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Guidebook

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THE CLIMATE READY PRAIRIES GUIDE

Communicating and Engaging on Climate Adaptation

In March 2025, members of the Re.Climate and ClimateWest team were received by Elder Victor Bruno of Samson Cree First Nation. This project, and their collaboration with SevGen Consulting, was blessed by Elder Victor in a ceremony on his Nation's territory. This guide is dedicated to his memory. We thank him for starting off this project in a good way.

About the project

This Climate Ready Prairies Guide to Communicating and Engaging on Climate Adaptation was developed by Re.Climate in collaboration with ClimateWest, a regional hub for climate services in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The project team also worked closely with SevGen Consulting Inc., an Indigenous-owned firm, which provided expertise on engaging with Indigenous partners and incorporating their perspectives respectfully and openly.

Methodology

The guide's framework and guidance are based on:

- 20 interviews with adaptation experts and practitioners from municipal, provincial and federal governments, universities, consulting firms and non-profit organizations
- 15 Indigenous engagement meetings with adaptation practitioners from tribal councils, nation lands management departments and Indigenous government entities from remote, rural and urban parts of the region at different stages of their climate adaptation journey.
- Feedback from six Climate Ready Prairies training sessions with communicators, adaptation professionals and emergency preparedness experts in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.
- A landscape analysis, comprising 45 academic articles and guides on the topic of communicating and engaging on climate change and adaptation, and a media analysis of regional news outlets and two academic salons.

The Climate Ready Prairies guide was reviewed by a regional equity committee, an academic peer-review committee, and five practitioners who participated in the training. Re.Climate would also like to acknowledge the project advisory group, which provided strategic guidance throughout the initiative.

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INTRODUCTION

Attendees of the Climate Ready Prairies final summit discuss "serious games" and their use in adaptation work on May 12, 2026 (PJ JORDAN/ FRIENDLY VISUAL)

This guide is designed by and for Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to support communication and engagement on climate adaptation policies and programs.

Extreme weather, exacerbated by climate change, is already having significant impacts across these three provinces. In response, municipalities, provincial governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, non-profit organizations and businesses are taking action to prepare for and adapt to the challenges posed by climate change. However, these efforts remain constrained due to a lack of resources; a lack of public awareness of climate change adaptation actions; the politicization of climate change as a whole; a lack of regional examples; the lack of media attention on extreme weather preparedness; and the uncertainty and difficult emotions that come with experiencing climate disasters.

This is not easy work. Educator and award-winning hoop dancer Sandra Lamouche, who helped shape this guide, shared the story of the buffalo, a creature that knows how to be resilient.[1]

When a harsh winter storm is approaching, buffalo gather together. The lead buffalo, often the matriarch, will direct the herd towards the storm. Running from the storm and fearing it, Sandra explained, would only prolong the buffalo's suffering, as there is no way to outrun a storm. By moving through the storm, the buffalo exemplify the importance of facing challenges head-on. They show that by accepting hardship together, they can endure it.

1 The guide attempts to weave together Indigenous and non-Indigenous expertise, experiences and research to ensure it is useful to Indigenous audiences and to encourage non-Indigenous readers to learn from and engage with their Indigenous neighbours in adaptation initiatives. The guide shares stories from communities across the region, showing how communities and organizations—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—are putting recommended tools and tactics into action.

Communicators and leaders responding to climate change must hold onto the realistic hope that the storm will end. Enduring the storm means thinking about what comes next rather than wishing for the past. If more storms are to come, how can we meet them safely and effectively rather than running away? This is also a lesson of the hoop dance. Going through challenges can make you stronger and help you grow.

Lastly, the buffalo keep the most vulnerable herd members inside a ring of stronger ones. This work cannot be done alone. It can only happen in collaboration with community members, colleagues and trusted organizations.

The Climate Ready Prairies guide helps communicators build the conditions for communities to prepare themselves. It provides evidence and practitioner insights to support communications and engagement planning.

This guide defines adaptation as the process of taking actions, based on evidence and community capacity, that prepare for probable climate impacts and build towards a safer future for the places and people we love. Evidence from Climate Outreach, EcoAnalytics and the Government of Canada shows that Canadians understand "preparedness" better than "adaptation." Therefore, throughout the guide we will use the term preparedness in lieu of adaptation where relevant.

The guide also introduces communicators to Re.Climate's PREPARE Framework, which can be used to facilitate these partnerships.[2] The framework will be useful to anyone who needs to communicate and engage their partners and audiences on preparing for climate impacts.[3]

The context of adaptation in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba

Climate change in the Prairies

Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are already experiencing the effects of climate change, and the Prairies are the fastest warming region in Canada beyond the Arctic *(Sauchyn et al., 2020; Laforge, et al., 2021)*. While communities in the region are well accustomed to climate variability, from -40°C winter days to +30°C summer days, climate change is making extreme weather more frequent and intense. Wildfires, floods and droughts are the most visible and impactful climate hazards *(Sauchyn, et al., 2020)*.

