

Stronger Together: Deepening Social Connection for Climate Resilience



Local Governments
for Sustainability
Les gouvernements locaux
pour le développement durable
CANADA



BEACONSFIELD

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SPRING 2026

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This resource was developed by **ICLEI Canada** in collaboration with the **City of Beaconsfield**. It is inspired by **Connectons-Connecting Beaconsfield**, a multi-year initiative that aims to foster a sense of belonging among City of Beaconsfield residents to strengthen the community’s collective ability to respond to and bounce back from the impacts of climate change. The Connecting Beaconsfield project was officially launched in 2022, and received financial support from the **Fonds d’initiative et de rayonnement de la métropole (FIRM)**, of the Government of Quebec. FIRM has since been replaced by the **Fonds signature métropole (FSM)**.

We respectfully acknowledge that 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 recognize that reconciliation is a fundamental component to building climate-resilient communities, and we endeavour to listen to and learn from Indigenous Peoples on an ongoing basis in the process of our work.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank all the local community groups, social support organizations, and individuals involved with Connecting Beaconsfield who contributed to this resource and toolkit by sharing insights and lessons learned through their participation in the project. To learn more about the partners involved with the project, visit **Connectons-Connecting Beaconsfield**.

ICLEI Canada. (2026). Stronger Together: Deepening Social Connection for Climate Resilience. ICLEI Canada—Local Governments for Sustainability.
<https://icleicanada.org/project/stronger-together/>

Foreword

City of Beaconsfield

From the beginning, we knew our project would eventually lead to a guide. What we didn't know was what story it would tell or how much we would learn along the way. Connecting Beaconsfield began as part of our Climate Change Adaptation Plan, with a focused objective: strengthen neighbour-to-neighbour relationships to better support residents during extreme meteorological events. When we first began exploring the link between social connection and climate resilience, it sounded promising in theory. One of us brought experience in cultural programming and community engagement. The other brought climate planning and technical expertise. We assumed that combining those strengths would make the path forward clear. It didn't.

Our first meeting with partners in December 2022 was energetic and inspiring but also abstract. We were talking about “resilience” and “social connection,” yet what would that look like in practice? What were we actually trying to build? What we did know was this: climate disruptions were becoming more frequent, and our community had a growing population of

seniors and residents facing increased vulnerability, whether due to mobility challenges, disability, language barriers, or social isolation. Even in that first workshop, something stood out. We had gathered an extraordinary group of partners. Their openness and willingness to experiment made us feel there was real potential, even if we couldn't yet define it.

Then, the 2023 ice storm hit Beaconsfield. As power remained out for days across the city, residents instinctively turned to familiar places for reassurance and support. Many came to the library to charge devices, access information, connect with others, or simply escape the isolation of a cold home. That was our turning point. We realized resilience isn't only about infrastructure or emergency logistics, it's also about trusted spaces and relationships. We also quickly realized this wasn't just about residents with mobility challenges. The entire community benefited from stronger connections. Families, newcomers, long-time residents—everyone had something to gain. From there, what began as a climate initiative evolved into something broader.

The collaboration between the departments of Sustainable Development and Library & Cultural Services proved foundational. Pairing technical climate expertise with daily, frontline community engagement allowed the work to take root in trusted spaces. It has only expanded across departments and in the community since then. Today, Connecting Beaconsfield is less of a single project and more of an integrated way of working. It has become a core pillar of a city-wide emergency preparedness event developed with our public works and urban planning colleagues. Climate adaptation is no longer confined to one department, it is increasingly embedded in how we collaborate.

Along the way, we began to see our library and cultural spaces differently, not only as places for programs and books, but as essential social infrastructure and resilience hubs. Staff already in regular contact with isolated seniors, caregivers, newcomers, and residents on our Vulnerable Persons Registry became natural climate messengers and connectors. These lessons are shaping our upcoming Multipurpose Cultural Centre, set to open in Summer 2028.

This guide reflects what we've learned including what worked, what surprised us, and what required adjustment. We are sharing a process, not offering a perfect model, and we invite you to make it your own. If you're reading this and thinking, "this sounds promising, but we're not sure where to start," please know: we were in your shoes not so long ago. We discovered that resilience doesn't begin with a technical plan. It begins with knowing who lives next door. It grows in everyday spaces: at a block party, in a front yard, or at a library counter, where someone feels comfortable asking a question.

If this guide helps to strengthen connection in your community, then it has done its job. And if you'd like to compare notes along the way, please reach out. We're all learning together.



Andrew Duffield
Director Sustainable Development,
City of Beaconsfield



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ICLEI Canada

In times of crisis, the most important resource we have is each other. While much of the conversation around climate resilience focuses on infrastructure, emergency planning, and technological solutions, communities repeatedly demonstrate that strong social connections, trust, relationships, and a shared sense of belonging are just as critical. When neighbours know and support one another, communities are better able to respond to extreme events, check in on vulnerable residents, share information, and recover together. Building social connection is therefore not simply a “nice to have”; it is a foundational component of local climate resilience.

Climate impacts do not occur in isolation. They emerge at the intersection of our built, social, economic, and natural systems, shaping both how risk is experienced and how communities respond. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires approaches that move beyond siloed solutions and instead strengthen the networks of people and organizations that make collective action possible. Across Canada, communities are increasingly recognizing that resilience is built not only through physical assets, but through relationships, trust, and the informal support systems that help people navigate uncertainty.

We were fortunate to explore this idea in practice through our partnership with the City of Beaconsfield and its community partners in the Connecting Beaconsfield project. Our work

together with the City began as a climate adaptation initiative, but quickly evolved into something broader: an opportunity to experiment with ways of strengthening social ties across the community. Together with municipal staff, community organizations, and residents, we tested many of the activities and approaches featured in this guide in real time. Along the way, we learned from local experiences, what worked, what needed adjusting, and how social connection can meaningfully support resilience. Those lessons have shaped the practical tools and activities shared here.

This guide is intended as a starting point for local practitioners interested in integrating social connection into their climate resilience work. We hope the ideas and examples help spark new initiatives in communities across Canada. At the same time, this work is inherently collaborative and constantly evolving. As you experiment with these approaches in your own communities, we encourage you to reach out and share your experiences. We have many stories from Beaconsfield and beyond that we would be delighted to exchange, and we look forward to learning from the innovations and insights that emerge as more communities put these ideas into practice.



Ewa Jackson
Managing Director, ICLEI Canada



Introduction

About this Resource

Community climate resilience starts with people—the people who make up a community, the social bonds that keep them connected, and the sense of belonging they feel to the place they call home. In the face of increasing climate changes and their accompanying impacts, social connection is a crucial element to ensuring that no one is left behind both in moments of disaster and in their aftermath. Cultivating this sense of trust and belonging starts with a simple concept: strengthening social relationships.

When the social fabric of a community is rich, opportunities for learning, creating, and acting together multiply. And as community members are empowered to see themselves as agents of action and change, even through the simplest of actions, collective capacity to respond and bounce back in the face of uncertainty grows. For those looking to mainstream adaptation and be prepared, this ingredient is the missing link that can be the difference between weathering the storm and facing catastrophe.

Local governments are uniquely positioned to cultivate conditions for more socially connected communities. Sitting at the nexus of many different actors, from decision makers and planners to community partners

and everyday residents (and more), they have the ability to craft spaces and opportunities that bring people together in unique, place-based ways. They also have a responsibility to recognize, prepare for, and respond to the impacts of a changing climate on the health and wellbeing of the communities they serve. *Stronger Together: Deepening Social Connection for Climate Resilience* aims to build off this potential, supporting local governments and other interested parties to strengthen community connection, foster inclusivity, and cultivate a sense of belonging. Inspired by the Connecting Beaconsfield initiative, this guide provides users with the knowledge, tools, and inspiration needed to shape community climate resilience that is people-shaped and people-driven.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



The lessons and takeaways of this guide are reflected in the real-world story of Connecting Beaconsfield.

To follow along with the project journey, begin by reading the ***Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice*** boxes included throughout the guide.

Purpose of this Resource

What this guide is...

- A resource for municipal staff, community organizations, and other local practitioners looking to build social connection as a path to greater climate resilience.
- A summary of key concepts, practical guidance, and activities for building more socially connected communities regardless of user or approach.
- A starting point for inspiration as you design and implement social connection projects at the street, neighbourhood, and city-wide scales.

What this guide is not...

- A step-by-step guide for delivering large-scale social connection projects from start to finish.
- A prescriptive and linear pathway for achieving your adaptation goals.
- A fool proof methodology for fostering social connection, as each community is unique and requires tailored, community-informed action.

How to Use this Resource

This resource can be read from start to finish or approached as different sections that provide guidance and inspiration according to your needs. Here are some of the ways you might choose to engage with it:

Increase Understanding

Use this resource to create greater awareness for yourself and others about why social connection matters to adaptation. Each chapter provides different insights into the ways that social resilience contributes to community resilience and as a result, climate resilience. You can then use these insights to increase support for your efforts.

Identify First Steps

The activities highlighted through this guide are designed as jumping off points for different phases, stages, and components of connection-building initiatives at all scales. Use these activities for direction as you get started and even build off activities that have come before.

Find Project Inspiration

Whether it's a one-time initiative or long-term program, get inspired by the story of Connecting Beaconsfield as well as by the many case stories included in the guide. Consider how different approaches might be tailored to your own community to create buy-in and maximize chances for success.

Integrate Key Concepts into Work Already Underway

Key concepts and takeaways shared through the guide can help to identify where projects that are already underway might be tailored, improved on, or built upon to create more meaningful and impactful outcomes.

Introduction to Connecting Beaconsfield

Using Social Connection to Build Climate Resilience: A Practical Overview for Busy Climate Practitioners



This guide is grounded in the experience of Connecting Beaconsfield, a project initiated by the City of Beaconsfield, co-created with multiple community partners, and supported by ICLEI Canada. It is an initiative that demonstrates how strengthening social connection can serve as a foundation for climate resilience and broader community wellbeing.



How it All Began

The project emerged from the City's Climate Change Adaptation Plan as a way to address climate risk through every day, human-scale action. It aims to mobilize trusted community networks and familiar spaces—all while empowering residents to act now.

Connecting Beaconsfield was launched in December 2022 with an in-person workshop convening partners who had expressed interest in joining the initiative. At this first gathering, the objectives and goals surrounding the project seemed vague and abstract to everyone, including the municipal team. But in April 2023, a freezing rain episode followed by a prolonged power outage for many residents occurred. In its wake, something clicked as everything became more real. A powerful observation was made by the municipal team and project partners: during disruptions, neighbours are often the first line of support—but only if relationships already exist. This event helped set the tone for Connecting Beaconsfield.

Setting the Scene in Beaconsfield

Beaconsfield is a bilingual municipality of just over 19,000 residents on the Island of Montréal. Considered a bedroom suburb, with 92% residential land use largely composed of single-family homes, the City's built environment supports a high quality of life in many ways; however, it can also limit everyday interactions between neighbours, as daily needs are easily met at home and a strong sense of privacy is prevalent.

In addition, many residents rely exclusively on cars to meet their transportation needs. With limited walkability to essential services and minimally accessible public transit, daily routines often involve moving directly from home to car and back again, reducing opportunities for casual neighbourly interaction. Despite this relative disconnect, residents benefit from a dynamic civic life with approximately 50 local associations and community groups active across the City. Many residents have a strong sense of belonging and want to give back to their community.





SUMMER 2023 SURVEY DURING A CULTURAL EVENT.

Within this context, there are specific social challenges that became apparent through municipal planning and community engagement:

- Approximately 20% of residents are aged 65+, a proportion higher than in many surrounding municipalities. This number is projected to reach 30% by 2030.
- More than 1,100 residents live alone, many of them older adults.
- While median household income is relatively high, income levels among people living alone and seniors are significantly lower. This reality impacts residents in less visible ways that include hidden poverty, a challenge often raised by community members.

When crises such as extreme meteorological events occur, many residents facing these conditions turn to the library seeking help: to empty their basements, to access community resources, or just to find a listening ear. A recurring profile has thus emerged related

to increased climate vulnerability in Beaconsfield: older adults living alone with limited family nearby and a low technological literacy level.

