

Case Study

SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE

Chippewas of the
Thames First Nation



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About the Project

Background

Deshkan Ziibing, also known as Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, is an Anishnaabe community on the north bank of the Thames River in southwestern Ontario. Growing increasingly concerned about the cumulative impacts of climate change, the Nation recognized the deep interconnectedness of upstream and downstream communities and ecosystems. In response, they sought to build and strengthen relationships, develop a shared understanding of climate challenges, and develop a collaborative regional response to enhance climate resilience.

Project Description

This year-long project brought together 15 organizations and 26 members to establish a regional collaboration on climate action. Participants—including First Nations, municipalities, conservation authorities, public health units, and health practitioners—worked to build trust, strengthen relationships, and co-develop a shared framework for collaboration. Striving to use Two-Eyed seeing in ethical space, the group co-created a scope of purpose document outlining their mission, values, and structure. With established co-chairs, a meeting schedule, and knowledge-sharing activities, this community of practice provides a foundation for ongoing dialogue and coordinated efforts to address greenhouse gas reductions and climate change impacts across the region.

Objectives

- To build and strengthen intersectoral relationships across the region;
- To develop a platform for ongoing regional climate dialogue; and
- To foster opportunities for coordinated and collaborative climate action.

Work Completed

Summary of Activities

Through regional engagement, interviews, virtual meetings, and a survey, participants contributed their perspectives, helping to shape both the project's direction and the development of the collaborative. An in-person workshop further strengthened trust, provided a platform for knowledge sharing, and created space to discuss shared values, concerns, and opportunities. Building on these discussions, members co-developed a Scope of Purpose document, outlining the collaborative's mission, shared values, and framework for collaboration. This groundwork led to the launch of the Southwestern Ontario Climate Collaborative, guided by four co-chairs and a member-driven meeting schedule.

Challenges

- **Building Equitable Opportunity:** The collaborative includes members from diverse organizations with varying capacities—such as time, resources, knowledge, and institutional support—making it challenging to ensure all partners have an equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and benefit from this initiative.
- **Diverse Perspectives:** Members bring varying perspectives on time, urgency, and priorities. Ensuring all members feel heard and valued is essential to maintaining engagement and fostering ongoing commitment to the project.



Photo Source: Department of Treaties Lands and Environment, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.

Impact & Key Learnings

Positive Outcomes & Impacts

- **Building Regional-Scale Partnerships:** Engaged 15 organizations and 26 members, strengthening relationships across First Nations, municipalities, conservation authorities, and health sectors to develop a regional climate collaborative.
- **Defining a Shared Vision:** Co-developed a Scope of Purpose document outlining the group's purpose and mission, seven shared values, and collaboration framework. This is a living document, with opportunity for ongoing refinement to reflect collective priorities and learnings.
- **Structured Engagement:** Established four co-chairs and a member-driven meeting schedule with themed discussions, presentations, and field trips to support knowledge-sharing and coordinated action.
- **Two-Eyed Seeing & Learning Together:** Dedicated to an ongoing practice of weaving Indigenous and Western knowledge, this collaborative provides a space for members to deepen cross-cultural understanding. Some members are engaging with Indigenous partners and ways of knowing for the first time.

Key Learnings

- **Process-First Approach:** Centering process over immediate action and outcomes enabled authentic relationships to develop, shared values to be identified, and a foundational framework guiding collaboration to be co-created.
- **Value of Third-Party Facilitation:** Having a neutral, third-party facilitator in the early developmental stages provided essential support in guiding discussions, providing external perspective, drafting shared values, and ensuring all voices were heard, ultimately creating a space where trust could develop organically among members.
- **Trust Takes Time:** Building trust is a gradual process that cannot be rushed. While action is important, prioritizing relationships has been key. The group has learned to balance taking action to build trust while also ensuring a foundational level of trust before acting. Recognizing that perspectives on trust and urgency vary, this group is innovating ways where trust and action can develop together.
- **Two-Eyed Seeing in Practice:** Committing to a Two-Eyed Seeing approach requires continuous learning, honest conversations, courage, and patience. While some members are deeply familiar with this perspective, for others, it is entirely new. Meaningfully weaving Indigenous and Western ways of knowing into all aspects of the collaborative takes time, intention, and ongoing commitment, reflection, and practice.

Looking Ahead

The Southwestern Ontario Climate Collaborative is poised to continue strengthening relationships, fostering ongoing learning, and advancing towards impactful action. The group will focus on innovating new ways of working together to build regional climate resilience.

Learn More

[Ethical Space](#) is a conceptual framework for engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems. It is a neutral collaborative space where different worldviews, cultures, and values can come together in a way that respects and acknowledges their differences without one dominating the other.

[Two-Eyed Seeing](#) is a guiding principle that weaves together Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, using the strengths of both to foster understanding and collaboration.