Drought is the region's most costly climate hazard because low water supplies can have serious social, environmental and economic impacts. For example, due to a severe drought in 2021, Saskatchewan's crop production fell by 47 per cent and only bounced back to pre-drought levels in 2025. Droughts do not only impact crops. However, farming is an incredibly stressful job, and droughts increase this mental health burden for farmers *(Yusa, et al., 2015)*. Even before the 2021 drought, farmers in the province were noticing erratic weather that made their jobs harder. Terry Boehm, a grain farmer near Saskatoon, told Climate Atlas of Canada that the weather patterns he and his father were used to had disappeared. According to SaskAdapt, Saskatchewan's climate change impacts and adaptation information centre, droughts will likely increase in intensity and frequency due to climate change.

2 Though this guide and framework was designed for the Prairie provinces, it can be applied to a variety of other regional contexts.
3 Throughout the guide, those responsible for this work will be referred to as communicators, though that may not be their full-time role.

Wildfires are also becoming more frequent and severe in the region because of what Natural Resources Canada calls "fire weather" conditions, including hotter temperatures and decreased precipitation. In May 2025, hotter and drier conditions contributed to significant wildfires across Manitoba and Saskatchewan, leading to the evacuation of thousands of residents. Wildfire smoke also caused major disruptions and posed serious health risks, especially for vulnerable populations *(Tymstra and Flannigan, 2025)*.

In response, many municipalities, Indigenous communities, organizations and businesses are taking action to prepare for these changes. For example, many communities already practice water management through water conservation plans, minimum or no-till farming and irrigation *(Diaz and Warren, 2012)*. Flood management is also common in places as diverse as Winnipeg, Man., Flying Dust First Nation, Sask. and High River, Alta. In fire-prone areas, communities are taking steps to reduce risk through activities such as constructing firebreaks and practicing prescribed or cultural burns *(Bonada et al., 2025; Vera, 2026)*.

However, despite these important efforts, climate adaptation is not happening at the scale necessary to ensure communities are prepared for a changing climate. To build long-standing public support for adaptation action, several key factors matter when communicating about climate impacts and future risks.

Four ways communicating climate adaptation is different

Talking about climate adaptation differs from climate mitigation because it focuses on who is impacted by climate change, how and the aftershocks of those impacts, rather than how to reduce human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. Climate adaptation also recognizes that even if Canada reached net zero emissions today, the climate has already changed and will continue to change. Therefore, we need to adapt to protect the people and places we love.

The PREPARE Framework offers specific practices for addressing these differences in your work.

1. Climate adaptation is not well understood in the region

The three provinces already experience significant weather variation. People are used to hot summers, drought periods and extreme cold, making it challenging to pinpoint what constitutes a climate hazard. It can, therefore, be difficult to explain the connection between climate change and more recent extreme weather events to people in these provinces. It is also the region in Canada where people are less concerned about climate change than in other provinces, though those who are concerned still represent a majority *(Comeau, 2025)*.

In addition, people in the three provinces may not know what the term "climate adaptation" means, as it is a technical term used by adaptation professionals. Leger's 2024 public opinion report on the federal government's National Adaptation Strategy found that few people had heard of the term "climate change adaptation."

People in the region may also not know who is responsible for climate preparedness. In a 2024 survey by Leger and Equiterre, only nine per cent of respondents from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and four per cent of Albertans thought local governments were best positioned to adapt to climate change. However, municipalities often bear the financial burden of responding to climate risks because they are responsible for local infrastructure and land-use planning *(Karami and Walker 2025)*.

2. Local Indigenous communities are taking the lead—and bearing the brunt

Indigenous people in the region are at the forefront of climate change impacts. Though they make up ten per cent of the region's population, these communities are disproportionately impacted because of a lack of infrastructure, little access to resources and the legacy of colonialism and ongoing structural racism. As Indigenous Climate Hub explains, Indigenous communities often operate under severe financial constraints as a result of the *Indian Act*.[4]

Climate change has made it harder for Indigenous communities to engage in traditional ceremonial practices, gather traditional medicines and berries, hunt and fish—for acquiring knowledge rooted in observation, passing on intergenerational wisdom and maintaining connection to the land *(Datta et al., 2024)*. Yet this intimate connection to land positions Indigenous communities to lead climate change preparedness, drawing on deep, intergenerational knowledge of local ecosystems and sustainable land and water stewardship.

"Indigenous communities in Alberta emerged as leaders in climate change preparations. While most of these communities have a population of fewer than 10,000 people, 60 per cent stated that they are taking action to prepare for climate change."

—Parry, 2022 p. 6

3. People are not impacted by climate change equally

While climate change affects everyone, some are more affected than others. Groups that experience social inequities, like Indigenous peoples, newcomers, youth, people with disabilities, older people or racialized people, are often more vulnerable because they are more exposed to climate risks and have fewer resources to prepare, adapt and recover. This could be due to age, health, gender, income, type of work and housing, language barriers or other factors.

Climate change can be described as a cascade problem. When a community is devastated by a wildfire, for example, existing crises—in housing, mental health supports, chronic health issues—are made worse. However, communities that are more affected by climate change are not necessarily more vulnerable. They have their own strengths, knowledge and ability to adapt, which are essential to developing effective adaptation strategies.