Responding to Risk through Social Connection

In the City of Beaconsfield, increasing local climate hazards and impacts include:

- Recurring flooding and more intense rainfall;
- Ice storms and prolonged power outages; and
- Heat waves and poor air quality episodes.

When events such as the 2023 ice storm occur, strain is placed not only on infrastructure, but on the community's social fabric.

For example:

- Access to phones or internet to reach important municipal or social services is limited during outages;
- Streets and other key transportation routes become blocked or inaccessible during floods; and
- Emergency and municipal services are stretched during peak events.

Rather than relying solely on emergency messaging or preparedness checklists, the City recognized that informal neighbour support is a critical layer of resilience that helps to overcome some of the challenges faced by individuals living in isolation. They also realized that fostering networks of neighbour support must occur before a crisis. This can be done through local action that fosters new relationships and meaningful connections, strengthening a community's social fabric as a result.



The Beaconsfield Approach At-a-Glance

- **Social connection first:** Beaconsfield intentionally focused on everyday neighbour relationships before even starting to mention climate. Trust, level of comfort, and sense of belonging were treated as “special ingredients” for resilience.
- **Integrated municipal leadership:** The project was co-led by the City’s Sustainable Development Department and the Library & Cultural Services Division, pairing climate expertise with trust-based community relationships. Libraries, cultural and community spaces, as well as community events were recognized as essential hubs for resilience and an important part of the initiative’s strategy.
- **Low-barrier resident participation:** Residents were invited to act as Neighbour Connectors, everyday community builders across the City. Participation was flexible and self-defined, reducing barriers and increasing engagement. The “volunteer” label was intentionally avoided, as many said it sounded like a major commitment.
- **Asset-based and equity-informed design:** Community mapping combined multiple mechanisms for engaging project partners and the broader community. Surveys, partner workshops, and informal conversations helped to identify social assets, vulnerabilities, and barriers to participation. This approach ensured actions reflected lived experience rather than assumptions.
- **Piloting to learn and adapt:** Early actions were treated as prototypes. Evaluation helped to identify improvements and next steps through both quantitative and qualitative feedback reflecting attendee comfort, new interactions, connections made, and stories of mutual support, as well as overall successes and challenges.
- **Climate action through connection:** As relationships strengthened, climate conversations naturally moved to the forefront. Social networks became pathways for preparedness, information-sharing, and community-led adaptation. Climate, originally used by municipal staff as a hook to talk about the project to residents, finally became our shared purpose – expressed and reinforced by the residents themselves.

Community Impacts (What's Changed?)

“Thanks to a block party I organized a year ago, now when I knock on the door of an isolated neighbour, she'll actually open it. It really worked for us!”

(Connecting Beaconsfield participant)

Examples of Connecting Beaconsfield outcomes documented thus far include:

- Increased comfort and trust among neighbours;
- Emerging self-organization related to climate preparedness;
- Improved outcomes from municipal outreach and engagement across other initiatives; and
- Greater participation in civic life from residents beyond the project.

Learnings for Other Municipalities

Connecting Beaconsfield is not defined by a single program, tool, or activity, but by a way of working shaped by Beaconsfield's context, demographics, and climate risks. The approach or “recipe” described in this guide reflects what worked well for Beaconsfield. In other municipalities, the ingredients and even the order in which they are combined may look entirely different. What remains constant is the intention: strengthening everyday relationships so that communities are better prepared to face the uncertainties ahead—together.

Project Partners

The Connecting Beaconsfield project was initiated by the City of Beaconsfield in collaboration with:

- ICLEI Canada
- Espace MUNI
- Beaconsfield 55+ Club
- Montreal Lakeshore University Women's Club
- Beaconsfield Rug Hooking Crafters Guild
- *Les Amis du Village Beaufort*
- Beacon Hill Community Association
- *Table de Quartier Sud de l'Ouest-de-l'Île*
- Friends for Mental Health
- NOVA West Island
- *Service de police de la Ville de Montréal* Neighbourhood Station 1
- *Villa Beaufort*
- Beaconsfield Garden Club
- Beaconsfield Artists Association
- And many others!

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Look for the **Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice** boxes throughout the guide to learn more about the City's journey.

Social Connection and Climate Resilience

This chapter lays the conceptual foundation for undertaking a social connection initiative. It aims to clarify what is meant by social connection, how it manifests in municipal contexts, and the role it plays in building and strengthening community resilience. For those looking to implement their own social connection initiative, this chapter will help you to move forward with confidence regarding why your efforts matter. It will equip you with the tools needed to clearly define and articulate the purpose of your initiative and to begin engaging potential partners.



Why Social Connection?



Start by asking: ***When disaster strikes in your community, who do residents turn to?***

Climate resilience is often framed in terms of infrastructure, emergency response systems, and technical planning.¹ While these components of adaptation planning are essential, they are only a part of the puzzle of what makes a community truly resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Increasingly, research and lived experience show that social networks, including the relationships between neighbours, community members, organizations, and institutions, are a necessary ingredient for creating climate-resilient communities.^{2,3}

For example, in communities where stronger social connections exist:

- Information can be shared more quickly to more people;
- Neighbours can check in on one another during disruptions; and
- Informal support can be more easily coordinated when formal systems are stretched.



By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Understand what social connection is and how it contributes to climate resilience;
- ✓ Recognize where and how social connections are formed;
- ✓ Consider the role your own local government plays in building social connection;
- ✓ Clarify the purpose and positioning of your own initiative;
- ✓ Identify the partners you need to involve early; and
- ✓ Host your first project workshop with partners.

As a result, collective recovery can happen more effectively both during and after crises. From neighbours checking in during a heat wave to community groups mobilizing to support those most affected, these connections make a real difference in a community's collective capacity to cope and bounce back when faced with moments of disaster. In this way, social connection is not a by-product of resilience—it is a condition for it.

Defining Social Connection

? Start by asking: *In what ways do community members relate to each other beyond living in the same place?*

Social connection refers to the networks and relationships that exist among people who share a place as well as the everyday interactions that occur between them.⁴ These connections may be close, but social connection does not need to be deep or emotional to make a difference. Even light, casual, or routine interactions help people feel less alone, more aware of others around them, and more comfortable asking questions or offering support when needed. Research shows that simply being around others, even without having strong bonds, is associated with improved wellbeing and reduced risk during times of stress.⁵

At the same time, repeated everyday encounters—neighbours chatting, parents meeting at schools, or residents gathering for activities—can lead to more meaningful relationships. As these connections grow and

and community bonds strengthen, a shared sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging can emerge where residents start to see themselves as a part of something. As a result, planning that is done with these types of interactions in mind can make a difference in the daily lives of individuals while empowering collective action.


For local governments, creating conditions where interactions can happen naturally and repeatedly over time is the foundation for a socially connected community that only grows in its capacity to cope and respond to any challenges ahead.

Figure 1. What connection looks like.⁶



Laying Foundations for Action

Loneliness, Isolation, and Increased Risk

 Start by asking: ***In what ways are people isolated from each other, both physically and relationally?***

Social isolation and loneliness are serious and growing public health concerns.⁷ They can have a significant impact on our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, with the health consequences of prolonged social isolation and loneliness compared to smoking 15 cigarettes per day.⁸

In Canada, almost half of adults report feeling lonely at least some of the time, and more than one in ten report feeling lonely often or always.⁹ On top of this number, it is estimated that 30% of older adults in Canada are at risk of becoming socially isolated.¹⁰ Research also reveals that youth (ages 16 – 24) experience both fewer positive relationships and less social support than all other age groups, meaning that their rates of loneliness are especially high.¹¹

While social isolation and loneliness can be experienced by anyone, certain groups may be more likely to experience these outcomes due to their proximity to structural conditions such as:

- Language barriers;
- Reduced mobility;
- Limited transportation;
- Living alone;
- Inaccessible public spaces;
- Discrimination; and
- Weak institutional trust.

Climate change can reinforce these conditions, increasing a person's likelihood of experiencing social isolation and loneliness.¹² Similarly, social isolation and loneliness can increase a person's vulnerability to climate change impacts.¹³ Where isolation already exists, the risk of experiencing negative outcomes from climate change is increased.

Addressing social isolation and loneliness through social connection helps to improve wellbeing and reduce the impacts of climate change on individuals—especially for those who are at greater risk of harm. It not only contributes to improved mental, emotional, and even physical health, but ensures that all members of a community have someone to turn to when crisis strikes.

Trust, Belonging and Collective Capacity

? Start by asking: ***What allows people in your community to move from awareness to action together?***

Social connection creates the conditions for trust and belonging to thrive. Trust comes from knowing you can rely on others and that they can rely on you. It is the basis for meaningful relationships. Belonging is the sense of feeling seen, valued, and a part of something. It is the basis for social cohesion.¹⁴

Trust and belonging go hand-in-hand, and when present in communities, contribute to shared responsibility, cooperation, and collective action. In fact, research shows that when residents have stronger social ties and an overall sense of belonging, they are more likely to engage in civic life.¹⁵ This means that efforts to foster social connection help improve individual wellbeing while strengthening a community's capacity to respond and adapt.

Why Social Connection Matters for Climate Resilience

? Start by asking: ***What happens in your community when formal services are stretched or overwhelmed?***

From a climate adaptation perspective, social connection acts as a form of invisible infrastructure. It complements physical infrastructure and emergency systems by enabling people to respond collectively, adapt locally,



and support one another when conditions change.¹⁶ For example, communities with stronger social connections tend to:

- Share information more quickly;
- Check in on one another during disruptions;
- Coordinate informal support when formal systems are stretched; and
- Recover more effectively after crises.

Social connection is also a powerful safeguard against the harms of isolation and loneliness. It can provide people with the support needed to build trust and belonging, helping people to stay emotionally, mentally, and physically healthy, even in moments of disaster.^{17,18} These are the conditions needed to foster engaged communities where residents are empowered to get involved, take action, and design solutions that respond to local needs.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Starting With Social Connection, Not Climate

Beaconsfield made an intentional choice to frame its initiative around social connection, rather than presenting it explicitly as a climate project. This approach was designed to foster broader engagement by anchoring the work in universal, positive concerns such as neighbourhood life, mutual support, and a sense of belonging that would resonate across ages, backgrounds, and perspectives.

Climate still played an important role, but as a concrete and relatable hook rather than the entry point. Conversations with residents often began with lived experiences related to recent climate impacts like flooding, power outages, or heatwaves, which helped illustrate how relationships with neighbours can make a difference during disruptions. By grounding climate impacts in everyday experience, the project was able to highlight the importance of social connection without creating barriers to participation or disengagement around messaging that would have been articulated mostly around climate.

Social Connection through Municipal Action


 Start by asking: *Where does social connection fit within municipal climate action?*

In municipalities where climate adaptation plans focus primarily on infrastructure and technical measures, social connection initiatives can help to:

- Strengthen community preparedness and early warning systems;
- Improve equity outcomes by reducing isolation-related risk; and
- Enhance public engagement in adaptation planning.

By formally recognizing social connection as part of your adaptation toolkit and in your climate planning, municipalities broaden their resilience strategy to include both physical and relational infrastructure. Climate resilience is not only about assets—it is also about relationships. When relationships are nurtured intentionally, resilience becomes something communities practice every day.

Social Connection in Municipal Contexts

 Start by asking: ***Where, when, and how do people in your community naturally cross paths?***

In practice, social connection in municipalities can manifest in:

- Accessible public and community spaces where people feel welcome and safe;
- Everyday routines such as walking routes, school drop-offs, or dog walking;
- Community organizations, associations, and resident-led initiatives;
- Planned or spontaneous moments of interaction during events;
- And more.

The Role of Municipalities

 Start by asking: ***What role is your municipality best positioned to play?***

For local governments, strengthening social connection requires shifting focus:


- *From* programs and services *to* relationships;
- *From* attendance numbers *to* levels of comfort and familiarity;
- *From* one-time activities and events *to* repeated opportunities that help people build connections; and
- *From* service delivery *to* enabling connection.

