. For example, retrofits and home energy literacy are typically not very interesting topics for many people, especially if they are from non-homeowning demographics. For this reason, more attention will need to be put towards how to effectively relate to individuals and groups to make this type of climate action more attractive.



THE CITY OF VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA WILL LEVERAGE LESSONS LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS PROGRAMS LIKE 'CITY OF VICTORIA CLIMATE CHAMPIONS' AND 'MY GREAT NEIGHBOURHOOD GRANTS'.

Engaging the Business Community to Reach Net-Zero

Description

The Town of Wolfville created a volunteer program that is focused on reducing GHG emissions in the business community by partnering with [Get2Zero](#). This program helps businesses reduce emissions by promoting cost savings on energy bills. Staff from Thinkwell Shift were hired by the Town to carry out workshops and conduct energy walkthroughs of businesses to identify opportunities for energy conservation that would ultimately save money.

WOLFVILLE,
NOVA SCOTIA

Working towards net-zero and climate resilience

The Town expects that at least three businesses will participate in the Get2Zero Energy Smart Business program, complete training on climate change and GHG emissions, and agree to implement at least one recommended action to reduce emissions. This will result in measurable GHG reductions over time and help create momentum for greater climate mitigation efforts within Wolfville's business community.

Progress to date

Due to limited staff capacity, the Town of Wolfville hired a consultant to carry out the bulk of the work for this program, particularly around volunteer engagement. While working with a consultant is providing the Town with the capacity needed to do this work, drawing businesses towards the program and away from their busy schedules has proved challenging. As a result, participation was initially much lower than expected and Staff have pivoted to handling volunteer recruitment themselves by going door-to-door to more than 70 businesses in Wolfville. The push to handle recruitment themselves has paid off and there are now nine businesses registered for the Energy-Smart Business workshops and facility walkthroughs, exceeding the initial goal of four businesses. All of the nine registered businesses have completed the first workshop and the facility walk-through. The final workshop will be held on February, 2023.

Advice to other local governments

Work with a consultant to overcome staff capacity limitations.

In situations where municipal staff capacity is low, Wolfville recommends hiring a consultant to support this type of work.

Take a close look at your engagement strategy and have a back-up plan.

In tight-knit communities such as Wolfville, you may have greater success having someone known by the community facilitate outreach and recruitment.

Make it personal.

If you can form an in-person relationship with potential volunteers it helps to build trust and understanding among volunteers.

Engage with businesses after the winter holidays, between January and May.

When targeting or working with the business community, it is important to identify options that carry a relatively low time burden. The months from September to January are very busy for businesses in Wolfville and that impacted business owners' abilities to commit to this program during this time period. The months following the winter holidays tend to be slower for business and the program expects to see a greater uptake during this time.



PARTICIPANTS IN WOLFVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA'S GET2NET-ZERO PROGRAM.

KEY LEARNINGS

The Agents of Change Project was a learning journey for all. While learnings from participating municipalities are shared in their respective case studies, we now share our own learnings and the learnings that emerged from the cohort as a whole. The following reflections rose to the surface throughout the project and will be carried forward as we continue our climate work with municipalities across the country.

Agile program design and targeted scope

Many of the volunteer engagement programs started out with relatively broad program design, targeting many sectors, community representatives, and/or thematic areas; however, as each respective program development gained in maturity, the tendency was to narrow the focus and target the recruitment at specific sectors or representatives. This approach proved more agreeable among collaborators and effective for participants.

Municipalities in partnership

Developing the volunteer programs in association with municipalities ensured that there was a dedicated staff person with a clear mandate to work on program development. This gave the programs much needed structure and support; however, working in partnership with community groups and residents was also paramount to success. Not only does this collaboration ensure the community has a hand in creating their net zero and climate resilient future, but it also helps to overcome capacity limitations that small municipalities may face when doing this work alone.

Outcomes over outputs

This project started with a very specific set of key performance indicators focused on measurable outputs like number social media hits, number of public events, or tonnes of GHG emissions. These indicators are relatively straightforward to measure and can often be prioritized over more elusive outcomes-focused performance tracking. It helps to think about outcomes as the results (i.e., the establishment of the program), and outputs as the activities that support the desired result (i.e., the social media hits the help to support the program). Ultimately, ten municipalities reached their intended outcome; however, the outputs that brought us there were not always what we originally expected.

Just the beginning

The [Agents of Change](#) project was just the beginning. There are now ten new volunteer engagement programs for climate action running in municipalities across the country. We are proud of their development, excited to see what they accomplish next, and hope that they will inspire more municipalities to engage their residents in local climate action.



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ICLEI Canada's work happens across Turtle Island which has traditionally been and is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples since time immemorial. We endeavour to listen to and learn from Indigenous Peoples on an ongoing basis in the process of our work.

February, 2023