This work sits at the intersection of many municipal responsibilities: libraries, recreation, culture, climate action, emergency preparedness, planning, communications, and social development. When it comes to building social connection, local governments are uniquely positioned to act as convenors and enablers, carrying the legitimacy and resources needed to bring local initiatives to life. To this end, municipal contributions to building social connection may include:

- Hosting and facilitating partnerships;
- Developing and supporting trusted community spaces;
- Reducing barriers to participation;
- Providing modest funding and/or coordination;
- Encouraging resident leadership; and
- Working across internal silos.

Municipalities do not build connections alone, but they can create the conditions where it will flourish.

Involving Partners

 Start by asking: ***Who else should be involved to make this initiative thrive?***

Working with partners such as local support organizations or resident associations who share overlapping priorities creates a basis for project success by bringing different perspectives on the lived experiences of residents, well as additional capacity, resources, networks, and expertise. Through early

conversations and collaborative planning, partners help to co-create and shape the initiative from the start. Not only do they have insights for defining objectives and identifying opportunities for action, but they will play a necessary role in designing and implementing activities

and next steps that reflect the realities of the community. While the degree of partner involvement may evolve throughout the project, these organizations remain the backbone throughout and are the key to its long-term success.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Bringing Partners In

In the earliest days of the pilot, Beaconsfield identified organizations with a diversity of strengths, networks, and perspectives for a first exploratory meeting. These external partners fell into two categories:

- **Local community groups** that already brought residents together, such as neighbourhood groups, associations, committees, seniors clubs, and cultural or recreational organizations.
- **Social support organizations** that served the needs of equity-deserving groups. While many of these organizations were not physically located in Beaconsfield, they worked closely with local residents.

Working with a wide range of partners was seen as important for helping to reach different segments of the community and strengthen the initiative's long-term impact. They did not need to work in climate or environmental fields, as their focus on community life meant they were better positioned to engage residents through trusted relationships.

Together with the City of Beaconsfield and ICLEI Canada, these partners helped to imagine and design the project and bring it to life, leaning into the different strengths, interests, and networks that each partner brought to the table—often at different times and in different ways.

Activity 1.1 Create Your Project Pitch

Purpose: To clearly articulate why your project matters and what you hope to achieve.

Why It Matters

A clear and compelling project pitch helps you:

- Engage potential partners;
- Secure internal support;
- Align departmental action;
- Communicate with elected officials; and
- Apply for funding.

Suggested steps

1. **Reflect on the conditions** that drew you to this initiative, such as recent climate events and their impacts on specific populations.
2. **Determine your overarching goal and the purpose** of your initiative by asking what you hope to achieve.
3. **Develop a short pitch** that addresses the who, what, where, why, when, and how your initiative will achieve this outcome. It may be written in full sentences or in short notes to be used in phone calls. *Tip: For best results, tailor your pitch based on who you are sharing it with.*

Outputs

- ✓ A 2–3 sentence project pitch that can be shared directly or adapted to phone and email communications.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



In early days of the project, the municipal team had difficulty explaining Connecting Beaconsfield in a few short sentences, especially the link between climate change and social connection. What really helped was when they took the time to encapsulate the main messages in a summary that could be shared with others or used to create a common understanding amongst the project team.

Activity 1.2 Identify and Approach Potential Partners

Purpose: To create a partnership network that will support the planning and delivery of your initiative.

Why It Matters

Social connection work cannot be led by climate departments alone. Partners from across social support organizations, resident associations, and even other municipal departments bring diverse perspectives, networks of trust, local expertise, credibility, resources, and more.

Suggested steps

1. **Clarify your purpose** by reviewing the project pitch drafted in Activity 1.1.
2. **Consider gaps** in internal project team skills, knowledge, and networks.
3. **Map existing relationships** with consideration of internal project team gaps.



4. **Consider who is missing** from this list and how you might connect with them. *Tip: Lean on the relationships you already have to initiate new connections.*
5. **Prepare a short summary** of why their participation matters and what it would look like in practice.
6. **Initiate outreach.** *Tip: Keep things informal. Invite your contact over for a coffee or to have a virtual “coffee chat” where they can learn more about the initiative.*

Outputs

- ✓ A list of potential partners and the role they might play; and
- ✓ A short outreach message that incorporates your project pitch that can be adapted for each partner to include your vision for their involvement.

Activity 1.3 Prepare Your First Partner Workshop

Purpose: To host an initial partner meeting that helps to build trust and set the tone for future collaboration.

Why It Matters

The first meeting will shape the culture of your project. It should prioritize relationship-building over deliverables, allowing for the time to really get to know each other.

Suggested steps

1. **Detail what you hope to achieve** through this gathering. *Tip: Remember that good things take time. It can be better to focus on one outcome and do it well instead of doing too many things all at once.*
2. **Plan an icebreaker** focused on your partners' strengths and experiences with community social connection—either as members of the community or through working with their organizations.



WORKSHOP WITH PARTNERS, APRIL 2023.

3. **Provide a simple overview of the project** and give time for partners to share hopes, concerns, existing initiatives, and questions.
4. **Discuss** next steps and level of commitment.

Outputs

- ✓ A draft agenda; and
- ✓ 2–3 opening discussion questions.

Social Connection in Your Community

This chapter is designed as a guided reflection. It invites you to pause before acting and to look closely at how connection already functions in your community—where it is strong, where it is fragile, and where barriers exist. Before planning actions or launching initiatives, municipalities need a shared understanding of their local context. These reflections form a foundation for the action-planning process introduced in Chapter 3.



Local Context Matters

? Start by asking: *What does social connection look like in your community during moments of crisis as well as the day-to-day?*

Just as every community is different, no single approach to building social connection will be the same from place to place. That's what this work is all about—responding to climate change in ways that embrace the unique character of each community and the people who call it home. With the purpose of your social connection initiative now firmly established, moving forward with action requires grounding in the local context that got you here in the first place. Consider what about this moment has prompted you to action:

Climate-Related Disruptions

- Have recent extreme weather events occurred that led to significant disruptions in everyday life?
- How have community members shown up for each other in these moments?
- Who faced the highest risk in these moments and how did they access support?



By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Clarify why and how social connection can make a difference in your local context;
- ✓ Identify community assets that already support social connection in your community;
- ✓ Understand how vulnerability is shaped and how it can evolve;
- ✓ Develop a shared definition of social connection to guide your actions; and
- ✓ Refine your project's vision, with your partners input.

Capacity of Local Government

- Are municipal services stretched or overwhelmed?
- Where do service gaps exist in your community?
- Do some areas or neighbourhoods experience these disruptions more frequently or intensely than others?

Civic Engagement

- How have community members engaged with climate adaptation planning (or other municipal planning processes)?
- Who shows up the most at community events, gatherings, and consultations (and who does not)?
- How are public and community spaces most used and by whom?

Building and strengthening social connection is not a passive act. It requires intentional choices about where to focus, who to involve, and how to work together to bridge gaps and build on successes. By taking the time early-on to gain a full picture of your community's unique character, your efforts to build social connection will be more inclusive, meaningful, and effective.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Clarifying Purpose

In Beaconsfield, reflecting on recent climate events, including floodings, prolonged power outages and freezing rain episodes, revealed that neighbour support existed in principle, but was not always activated in real life. When asked if they reached out to neighbours during these events, many said they had not, but that they might next time. These reflections helped clarify the project's purpose: to strengthen everyday social connections before disruptions occur, including for residents at higher risk of isolation.

The Shape of Your Community

Social Infrastructure as Community Assets

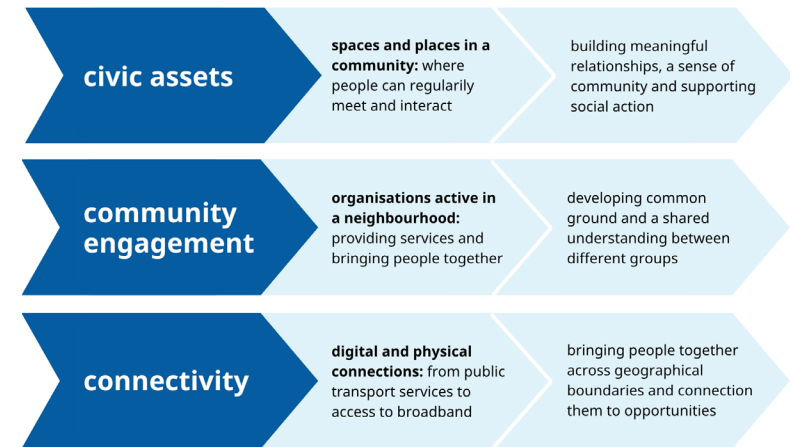
? Start by asking: ***What spaces, places, and factors have a positive influence on social connection in your community?***

Community assets are often understood as physical infrastructure or formal services; however, when it comes to social connection, assets extend far beyond buildings and programs. They include people, relationships, routines, and informal spaces where interactions occur in the day-to-day. Examples of social connection assets include:

- **Tangible** assets like libraries, parks, community centres, cafés, and recreational facilities;
- **Intangible** assets like neighbourhood norms and habits, informal helping networks, shared traditions, and a culture of looking out for one another;
- **Formal** assets like associations, clubs, faith-based groups, and organized community initiatives; and
- **Informal** assets like front yards, dog parks, school pick-up zones, local walking routes, and online neighbourhood groups.

Together, these assets form a community's social infrastructure, the connective tissue that enables networks of care, mutual support, and collective action.

Figure 2. What connection looks like.¹⁹



Identifying where and how these assets exist in your community helps to paint a picture of social connection in context. Not only will this process help you to understand what drives community members to connect, but you can leverage these assets and the knowledge they provide to improve your likelihood of success.

You aren't starting from scratch, and by recognizing the tools that already exist in your community, your work will have broader reach, impact, and buy-in. At the same time, undertaking this type of analysis creates space to examine who can access these assets and who cannot, laying the groundwork for more inclusive and targeted action.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice




Social Infrastructure as a Resilience Asset

In Beaconsfield, cultural and community spaces, including the public library, were identified as key components of the City's social infrastructure. Beyond their physical function, these spaces serve as trusted, familiar places where residents already gather, seek information, and turn to for reassurance during life's ups and downs, including climate-related disruptions.

During a prolonged power outage in April 2023, residents came to the library to charge devices, use computers to file insurance claims, connect with neighbours over a coffee, or simply borrow books and take a break from a stressful situation. These everyday interactions highlighted the role of community spaces as informal resilience hubs supporting connection, comfort, and access to information when it mattered most.

Overcoming Barriers to Participation

 Start by asking: *What factors might inhibit someone's ability to participate in social life?*

Social isolation and loneliness aren't the result of individual action or inaction—they are shaped by structural and systemic factors that influence who can participate in community life, how often, and on what terms. For example, certain individuals and groups may face a higher likelihood of isolation due to factors such as:

- Inaccessible public spaces;
- Costs for participation in social activities;
- Language barriers or limited access to information;
- Discrimination, social stigma, or past experiences of exclusion; and/or
- Lack of trusted relationships with institutions or service providers.

Strengthening social connection is about more than just encouraging people to "get involved." It requires identifying and reducing barriers that limit participation and intentionally designing opportunities that are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to different lived experiences.


Mapping social connection vulnerabilities in conjunction with assets can help identify where systems, environments, or practices limit opportunities for connection within your community.

This process can then be used to direct action, but must be intentional in its focus on conditions and contexts. Individuals and groups should not be labelled as vulnerable nor seen as “vulnerabilities”.

Reducing barriers to social connection often requires action at multiple levels. Upstream efforts, such as policies, plans, and operational decisions, can help address structural inequities. Downstream actions, including targeted outreach, adapted programming, and relying on trusted messengers, help ensure that residents facing higher barriers are not left out of efforts to build connections. Together, these approaches strengthen both equity and resilience.

See our [Equitable Climate Adaptation: Considerations for Local Governments](#) to learn more about taking action to support climate change adaptation in a way that centers equity and community engagement.

Considering Scale and Local Nuance

 Start by asking: ***What does your municipality look like across population characteristics, neighbourhoods, and the built environment?***

“Community” can mean many things: an entire municipality, a neighbourhood, a building, a street, or a specific group of residents. The scale at which you reflect on social connection assets and vulnerabilities will shape what you notice and what actions feel realistic.

In smaller municipalities, it may be possible to consider social connection across the community as a whole. In larger or more diverse contexts, focusing on a specific neighbourhood, population, or place can make patterns easier to see and allow for the consideration of more tailored actions.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Understanding Local Vulnerabilities

In Beaconsfield, many older adults live alone in large single-family homes, with limited local options to downsize. This creates a specific form of vulnerability that combines social isolation with the physical, financial, and emotional demands of maintaining a home. Recognizing this nuance helped shape actions that support aging in place through strengthened neighbour connections and to encourage these residents to ask for help.

Scale is not fixed. As your understanding deepens, you may move between scales, starting small to test ideas, then expanding as relationships, capacity, and confidence grow. You may also find that different issues call for different lenses: a neighbourhood-scale approach for everyday connection, and a demographic or network-based approach for addressing specific vulnerabilities. There is no single “right” scale. The key is choosing one or many that allow for meaningful insights, shared ownership, and achievable actions, while remaining flexible enough to evolve over time.

Gathering Community Insights

? Start by asking: ***How are diverse community perspectives being included in the project planning process***

A clear picture of social connection cannot be developed from the municipal perspective alone. It emerges when the voices of those who live, work, and play in the community are actively involved in the reflection process.

Community insights can be gathered through a mix of approaches, such as:

- Partner workshops or roundtables;
- Focus groups with specific populations;
- Informal conversations during day-to-day interactions;
- Pop-up engagement at community events; or
- Short surveys with both multiple choices and open-ended questions.

Each method surfaces different types of insights. Opportunities where you can directly connect with community members will provide you with specific insights based on people’s lived experiences. Partner input will help to identify and address patterns that exist at a broader group or community level. Combining these approaches helps balance depth and reach, ensuring that both lived experience and broader patterns are reflected.

However, community-wide engagement may not always be possible. Regardless, involving partners and trusted community organizations is essential. These groups often have direct insights into how connection is experienced by different populations, particularly those who may be less visible or harder to reach.



Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Listening Before Designing

Gathering community insights was treated as an essential part of the Connecting Beaconsfield planning process, and one that required time. The project began with in-person surveys conducted by municipal staff and project partners at local events (May to September 2023). These surveys aimed to better understand resident challenges and needs related to local relationship-building and connecting. While surveys included closed questions, the team intentionally focused on open-ended responses, taking time to hear residents' stories and take notes.

Through these conversations, the project reached more than 350 residents and helped to plant early seeds about the role social connection could play in strengthening community resilience. A targeted phone survey with open-ended questions was also done with the 150 residents who are registered to the City's Vulnerable Persons Registry.

Once community responses had been analyzed, a recurring theme stood out: many residents wanted to do more but did not know where to start. For example, a number of respondents said they wanted to organize a block party on their street, but felt the process was too complicated, or that they did not even know they could organize one. This insight directly informed one of the pilot project's key actions: streamlining the City's block party program and introducing ready-to-use party boxes and on-site support.

Defining Social Connection in Context

? Start by asking: *What does social connection mean for your community?*

Before planning actions, it is essential to establish a shared, place-specific understanding of social connection. While definitions drawn from research or policy frameworks can provide helpful reference points, they may not fully capture how connection is experienced locally.

A meaningful local definition should account for:

- A diversity of lived experiences and everyday interactions between residents;
- Community values and cultural norms;
- Identified assets and barriers to connection; and
- Aspirations for a more connected future.

Rather than acting as a rigid definition, this shared understanding should become a reference point. It can help partners align around a common purpose, support consistent decision-making, and provide a shared language for discussing progress while still allowing flexibility in how actions are designed and delivered. This shared definition can be used to establish a vision for your initiative that guides how you prioritize actions, communicate with residents, and evaluate what “progress” looks like over time.



LAUNCH OF THE URBAN GARDEN, MAY 2024.



Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice

Defining Connection Together

Partners were invited to share their reflections on social connection in Beaconsfield through a short online survey in early 2023. Twelve partners responded, offering insights drawn from their professional roles and personal experiences in the community. Using this input, the team developed a preliminary definition which was shared in April 2023 at the second partner workshop. The timing of this discussion was significant: it took place shortly after a freezing rain event and power outage that, for many residents, lasted more than one week. Their recent experiences strongly shaped how partners participated in the workshop.

While partners agreed with the intent of the draft definition, they felt the language was too formal and abstract. Through discussion, it was reframed into simpler, more action-oriented statements:

Preliminary Definition of Social Connection:

Social connection refers to the sense of belonging and feeling of closeness that individuals experience as a result of their interactions and relationships with others. It can manifest in various ways, such as through shared experiences, common interests, mutual support, and open communication.

Co-created Definition of Social Connection (Final):

Social connection refers to the sense of belonging and feeling of closeness that people experience as a result of their interactions and relationships with others. Caring for others, showing a genuine interest. Need to respect everyone's wishes and privacy. Preparedness: making new connections in a casual setting, before an emergency situation arises (= connection already exists).

Partners also noted the value of using different versions of the definition for different audiences, from more formal language for planning or funding contexts, to simpler, more direct language for engaging residents.

Activity 2.1 Mapping Social Connection Assets and Vulnerabilities

Purpose: To identify key social connection assets and vulnerabilities that can be used to direct action planning.

Why It Matters

The insights gained through this process help to direct action by:

- Identifying factors that have led to more positive social connection outcomes and considering how they might be adapted, replicated, or leveraged within the project; and
- Recognizing gaps and barriers to social connection so that actions can be designed to overcome or address them.

Steps (Preparation)

1. **Invite workshop participants** from a mix of municipal staff, community organizations, and other partners who work closely with different groups.
2. **Create a shortlist of prompt questions** to guide participant reflections.
3. **Decide on what you are mapping** (e.g., social infrastructure, community events, connection routes, barriers, etc.).
4. **Choose your scale** (e.g., the whole municipality, a few neighbourhoods, population-specific insights, etc.).

5. **Choose your mapping method(s).** *Tip: Working with a community map is best for considering questions of physical infrastructure, location, and access. Mind-map or cluster approaches help to identify intangible assets or barriers such as social norms, networks, or trusted messengers.*
6. **Prepare and obtain materials** such as community maps, sticky notes, markers, highlighters, or other tools that will help to document insights.



FIRST WORKSHOP WITH PARTNERS, DECEMBER 2022.

Steps (Workshop Delivery)

1. **Agree on simple definitions for assets and barriers** based on the focus and scale of your mapping process.
2. **Map the physical places, spaces, and connection points** where people connect and/or the community events, groups, or routines that help them to do so. *Tip: Encourage participants to speak from lived experience or professional observation, rather than searching for “correct” answers. This exercise is about surfacing patterns, not producing a perfect map.*
3. **Map barriers in the built and/or social environment** that limit access to connection opportunities. Reflect on the conditions shaping these vulnerabilities as opposed to blanket statements or labels. *Tip: Partners will help to illuminate specific challenges for different groups—assets and barriers for elderly residents will be different than those identified for youth.*
4. **Identify community anchor points** (i.e. social connection hubs that already exist in your community).
5. **Spot the gaps** in how assets and barriers are distributed, paying attention to patterns in how they exist across your community in uneven ways.
6. **Summarize key insights** such as the top five assets to build upon or barriers to address. These insights can offer up starting points for your pilot project. *Tip: Think about where actions might have the biggest impact in the least amount of time. These might be opportunities for “easy wins.”*



Outputs

- ✓ A map visualizing social connection in your community (a visual summary of key assets, barriers, anchors, and gaps); and
- ✓ A short list of priority insights and starting points that can be applied to action planning (see chapter 3).

Tip: Start with the mapping exercise before working on the definition, as the mapping exercise rests on assets that are concrete and very tangible. Working on this first will help you establish stronger foundations before you move to concepts that are more abstract.

Activity 2.2 Defining Social Connection in Your Community

Purpose: To develop a shared, place-based definition of social connection and accompanying vision to guide action planning and evaluation.

Why It Matters

This definition will ground all future action in the specific local context you are operating within and ensure that all actions and outcomes are aligned.

Steps (Preparation)

1. **Develop a short survey** to gather partner input on what social connection looks like in your community.
2. **Compile survey answers** and use them to draft a starting point definition of social connection for your community.
3. **Gather materials** such as maps, tools, sticky notes, markers, printed out definitions, and more that will help to support workshop delivery in a collaborative way.

Steps (Workshop Delivery)

1. **Discuss, reflect, and refine** the definition together, ensuring that the language used aligns with the lived experiences of community members.
2. **Create different versions** of the definition that can be used with a variety of audiences. *Tip: Residents may respond better to plain language, partners to language around shared coordination, and funders to slightly more formal language.*
3. **Develop a shared vision for the future** that balances ambition and realism. On one hand, consider what a future might look like within your community where everyone felt they belonged? On the other, think about the current conditions that would need to change for this vision to be realized.
4. **Connect to action planning** by identifying 2-3 broad goals that align with the project's purpose and that factor in your co-created definition of social connection, social connection assets and vulnerabilities, your shared vision, and other relevant local context.

Outputs

- ✓ A shared definition of social connection, including variations for different audiences;
- ✓ A vision for the future of your community that the project will work toward; and
- ✓ 2 or 3 broad goals for pilot phase implementation.

Planning For Action

This chapter prompts you to think of action planning as an iterative and collaborative process. It encourages you to work with your team and partners to design an initiative that responds to identified vulnerabilities while building on existing assets. You are not starting from scratch. While local governments may hold a unique role in bringing together partners and supporting social connection, they are part of a much broader ecosystem shaped by formal and informal networks, spaces, and relationships that can and should be relied upon for implementation.



Turning Insights into Action

? Start by asking: ***What actions will make a meaningful contribution to meeting your project goal(s)?***

Building a more socially connected community is a marathon, not a sprint. When it comes to planning, knowing that your initiative will grow and evolve can help to ground your efforts in sustainable approaches that help to meet your project objectives in the long-term. Having a clear sense of purpose, knowing your role, and relying on your partners creates a strong foundation for action. Understanding the shape and context you're working within provides the roadmap for next steps. As you move through the action planning process, keep in mind:

Project Purpose

- Why did you undertake this project in the first place?
- What are the outcomes you hope to achieve?
- What factors influenced the involvement of specific project partners?

Assets and Vulnerabilities

- How can pre-existing social infrastructure be leveraged to create momentum?
- Where might targeted action help to reduce barriers to participation?

Community Vision

- How does each action contribute to your long-term vision for a socially connected community?



By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Translate insights about your community into concrete actions;
- ✓ Brainstorm and prioritize social connection activities with partners;
- ✓ Select actions that match capacity and local needs; and
- ✓ Plan a small set of pilot initiatives to test and learn from.

A Process-Oriented Approach to Action Planning

This chapter makes no distinction between guidance and activities. The chapter is the activity, with each component designed to move you from ideation to implementation. It follows a simple five-step process:

1. **Brainstorm actions collaboratively;**
2. **Organize and cluster ideas;**
3. **Select actions to pilot;**
4. **Design for delivery; and**
5. **Pilot, learn, and adapt.**

These steps build on each other, allowing your project team to get started without needing everything figured out all at once. This process is about trying, learning, and adapting as you go!

Remember: Not all steps need to happen in a single meeting or phase. Every action, even the smallest ones, will make a meaningful contribution to meeting your long-term goals. Take your time!

Core Principles for Action Planning

Before diving into the action planning process, there are some key principles to follow that can help to guide your decision-making. As you move through the action planning process, return to these principles regularly to assess whether proposed actions truly support connection, inclusion, and local leadership.

Principle 1. Prioritize relationships

Strengthening social connections should be the primary outcome in the early stages of your project. While climate change can be a powerful entry point for conversation, actions do not need to be explicitly climate-focused to build resilience. A block party, a shared meal, or a casual gathering can be just as effective if it creates new relationships, strengthens existing ones, and fosters trust among neighbours. Social connection will be the foundation on which community climate resilience is built.

Principle 2. Let residents lead

Creating opportunities for connection does not require large-scale programming. Small, everyday interactions between neighbours on a walk, at the grocery store, or in front of a home are often the first step toward deeper relationships, especially when they occur repeatedly over time.

Residents are well positioned to lead this work. They bring local knowledge, networks, and credibility within their neighbourhoods. Empowering residents to take the lead helps ensure that actions are tailored to local realities while creating champions for your work beyond a single project or initiative. Local resident associations can be especially valuable partners in this work, helping to bridge top-down planning and community-led action.

Principle 3. Design shared experiences

Shared experiences with friends, acquaintances, or even strangers strengthen social connections by fostering positive interactions and shared purpose. These might be one-time occasions or recurring events that bring people together to learn something new, be creative, or celebrate. Clubs, workshops, classes, and other group activities can be especially helpful for building relationships over time.

Designing activities for specific audiences (e.g., seniors, families, people living alone, etc.) can help to address barriers to participation and reach residents who might otherwise not be included. Sometimes, people need to be prioritized and “invited in” to truly feel welcome. Community organizations are often well suited to lead these activities, as they bring relevant skills, capacity, and trusted relationships, as well as the knowledge required to meet people where they are at.

Principle 4. Activate existing places and spaces

Public and community spaces are powerful assets for fostering social connection, but they often require intentional activation. Benches, tables, public art, and usable green spaces can encourage people to linger, while events and resident-led activities create reasons to gather.

Bringing people together doesn't always require the creation of new spaces; rather, it can be most effective when done in spaces that are already used by people, either passively or actively. Considering how to make these spaces more welcoming, safe, and accessible for all can help to overcome barriers to social participation, without needing to wait for the perfect space to be built.



LAUNCH OF THE SUMMER 2023 SURVEY AT THE BIG BEAU EVENT, BEAUREPAIRE VILLAGE.

Action Feasibility

Determining actions is about dreaming big while remaining realistic. While you shouldn't feel limited in thinking outside the box, your actions should consider feasibility, partner capacity, and alignment with project objectives to ensure the initiative can be sustained.

Consider:

- What resources are required to make the action possible?
- How much time will be needed to deliver on this action?
- Who has the time, knowledge, and networks to bring the action to life?

Additionally, aim to prioritize actions that:

- Respond to identified vulnerabilities;
- Build on existing assets;
- Create early momentum or “easy wins”; and
- Support the inclusion of residents facing higher risk of isolation or climate impacts.

These considerations help to align your efforts with desired project outcomes and encourage you to think ahead about how success will be evaluated, even informally. This helps to strengthen learning and iteration during the pilot phase, and can also help to make the case for additional support in the future.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Small Shifts, Big Impact

Actions that empower resident leadership can expand what is possible through small actions that have big impacts. One Neighbour Connector shared that she started intentionally spending time in her front yard, rather than in her backyard, to see neighbours walking by. By placing two chairs and a small table near the sidewalk, she created an informal invitation for people to pause and chat, leading to regular conversations that would not have happened otherwise. Another resident developed a playful signal to invite neighbours over for a casual 5 à 7 (happy hour). On the day she planned to gather with neighbours, she placed a small pink flamingo on her front lawn, a lighthearted way of letting neighbours know they were welcome to stop by for a drink or conversation. These simple gestures made by Connecting Beaconsfield participants required few resources while being extremely effective for building familiarity and trust over time.

Putting Principles into Action: The Five Steps

Step 1. Brainstorm actions collaboratively

Using the strategies and case stories at the end of this chapter for inspiration, create a long list of possible actions and activities that can help meet your desired outcomes. This process is best supported by input from multiple project partners. Involving partners at this stage can help motivate community-led action by ensuring that ideas reflect the interests, skills, and experiences of participating organizations.

Rather than providing strict guidelines, encourage creativity. This list will be refined later according to feasibility, capacity, and alignment with project objectives. Be sure to document all ideas including those not selected for early implementation as they may become more feasible in later phases of the project. Much like an assets and vulnerabilities map, your list of actions can become a living document that evolves alongside your project.



Case stories are included at the end of this chapter to help you find inspiration.

[See Case Stories](#)

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Structured Brainstorming

In Beaconsfield, partners brainstormed actions through themed stations focused on different populations (e.g., seniors, families, people living alone). This approach helped surface over 30 ideas that responded to the local challenges rather than generic programming.

Regardless of how you approach this kind of exercise, make sure to designate one or two people to document ideas, take notes, and capture visual records (e.g., photos of flipcharts or idea notes). This documentation becomes a valuable reference as the project evolves.

Step 2. Organize and cluster ideas

Once a long list of actions has been generated, review the ideas and organize them according to shared themes, delivery type, or intended outcomes. This step helps to identify patterns, overlaps, and opportunities to build on existing initiatives. It can also help to reveal where responsibility naturally aligns to determine who's best to lead on each action:

- municipal staff;
- community organizations; or
- residents themselves.

Depending on time and capacity, this step can be done right after the brainstorming exercise or at a later date by your project team.

Step 3. Select actions to pilot

Using your preliminary long list of actions, work with partners to select a small number of actions to pilot. Selection should consider feasibility factors such as available capacity, required resources, and who is best positioned to lead delivery.

Having partners involved in both ideation and decision-making helps to ensure that selected actions align with collective strengths and increase the likelihood of successful implementation. Actions can be led or supported by more than one organization. By co-creating with partners, you expand the possibilities for what can be done by leveraging different skills, capacity, and resources toward a shared outcome.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Clarifying Leadership and Ensuring Ownership

Beaconsfield grouped actions into city-led and community-led streams early on. This helped align expectations, clarify roles, and reduce pressure on any single group. For the City, actions that required broad facilitation were especially relevant alongside opportunities to embed social connection and community resilience into other municipal projects and initiatives.



Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Overcoming Discomfort

When project partners discussed the meaning of social connection early on in the project, one phrase surfaced repeatedly: “breaking the awkwardness.” It was acknowledged that starting conversations with strangers can feel uncomfortable, let alone other activities such as singing in public or dancing in the street. Yet, sometimes resilience begins with doing something slightly uncomfortable, together.

Some of the most successful Connecting Beaconsfield activities during the Summer 2024 pilot project leaned directly into that discomfort. A partner organized a community sing-along in a park. Many participants hesitated at first, but once the music started, strangers sang together. At block parties, line dancing in the street became a shared moment that dissolved barriers between neighbours. Like food, music and movement are universal connectors. They create shared experiences quickly, even when people do not yet know each other well.

Step 4. Design for delivery

Once actions have been selected to pilot, additional planning is required to clarify roles, timelines, and support needs. Depending on the action, this may include resource development, volunteer recruitment, training, promotion, or coordination between partners.

From the start, consider the short-term and medium-term goals of the identified actions, as this will help to establish success indicators and create a foundation for future learning. It also helps to keep the actions aligned with the project purpose and vision.

Keep in mind that flexibility at this stage is key. Allowing actions to be shaped by those delivering and participating in them will strengthen ownership and responsiveness.



This process is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four

See [Bringing Your Plans to Life.](#)

Step 5. Pilot, learn, and adapt

Piloting your actions is about testing approaches, gathering feedback, and refining delivery. Focusing on a select few actions at the very start of your initiative will allow for trying things out and taking risks within a controlled setting. From there, scaling actions is more likely to result in successes as learnings from the earliest stages of your project are applied to future actions.

Evaluation at this stage should focus on learning rather than performance, using both qualitative and quantitative insights to understand what worked, what didn't, and why or why not. When feedback is meaningfully incorporated, you build trust with partners and participants by demonstrating that their insights are valued and acted upon.



This process is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four

See [Bringing Your Plans to Life](#).

Inspiration Through Real World Examples

The following case stories provide inspiration for a range of approaches that can strengthen social connection. They are not intended to be replicated directly, but rather, aim to expand thinking about what is possible in different contexts.



LAUNCH OF VOISINS CONNECTEURS, AUGUST 2024.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Keeping It Light

Several early actions intentionally avoided complex logistics. Informal, familiar settings helped lower participation barriers and made it easier for residents to engage comfortably.

Block Connectors Edmonton

Program Objective: To foster new social connections, strengthen existing ones, and build a sense of belonging amongst residents and across neighbourhoods.

Block Connectors Edmonton is a city-led initiative that empowers residents to become leaders within their communities by acting as main contacts and facilitators of social connection amongst neighbours. Individuals and families can volunteer as “block connectors” who then use a variety of tools including direct outreach, social events, and informal social gatherings to facilitate introductions and strengthen relationships. Activities may include (but are not limited to) welcoming new residents, making introductions between neighbours, hosting informal social gatherings such as BBQs, block parties, or garage sales, creating neighbourhood contact lists, and sharing local news and events. As a result of these activities, block connectors help to cultivate strong neighbourhood bonds that contribute to a greater sense of trust, belonging, and support in times of hardship—all of which help to build community resilience at both the neighbourhood and city scales.²⁰



Check this out! Read the [Block Connectors Edmonton Resource Guide](#) to discover tips, tricks, and tools such as Connector Cards that can help to meet your project’s objectives.

Similar programs have been undertaken in cities across Canada, including Kelowna (BC), Brandon (MB), and Waterloo (ON).



Neighbours Helping Neighbours

Program Objective: To promote mutual support systems that utilize social connection to strengthen emergency preparedness among residents.

Neighbours Helping Neighbours is a collaborative initiative launched by Building Resilient Neighbourhoods (BRN) that focuses on building formal and informal systems of neighbourly support for residents in multi-unit buildings. Tailored to the distinct character of each building, organizers collaborate with community champions who receive training, mentorship, and support to facilitate more connected communities. Piloted in 10 different locations across Canada, the outputs and outcomes of each implementation are distinct. For example, a partnership with Norc Innovation Centre in Toronto saw Neighbours Helping Neighbours incorporated into their Ambassador Program. A preliminary introduction was provided to participants followed by co-created educational materials that inspired Ambassadors to co-design helping systems in their building such as buddy systems, floor connectors, or ask/offer bulletin boards.^{21,22}



Get inspired! The Neighbour Helping Neighbours Pilot Learning Report provides multiple examples of how community champions were mobilized to creatively connect with other local residents. [Read the report.](#)



IMAGE SOURCE WWW.RESILIENTNEIGHBOURHOODS.CA

CompanionLink Befriending Program

Program Objective: To support the social and emotional wellbeing of seniors by fostering meaningful intergenerational relationships that help to reduce isolation and loneliness.

The Befriending Program provides seniors and volunteers with the opportunity to connect over the phone on a weekly basis leading to lasting bonds based on meaningful social connections. During these calls, participants get to share stories and experiences, discuss interests and hobbies, and have friendly check-ins, all of which contribute to a sense of companionship and support. As a result, participants leave feeling valued and connected. The Befriending Program was first piloted during the COVID-19 pandemic with the support of student volunteers. As a result of the pilot's success, CompanionLink was created to help carry these activities forward in the long-term. In the first 6 months of CompanionLink's activities, participants reported a 39% reduction in feelings of loneliness.

To-date, over 100 seniors have been matched with volunteers through the Befriending Program, with plans to scale their efforts both provincially (within Ontario) and nationally.^{23,24,25}



Consider this! CompanionLink identifies the following three barriers to accessing social connection in elderly care: technology, care worker restrictions and overwhelm, and difficulties with finding volunteers. [Learn more about their efforts to overcome these challenges.](#)



Canada Connects

Objective: To create safe spaces for newcomers through relationship-building that encourages intercultural awareness, volunteerism, and social and civic engagement.

Canada Connects is an initiative hosted by the London Cross-Cultural Learner Centre that connects newcomers with Canadian citizens or long-term community members as a way to build welcoming and engaged communities. Through volunteer engagement and mentorship, the program fosters meaningful relationships and connections while providing a safe space to strengthen cross-cultural communication and understanding about the challenges faced by newcomers. Canada Connects is one of the multiple newcomer programs offered through Community Connections. Other programs include the Small Groups Program based around interest and skill development for adults and families, youth programming that helps young people get involved, make friends, and develop different skills, and the YESS Program to assist newcomers aged 15 to 30 overcome employment barriers.²⁶



Check this out! The London Cross-Cultural Learner Centre creates guides for newcomers that highlight different ways to get involved with civic engagement, such as [Embracing Earth Day: A Newcomer's Guide to Environmental Engagement in London, Ontario.](#)



Community Writing Workshops

Objective: Writer’s Collective of Canada aims to foster connection by facilitating powerful and authentic storytelling shared in community.

“When we write with others, we discover ourselves.” The Writer’s Collective of Canada works with community partners and volunteer facilitators to host virtual and on-site writing workshops in communities across Canada. Workshops operate around three key practices—sharing, listening, and connecting—with recognition that stories can help to break down barriers and broaden perspectives so that every person can be heard. As such, no prior writing experience, education, or skill level is required to participate. Instead, everyone is empowered to see themselves as a writer. Key outcomes of participation include deeper connections, increased resilience, and strengthened self-advocacy amongst participants. To this end, Writer’s Collective of Canada seeks out project partners such as community centres and social service agencies that work with historically underserved communities, including underhoused, youth, elder, immigrant, and 2SLGBTQIA communities.²⁷



Consider this! Writing workshops can provide the opportunity to explore thoughts, feelings, and reflections on climate change. [Learn more about WCC workshops.](#)



Climate Connections

Objective: To increase climate change education and preparedness through community connections.

“The time to talk to neighbours about climate risks is before the power outage, flood or wildfire...” The Climate Connections initiative is led by How We Thrive, a small nonprofit organization with a goal of fostering community resilience through connection, collaboration, and climate change education. It offers a wide range of activities that include workshops, self-guided courses, retreats, social events (virtual and in-person), and a community-of-practice, as well as microgrants to support community members talking to their neighbours about climate risks. In 2025, three Rough Weather Ahead workshops were offered in-person across the HRM to provide participants with crucial information about how climate change is impacting their communities alongside tools for connecting with and helping each other in times of need. By promoting climate change education through neighbourly connections, their work helps to build community resilience in multiple ways—starting with opportunities that enable people to learn and reflect together!^{28,29}



Consider this! A six-module **Climate Connections course** is available online and for free to individuals and communities in Nova Scotia/Mi'kma'ki. Providing these resources outside of direct programming can help to increase the likelihood and reach of positive project outcomes.



PHOTO OF ELDER ALBERT MARSHALL FROM WWW.HOWWETHRIVE.ORG/CLIMATE

Connect and Prepare

Objective: To establish a proactive, community-driven approach to emergency preparedness.

Connect and Prepare is a workshop series and program developed by Building Resilient Neighbourhoods (BRN) that aims to strengthen social connections between neighbours as a foundation for resilience. Launched in 2022, the program is guided by the theory that neighbours are often the true “first responders” in a crisis. It complements municipal emergency management by building local capacity and encouraging neighbour-to-neighbour support not only during extreme weather events, but across all types of emergencies with a focus on coordinating outreach to residents facing higher vulnerability. The program has been highly successful, not only helping to link participants to existing government and community resources, but by fostering civic engagement around resilience in multi-unit buildings. In some cases, program messaging has been integrated into municipal heat safety public education campaigns.^{30,31}



Get inspired! **Connect & Prepare success stories** from different communities that emphasize program benefits related to climate preparedness and beyond!



IMAGE SOURCE WWW.RESILIENTNEIGHBOURHOODS.CA/CONNECT-PREPARE/

Rock Your Block

Objective: To strengthen relationships between neighbours through resident-led events.

Rock Your Block is a city-run initiative that makes it easy for residents to organize block parties and neighbourhood street events through a streamlined permitting process. In addition to removing lengthy application and approval processes, the program offers a step-by-step guide for planning events alongside the “Rock Your Block” trailer that can be rented by residents for a day, free of charge. The trailer includes everything needed to host a block party, including toys and games, tables and chairs, a BBQ, and portable speakers. By offering both logistical guidance and event resources, the initiative promotes increased civic participation and makes community-led events more accessible to residents of all backgrounds. It encourages neighbours to have fun, socialize, and build meaningful relationships, and as a result, strengthen community connections.³²



Consider this! To maintain a strong sense of community, connection, and well-being for city residents, Okotoks has undertaken the development of a **Social Needs Assessment and Strategy** informed by community voices.



IMAGE SOURCE WWW.OKOTOKS.CA

8 80 Towerpops

Objective: To foster community participation and belonging in tower communities through the activation of underutilized public spaces.

8 80 TowerPOPS promotes community wellbeing by activating underutilized public spaces through programming and design improvements shaped by resident input. Led by 8 80 Cities, the initiative aims to support health equity by prioritizing outdoor play, community connections, and an improved sense of belonging. In the first year of the three-year pilot, over 900 community members were engaged at over 40 community events including pop-ups and workshops. As a result of these engagements, two underutilized sites located in proximity to high-density neighbourhoods were selected for activation. These neighbourhoods have a large proportion of newcomer and racialized populations with historically limited access to vibrant and welcoming spaces. Co-designed and imagined in collaboration with community members, TowerPOPs helps to overcome this gap leading to improved health outcomes and more connected communities.^{33,34,35}



Get inspired! 8 80 TowerPOPS is made possible in collaboration with **PlazaPOPs**—a collaborative approach to placemaking that transforms private parking lots and underutilized public spaces into community gathering places that promote a vibrant local culture and support local businesses.



IMAGE SOURCE WWW.880CITIES.ORG

Youth Parks Program

Objective: To provide enriching experiences for local youth to foster relationships and have fun.

The City of Pointe Claire hosts a Parks Program that encourages young citizens between the ages of 8 and 18 to participate in activities, outings, and community-building activities in their local parks. The program is free and operates during the summer on a drop-in daily basis, with activities that include soccer, dodgeball, beach days, and more. In the winter, the program transitions to the Youth Centre, which offers indoor programming and outings such as skating or bowling in addition to early autumn activities in the park. The program takes place during the day from June through August, and on Fridays evenings from September through December. This schedule ensures that youth have access to affordable and accessible peer-driven spaces in the summer, with continued opportunities for connection and fun that accommodate changing schedules. As a result, participants are able to build relationships with other youth and the public spaces where programming takes place.³⁶



Check this out! A report launched in 2025 by le *Centre d'étude en responsabilité sociale et écocitoyenneté (CÉRSÉ)* analyzes the impacts of urban park initiatives on social inclusion. Read [*Les parcs urbains comme vecteur d'inclusion sociale: analyse d'initiatives et de leur impact sur la communauté*](#) (only available in French).



Our Urban Village

Our Urban Village is a 12-unit, three-storey housing complex that aims to foster a strong sense of collaboration and belonging amongst residents. Developed in partnership with Happy Cities and Tomo Spaces as “cohousing lite”, it emphasizes cooperative living and neighbourly-connection through shared amenities, indoor and outdoor common spaces, as well as socially minded design features. These features include wide walkways and extended staircase landings that encourage daily encounters and organic social interactions while maintaining full access to main circulation routes. Intentional community-building is a feature of residency, with shared dinners led by residents and facilitated sessions taking place that support relationship-building. Six months after move-in, residents reported significant positive outcomes including reduced loneliness, higher levels of trust, and a greater number of confidantes.^{37,38}



Check this out! Happy Cities in partnership with Hey Neighbour! Collective launched the ***Building Social Connections Policy and Design Toolkit***, which highlights key social design principles related to building edges, circulation, amenities, and home features alongside policy and implementation guidance.



IMAGE SOURCE WWW.OURURBANVILLAGE.CA

Bringing Your Plans to Life

This chapter supports the move from planning to implementation. It encourages you to embrace sustainable growth by showing users that the key is not to scale too quickly, but rather, to begin with small, achievable actions that create early wins and generate learning. Piloting allows you to test ideas, gather feedback, and refine your approach before committing to long-term expansion. Social connection work is not linear—it grows through experimentation, reflection, and adjustment.



Moving from Planning to Implementation



Start by asking: ***What uncertainties must be overcome to move into implementation?***

Implementation can be a nerve-wracking process, but starting small by piloting a select few activities can help to overcome uncertainties and sustain your project in the long-term. These early efforts will offer invaluable insights into what works and what doesn't within your community while allowing you to build and strengthen relationships with community members. As trust build between the project team and the community itself, you can move forward with the confidence to try new things, seek out new opportunities, and scale your efforts.

Implementation is a circular process, not a linear one. While the activities themselves may change or evolve, the need to reflect, refine, design, deliver, and evaluate remains the same.



BEACONSFIELD BLOCK PARTY EVENT, 2025.

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Translate planned actions into a scalable pilot initiative;
- ✓ Assess collective capacity and clarify roles with partners;
- ✓ Understand the unique role of local governments during implementation;
- ✓ Deliver actions in ways that build trust and ownership; and
- ✓ Monitor, learn, and refine before scaling.

As you move toward implementation for the first time, start by considering:

- Are there any uncertainties or challenges that may be stopping you from taking action?
- Are your expectations for the pilot realistic based on the conditions you're operating within?
- What would "good enough" look like for this stage of your initiative?

These questions are meant to remind you that things don't need to be perfect for you to get started. Establish the bare minimum needed to get going, and allow your initiative to grow in-line with your collective knowledge and awareness of what will serve the community best.

A Process-Oriented Approach to Implementation

Similar to chapter three, the following pages offer a five-step process for piloting your initiative:

1. **Assess capacity and assign teams;**
2. **Establish clear timelines, roles, expectations, and evaluation mechanisms;**
3. **Deliver with coordination and flexibility;**
4. **Gather feedback from partners and participants; and**
5. **Reflect, refine, and determine your next moves.**

These steps can and should be returned to with every new stage of your project as they encourage you to build off the work that has come before. Documenting your process at every step of the way is especially important in your pilot phase, as this information will be the baseline that you refer to when considering how far you've come. It is an essential part of your initiative's story.

Core Principles for Implementation

Before getting started, review the following key principles. Return to these principles as you move through different project phases to ensure that your initiative reflects your community while scaling at a sustainable pace.

Principle 1. Start small and build momentum

Your initiative does not need to reach everyone immediately to be a success. In fact, starting small and prioritizing slow but steady relationship-building will lead to stronger outcomes down the line as trust builds and belonging increases.

A pilot can begin with just a small group of committed partners or residents who are willing to build relationships at the hyper-local level. Once people start to feel the value of your work, what started as a small trickle will eventually cascade into something more powerful. From there, you can scale action to reach even more residents.

Principle 2. Empower shared leadership

Sustainable initiatives distribute responsibility. Ask yourself: if any one person or organization was no longer involved, could the work continue?

Empower all members of the team—project leads, partners, volunteers, and even participants—to see themselves as leaders with the knowledge and tools to build meaningful connections. Without over-formalizing the conditions for collaboration, determine roles for each party that lean into their strengths, interests, and lived experiences.

Principle 3. Act as a backbone, not the sole driver

Local governments are uniquely positioned to create structure, remove barriers, and bring people together. This might look like:

- Providing structure and coordination;
- Increasing access to resources;
- Supporting communications;
- Removing administrative barriers; or
- Showing up visibly at community activities.

Providing tools, small grants, or materials to support delivery while allowing residents to decide how to use them is a reciprocal act of trust.

It also helps to strengthen the long-term sustainability of your project. These individuals and organizations are more likely to have trusted relationships in their communities that can help to expand the reach of the

initiative. Additionally, as different actors take ownership over various project components they become champions of the work, creating possibilities for new social connection activities to emerge.

Principle 4. Reduce friction for participation

Lower barriers to engagement wherever possible. This means keeping logistics light for both those leading on activities and for those participating. In practice, this might look like holding events or activities in familiar settings, using accessible language, and leaning into informal formats that require minimal registration or a clear invitation. These are general strategies that can significantly lower barriers to participation.

To take this a step further, consult with community partners to identify where specific barriers can be reduced for different groups. This might include covering the costs of public transportation, scheduling events outside of work hours, or providing childcare.

Principle 5. Treat implementation as learning

Monitoring and evaluation are not performance audits. They are tools for iteration. Success can be measured as much by insights gained as by outcomes achieved.

Embed monitoring and evaluation into your initiatives from the very start by considering what you hope to achieve. These don't need to be quantitative measures (such as # of attendees), but can be individual reflections

and stories shared by people about how they felt (or feel), who they've connected with, or why they chose to attend an event. When monitoring and evaluation aren't seen as an afterthought, they become a tool for refining your activities to be more meaningful and effective – both at the end of the pilot but also as it's taking place.

Putting Principles into Action: The Five Steps

Step 1. Assess capacity and assign teams

Before launching, develop a clear picture of your collective capacity in relation to the actions you aim to pilot. This helps to align expectations with what can realistically be delivered.

Within your core team, consider:

- Delivery timelines for pilot actions (e.g., one-off, recurring, ongoing);
- Competing commitments (e.g., other professional responsibilities and deliverables);
- Spatial requirements (e.g., public, private, online, neighbourhood-scale);
- Resource needs (e.g., tools, materials, skills, compensation);
- Leadership responsibilities (e.g., individual, shared); and
- Staff and volunteer availability.

With partners, explore:

- Staff availability for supporting early implementation;

- Skills, knowledge, and networks they can contribute;
- Possible space or resources that can be offered; and
- Ongoing or planned activities that could be leveraged.

Once this information is obtained, you can determine who might be best to lead on delivery and who can offer support. Sharing responsibilities across multiple actors in this way will help to reduce burnout and increase sustainability.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Compensation and Shared Investment

At the outset of Connecting Beaconsfield, project partners received a modest financial compensation in recognition of their time and contributions. The City also covered costs associated with pilot activities, including events organized by community organizations. This approach signaled that their participation in the project was valued and that the city was a true partner in implementation. Offering tangible resources underscored the nature of the initiative as a shared investment, strengthening commitment and accountability amongst the partners.

Tip: Through this process, you may realize that collective capacity for early implementation is limited. If you don't have the resources or time right now, piloting just one action will still make a meaningful step in the right direction.

Step 2. Establish clear timelines, roles, and expectations

This step is about planning for the individual actions that will take place in this pilot phase. The different teams assigned to each action should work together to clarify:

- A realistic timeline for action delivery;
- Clear roles for each person on the team (e.g., municipal staff, community organizations, volunteers, etc.);
- Required resources;
- Communication channels; and
- One or two short term goals that the action will aim to achieve. Measuring these goals should focus on process rather than outcome, considering the factors that enabled or inhibited meeting them.

Keep in mind that things will change during the pilot, so this planning does not need to be overly detailed. Your plans should remain flexible as conditions are likely to change—especially in the earliest phase of the initiative.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Starting Small

The Neighbour Connector pilot began modestly, with early responsibilities for participants focused on engaging 10–15 households, gathering ideas, and initiating small gatherings. Emphasis was placed on relationship-building rather than scale. To reinforce this, evaluation focused primarily on process, asking: What helped build trust? What barriers emerged? What support was needed? Beginning with manageable expectations made participation less intimidating and allowed the program to evolve organically, especially as positive processes were reinforced and barriers intentionally addressed.

Step 3. Delivery: Preparation, coordination, and flexibility

Delivery requires a combination of preparation and coordination, which may include actions such as the following:

- Development of resources and tools (e.g., worksheets, signage, etc.);
- Volunteer recruitment;
- Workshop planning (e.g., recruiting facilitators, securing space, registration, etc.);
- Promotion and outreach; and
- Ongoing partner coordination.

While you should outline the steps and key milestones necessary for delivery, at the same time, you want to avoid over-engineering. Flexibility is an important component of letting the initiative be shaped by your community, so don't be scared to move away from the original plans. Allow actions to evolve through the insights and efforts of those leading and participating in them. While it might not turn out exactly as you imagined, the outcomes that emerge are likely to be a better fit for your community.

Municipalities play a critical enabling role during this stage by supporting partners to shape the delivery of different actions. As municipal practitioners often act as doers and leaders, this new role might feel daunting or out of your comfort zone, but fighting the urge to intervene or take over can help to empower project partners. Before jumping in, ask yourself:



- Are we stepping in too quickly or stepping back too far?
- Where are partners and residents already demonstrating leadership?
- Are we creating space for flexibility or over-controlling outcomes?
- What signs indicate that trust is strengthening?

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Pilots as Prototypes

From the outset, Connecting Beaconsfield treated early actions as prototypes—not permanent programs. This mindset created space for experimentation. Some ideas evolved, others were adjusted, and a few were set aside. The value of each action was measured not only by participation numbers, but by process-based learning:

What resonated? What barriers emerged?
What felt authentic?

This approach reduced pressure and supported adaptation based on lived experience. One example was the later introduction of Partage Club, a mobile app allowing residents to lend, borrow, and request small forms of help. The idea emerged from observed needs during the pilot phase. By prioritizing learning over perfection, the initiative built momentum while refining its long-term direction

Step 4. Gather feedback

Collect insights throughout the pilot, not only at the end. Methods to support this work may include:

- Informal conversations with participants during events;
- Short surveys held in-person and/or online;
- Structured one-on-one interviews;
- Partner check-ins;
- Focus groups;
- And more.

Importantly, be sure gather feedback from both partners and participants as they bring different yet equally valuable perspectives:

- **Partner feedback** can offer reflection on coordination dynamics, delivery challenges, and success factors.
- **Participant feedback** can help to understand impact and provide specific insights on ways to improve the experiences of those in attendance.

In both cases, incorporating feedback into your activities both during delivery and in subsequent iterations of the initiative helps to build trust—especially when you communicate these changes to those who provided their insights in the first place. It also helps community members to see that their voice matters, contributing to their sense of belonging.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Prototype Your Communications

Early project materials, including buttons and printed items, did not resonate as strongly as expected. Instead, QR codes or redirect links that could be easily scanned and updated later provided an effective method for sharing information, engaging with participants, and eliciting feedback. Ordering small batches and testing tools before scaling helped reduce waste and adjust method and messaging, strengthening both engagement and efficiency.

Step 5. Reflect, refine, and decide what to scale

At the conclusion of the pilot period, a combination of participant and partner feedback alongside project team observations can help to reflect upon and refine your activities. These reflections should take place with consideration of your pilot goals to illuminate successes and challenges to achieving them.

Approach your reflections with curiosity rather than judgment. Missteps are not failures—they are precious data that will help to tailor your pilot to the unique, real-world needs of your community. These are the insights that will become the building blocks for longer-term program development.


Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



A Vegetable Planter That Did Not Deliver as Expected

As part of the pilot project, one of the initiatives that multiple partners had identified and recommended was a vegetable planter that would be installed near the municipal headquarters. This initiative was done in collaboration with the local garden club. It was challenging to find residents who would come regularly to water the garden, so the municipal team relied on the day camps over the summer, who happily took care of it. It was a way to spread the word about Connecting Beaconsfield to local families, as we did not have any specific actions targeting children and families.

Evaluating for Learning and Growth

 Start by asking: ***What changed because of your pilot and how do you know?***

Evaluation is about understanding impact and informing next steps. When it comes to your social connection initiative, it should aim to capture both process indicators (e.g., what worked, what didn't, what helped partnership to function, etc.) and outcome indicators (e.g., shifts in community engagement, increased sense of belonging, greater climate preparedness, etc.).

Informed by the project goals and measurements established earlier on in your initiative, consider questions such as:

- What surprised you the most during implementation?
- What about the project aligned with your expectations?
- What elements contributed to meeting project goals?
- Where did challenges or barriers impact participation?
- Are there any obvious changes you would make if you delivered the action again?
- Are you ready to scale the action or is another iteration required?
- What conditions would need to be in place before expanding activities?
- Even if the action was a success, should it happen again or are there other activities that might offer valuable results?

Because social connection can be difficult to measure in purely quantitative terms, a mixed-method approach is often most effective for documenting possible changes. Your approach to measurement and evaluation should aim include both qualitative and quantitative measures of success, such as:

- Participation numbers;
- Diversity of participants;
- Survey feedback;
- Partner reflections;
- Personal stories and discussions; and
- Observed behaviour changes.

By documenting qualitative insights alongside quantitative ones, you can identify specific strengths, successes and challenges faced by individuals that might not otherwise be captured in quantitative data. This information may be especially helpful for factoring inclusivity into future social connection activities, as lived experience under social and structural systems is distinct for different groups.

When taken together, this information can be used to establish what and how actions should be improved upon, repeated, scrapped, or scaled to maximize impact, overcome isolation, and build thriving, resilient communities.

Activity 4.1 Planning Your Pilot Activities

Purpose: To design a focused pilot initiative that identifies clear roles, timelines, and a monitoring approach for each of the selected actions.

Why It Matters

A structured yet flexible plan for pilot action delivery ensures that capacity, time, and resources are maximized, learnings are prioritized, and changes based on community insights are meaningfully incorporated into your initiative.

Steps

1. **Select 2–4 actions** to include in your pilot (see Chapter 3 for guidance on this process).
2. **Establish a clear timeline** for the pilot (this may be determined based on funding requirements or similar factors). For each individual action, provide an expected timeline that includes earliest and latest possible dates for completing deliverables within the pilot period.
3. **Host a discussion with partners** to assign project leads and assess support needs with consideration of partner organization interests, capacity, and resources. *Tip: Multiple partners may work together in leading on different actions.*



4. **Assign supports** in the form of other organizations, volunteers, and city staff.
5. **Determine communication methods** amongst action leads, whether by email, phone calls, or instant messaging.
6. **Help to coordinate action planning calls** between leads and supports. In these calls, leads and supports can work together to more clearly define rolls, establish milestones, brainstorm evaluation, and identify required resources.

Outputs

- ✓ A high-level pilot plan that includes project timelines and action leads; and
- ✓ A detailed outline of each action to be compiled by the project lead in collaboration with other partners.

Activity 4.2

Learning Log

Purpose: To capture insights before, during, and after the pilot is delivered.

Why It Matters

Logging your learnings will offer invaluable information down the line when it comes to accountability, evaluation, project evolution, and more. It can be a way to keep track of challenges and successes when they happen instead of long after they've ended.

Steps

1. **Create a simple shared document** that is accessible to project partners.
2. In conjunction with project partners, **keep track of learnings**, including:
 - What works well;
 - What feels challenging;
 - Unexpected outcomes; and
 - Possible adjustments for the next phase.



Tip: Keep it simple and ongoing, preparing the log before you launch your pilot to ensure that every step, experience, and lesson is documented along the way.

Outputs

- ✓ A shared document for supporting project monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Activity 4.3

Evaluating Your Pilot

Purpose: To assess what changed during your pilot and identify priorities for the next phase.

Why It Matters

Evaluation that focuses on learning and growth is key to iterating your project, and eventually, sustaining it via long-term program support. It can also help to tell the story of your project to funders municipal decision-makers.

Steps

1. **Review the original objectives and goals** of the initiative.
2. **Identify observable changes in community social connection** using feedback collected through surveys, conversations, and stories. Changes may be reflected in new or strengthened relationships, rates of community participation, awareness of climate impacts, or improved emergency preparedness.
3. With community partners (in-person or virtually), **have an open discussion** on what worked well, the barriers limiting impact, and surprising lessons learned.



4. **Assess feedback** collected through surveys, conversations, and stories alongside Learning Log insights and notes from your open discussion to identify if and how the pilot achieved specific goals or contributed to meeting social connection objectives.
5. **Extract learnings and insights** about what made actions successful, what could be improved upon (or scrapped altogether), and any other learnings gained through project delivery. Select 3-5 lessons learned that will be carried forward as priority adjustments into future stages of your initiative.

Outputs

- ✓ A brief summary of your evaluation insights; and
- ✓ 3-5 priority adjustments for future actions.

From Connection to Climate Resilience

This chapter prompts you to think about what comes next. It asks you to consider the possibilities for climate resilience and other forms of community resilience that emerge when a strong social fabric is in place. This might look like sharing important climate change-related information to expanded networks or an increased number of participants in municipal engagement activities. Possibilities are endless when a community is more socially connected and where collective action is a central tenet of everyday life.



Cascading Opportunities

Early efforts to strengthen social connection often begin with modest, relational actions: a block party, a conversation in a front yard, or a workshop at the library. Over time, these efforts lead to positive resilience outcomes that unfold at multiple levels:

- At the individual level (e.g., residents feel less isolated and more confident asking for help);
- At the neighbourhood level (e.g., informal networks begin to coordinate and self-organize); and
- At the municipal level (e.g., trusted relationships amongst local organizations accelerate communication, collaboration, and implementation).


These outcomes also unlock broader and cascading opportunities for climate resilience, civic engagement, and institutional change. This chapter invites you to look beyond your pilot phase and consider what could become possible when trust, familiarity, and shared responsibility start taking root in your community.



By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize how social connection initiatives create ripple effects beyond their original scope;
- ✓ Identify how strengthened social networks can accelerate climate adaptation efforts;
- ✓ Understand the role of cultural and social infrastructure to long-term resilience;
- ✓ Explore how resident leadership expands adaptive capacity; and
- ✓ Consider how to sustain your initiative as an ongoing program.

From Social Connection to Climate Resilience

 Start by asking: ***What possibilities are opened up by increased social connection?***

As emphasized through this guide, climate change may not always be front and center in the earliest stages of your social connection initiative. However, as trust and familiarity grow, the foundation for more explicit climate adaptation conversations strengthens. As your project evolves, a more explicit focus on climate change and its impacts may start to make sense for your community.

Once your initiative has gone through one or more iterations, you may find new opportunities to:

- Integrate climate preparedness discussions into community activities;
- Use strengthened networks to disseminate emergency messaging more effectively;
- Engage residents in adaptation planning consultations;
- Test neighbourhood-level response strategies before disruptions occur;
- ...and more.

Strong social networks enhance adaptive capacity and the ability of individuals and communities to anticipate, respond to, and recover from climate impacts.³⁹ In this way, social connection becomes a gateway to deeper climate action.

Importantly, these benefits extend beyond logistics: knowing neighbours reduces anxiety during disruptions and having trusted relationships with other residents, organizations, and spaces can provide psychological reassurance as well as practical support. Emotional resilience and climate resilience reinforce one another.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Climate to the Front

During one Neighbour Connectors workshop, volunteers were presented with climate-related scenarios, such as an ice storm or flood, and asked how they might respond through neighbourhood-level action. Mid-discussion, additional “surprise” elements, such as a nighttime power outage, were introduced and had to be considered.

Participants quickly recognized how existing relationships would shape their response. Who would check on whom? Who had backup generators? Who might need additional support? These exercises shifted climate preparedness from abstract policy to tangible, neighbour-to-neighbour action, demonstrating how social connection translates directly into resilience.

Community-Led Adaptation

? Start by asking: *Who in your community is ready to lead if invited?*

One of the strongest indicators of adaptive capacity is the ability of residents to self-organize.⁴⁰ Where resident-led initiatives are nurtured, whether through ambassador programs, neighbourhood groups, or informal gatherings, community members are more able to:

- Raise awareness about climate-related risks;
- Coordinate informal response plans;
- Share tools and resources;
- Mobilize quickly during disruptions; and
- Advocate for local improvements.

As the impacts of their participation become more apparent, residents begin to see themselves not only as participants, but as leaders. This shift expands the reach and creativity of adaptation efforts far beyond what municipal staff can accomplish alone.

Beyond Climate Change: Strengthening Civic Fabric

? Start by asking: *What else becomes possible when connection, trust, and belonging increase?*

The benefits of strengthened social connection extend beyond climate adaptation. Where trust and belonging are increased, communities are more likely to experience:

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Far from Where Things Started

When asked how a future winter emergency might unfold compared to past events, one Connecting Beaconsfield participant described her plan to connect with her neighbours to create a shared list of resources such as generators, extra blankets, and equipment that could be mobilized and shared during a crisis. What began as casual summer conversations evolved into tangible preparedness planning.

- Higher levels of civic engagement;
- Greater participation in municipal consultations;
- Increased volunteerism;
- Stronger cross-sector collaboration; and
- Improved trust in local government.

As a result, the residents of more socially connected communities are more likely to:

- Engage in long-term planning processes;
- Support local initiatives; and
- Contribute to problem-solving across issues.^{41,42,43}

When people feel they belong to a shared place and purpose, and know that their actions can make a positive impact on those with whom they share it, they are more inclined to act. In this way, climate resilience work becomes a catalyst for broader community resilience.

Connecting Beaconsfield in Practice



Shaping Municipal Action

Staff in Beaconsfield observed that networks built through Connecting Beaconsfield became valuable for other municipal initiatives. When new projects required outreach or collaboration, established relationships accelerated engagement. Rather than building trust from scratch each time, the City was able to rely on existing social infrastructure to support additional priorities.

This dynamic also extended beyond the municipal level. For example, two neighbourhood groups that first connected through the initiative began collaborating on other activities, strengthening local momentum and creating new opportunities for engagement.



It Doesn't End Here



Start by asking: ***What comes next?***

The story of your social connection initiative is constantly being written. While the pilot might be the first chapter, social connection work is forever work. Considering how to sustain your efforts should factor into the evaluation of your initiative and any planning for future action. Shifting from a short-term initiative to a long-term program can be one way to carry things forward.

Moving From Pilot to Program

Shifting your initiative from a pilot to sustained program requires intentional investment and integration. Key considerations that can be built into planning and used to make the case for long-term financial, political, and community support include:

- **Institutional alignment:** How does this work connect to your climate adaptation plan, emergency preparedness strategy, equity commitments, or community development priorities? Embedding social connection within formal plans will help strengthen your initiative's legitimacy, garner cross-departmental support, and ensure continuity. These benefits are reciprocal. For example, in municipalities where climate adaptation plans focus primarily on infrastructure and technical measures, social connection initiatives can be emphasized as a way to:
 - Strengthen community preparedness and early warning systems;
 - Improve equity outcomes by reducing isolation-related risk;
 - Support behavioural adaptation; and
 - Enhance public engagement in adaptation planning.
- **Resource stability:** What level of staff time, budget, or partner compensation is needed to sustain momentum? Even modest but predictable support can significantly increase program stability, so including these expectations in any proposals or plans is important from the start.

- **Governance clarity:** Who is responsible for coordination and how will decisions be made? How will new partners be onboarded? A clear structure for your program that is documented in writing will help avoid confusion and improve communication amongst municipal team members and partners.
- **Iterative learning:** How will evaluation insights be incorporated into future planning cycles? Sustained initiatives will evolve over time, and they will not remain static. It can be a good idea to plan and dedicate time to do this.

Evolving with Your Community

As the impacts of increased social connection are felt at the resident, neighborhood, and municipal scales, you may feel compelled to make climate change a more obvious focus of your efforts. In many ways this should be the case, and your program planning may seek to embed climate action more explicitly into future activities.

At the same time, ensuring that connections continue to develop and strengthen is the only way to keep your social fabric strong. The shape of these actions may change as your community changes—and they should. Just as communities evolve, your efforts must evolve to reflect the changing character and needs of your community. Regardless, relying on community organizations and residents as essential partners in this process will keep you moving forward with social connection and relationships at the core.

Activity 5.1 From Pilot to Program Planning Session

Purpose: To determine how your initiative can transition from short-term pilot to sustained program.

Why It Matters

Program funding and support is more able to sustain long-term action, meaning that local governments can continue to foster social connection as a key component of climate resilience.

Steps

- **Consider your vision for the initiative** on a 1-2 year horizon or a 3-5 year horizon depending on your municipality's priorities.
- **Identify institutional alignment points** such as your climate action plans, municipal projects and programming, emergency response strategies, equity goals, and others.
- **Estimate required resources** such as staff time, budget, and partnerships.
- **Define the governance structure moving forward** and your municipality's role within it.



- **Document these reflections** in a mini “proposal” or road map.
- **Identify potential funding sources or awards** to support sustainable social connection efforts.

Outputs

- ✓ A one-page roadmap, with key strategies and goals clearly identified;
- ✓ Identified budget range and resource needs; and
- ✓ Clear next steps for leadership approval.

Community Climate Resilience – By All, For All

Showing up for each other in moments of crisis is just one way that social connection translates into climate resilience; but the power of social connection goes beyond a single moment. By ensuring that each community member feels a sense of trust and belonging—that they aren't alone, that their voice matters, and that they have the power to make a meaningful impact on the lives of their neighbours—transformative change starts to occur. When these ingredients are present within and across a population, community takes on a different meaning. It's not just about a street, neighborhood, or town; it's about people and their collective investment in the wellbeing of each other and the place they call home. This is the foundation for community resilience by the people, from the people, for the people that is strong in the face of any storm.

From bringing together partners whose collective care, reach, and expertise can ensure that every voice is represented, to designing and implementing activities that put community members at the centre (both as leaders and as experts in their own experiences), local governments and other local organizations have a unique role to play in shaping a people-centred and community-designed response to climate change impacts. It starts with small actions that create moments for social connection, meaning, and trust-building toward a future where, no matter what strikes, no one is left behind. This is the missing link to climate action that makes a meaningful difference in the everyday lives and out-of-the-ordinary challenges that communities face.

We hope that you return to this resource as you continue on the path toward a more socially connected and resilient community. This work is forever work, and whether it's to identify next steps, find inspiration, or reflect on what's already been done, this guide is one of the many tools in your toolbox—a toolbox that extends beyond just you (the user) to include all of the ideas, experiences, and insights that each community member contributes to the social fabric of the place you (all) call home.

Connecting Beaconsfield as a Model

Climate resilience is often discussed in terms of infrastructure, plans, and technical solutions. Yet the experience documented throughout this guide demonstrates that resilience also depends on something more fundamental: whether people know each other, trust each other, and feel supported. These relationships form a precious asset, though often invisible, that can make a real difference when disruptions occur.

Connecting Beaconsfield shows how a municipality can intentionally strengthen social connection as a foundation for climate resilience, particularly for residents facing higher vulnerability, including people with reduced mobility, social isolation, or limited access to support. Rather than starting with risk assessments or emergency protocols alone, Beaconsfield prioritized relationships, recognizing that neighbours are often the first line of support during climate events, especially when emergency services are stretched.

This approach did not rely on a single program, activity, space, or a fixed model. It evolved through collaboration between municipal teams, community partners, and residents themselves.

By working across silos, lowering barriers to participation, and treating early actions as opportunities to learn, the City along with community partners and involved residents created space for trust, reciprocity, and community leadership to grow. Over time, climate preparedness grew, too.

Adapting the Approach to Your Community

There is no single recipe for community climate resilience. Beaconsfield's approach reflects its own demographics, built environment, climate risks, and civic culture. The value of this guide therefore lies not in replicating specific activities, but in applying its underlying principles to local realities.

What remains constant in this work is the intentions that underly it:

- To start with relationships and social connection;
- To lower barriers to participation;
- To work across municipal silos; and
- To treat residents not as audiences, but as active partners in building resilience across the community.

When applied in ways that reflect local context, these principles can help to reduce vulnerability and strengthen adaptive capacity across diverse communities. This guide encourages municipalities to use the tools, examples, and lessons presented here as a flexible framework that can be adapted and enriched—to really make it their own.

Community climate resilience is built through everyday relationships, shared responsibility, and the belief that everyone has a role to play. By placing people and relationships at the core of climate adaptation efforts, communities can build resilience that is inclusive, scalable, and responsive to change.

What's next for Beaconsfield

For Beaconsfield, Connecting Beaconsfield is not an endpoint, it is an ongoing process that will continue to evolve alongside the community to meet changing needs. Future plans include:

- **Deepening neighbourhood-level connections to better support residents facing higher vulnerability**, including through alignment with the City's Vulnerable Persons Registry.
- **Strengthening the role of trusted community spaces, such as libraries and cultural venues, as resilience hubs**, including the opening of a new multipurpose cultural and community centre scheduled for summer 2028.
- **Embedding social connection more explicitly into the City's Climate Action Plan**, ensuring community mobilization and neighbour-to-neighbour support remain core levers for climate adaptation.
- **Expanding the use of storytelling** to raise awareness and deepen engagement, helping residents connect personally to the initiative through lived experiences, shared stories, and relatable examples.



- **Continuing to integrate social connection across municipal initiatives**, reinforcing its role in adaptation, emergency response, and community wellbeing.
- **Sharing lessons learned with other municipalities across Québec and Canada**, supporting replication while recognizing that each community will adapt the approach to its own context.

As climate risks intensify, Beaconsfield will continue to strengthen its “invisible infrastructure”—the connections that allow neighbours to check in, share resources, and respond together when it matters most.

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