4. Climate adaptation activates grief, fear and uncertainty

Adapting to climate change means a nation, town, neighbourhood or region has to change. This can be hard to accept, and the emotions around it can be overwhelming. This can lead to denial of the problem or a desire to just "go back to normal" *(Rutledge, 2015)*.

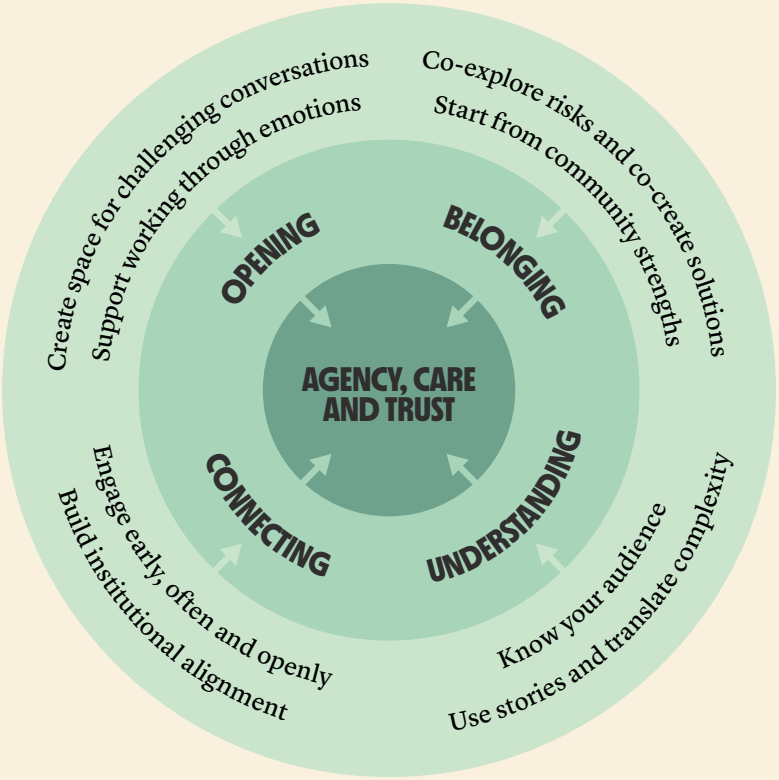
Fear and uncertainty, meanwhile, might be triggered when community members feel helpless to solve a problem or unable to imagine what the future will look like.

A sense of helplessness makes people feel even more overwhelmed. When people are not given actions to take to protect and prepare their friends, families and homes, they will disengage or oppose change. In these instances, it's no good trying to find the "right words" to communicate. Instead, communicators must tell new stories about people and places where change can be accepted, if not embraced *(Moser, 2021)*.

4 Under the *Indian Act*, First Nations have to receive permission from the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations to allow any commercial development on reserve land. In fact, reserve land is "held in trust for bands by the Crown" and the minister can decide what land use proposals to authorize or not (Hanson, 2009, para 2). This makes it extremely difficult for chiefs and councils to make land management decisions.

THE PREPARE FRAMEWORK

for readying communities for climate change by building trust, care and agency



The PREPARE framework helps communicators develop and implement climate preparedness actions that start with local knowledge and invite audiences into decision-making. It guides communicators towards building community agency, care and trust, three essential components to establishing preparedness as a public good and making people feel safe in approaching change. The framework has three rings.

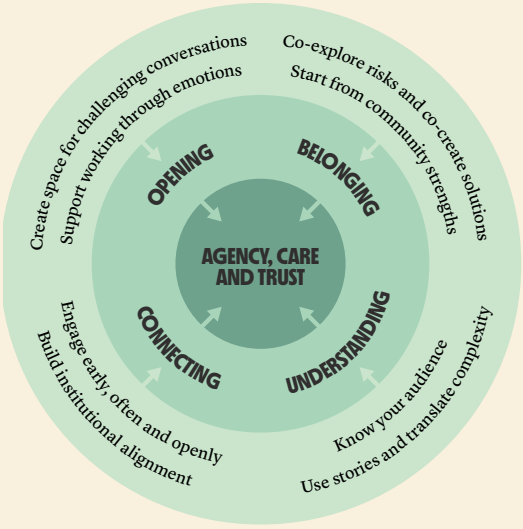
The centre ring

The centre ring represents what people need in order to engage meaningfully in preparedness processes. The **three key elements** include:

- **AGENCY:** People need to feel they have a say in the process and be empowered to make choices for themselves so they can contribute to preparing for climate impacts. The public as partners is key.
- **CARE:** People need to feel that you care about them, and that preparedness actions and policies aim to protect and support them and others.
- **TRUST:** People need to trust the process, the credibility and integrity of the communicators doing the work.

The middle ring

The middle ring represents the capacities at the heart of the PREPARE framework. Focusing on these capacities can help communicators build understanding about adaptation, include Indigenous and marginalized communities from the start and respond to a range of emotions. Together, these approaches can help build a sense of agency, care and trust.



- **UNDERSTANDING:** Communicators are creating space for listening and shared learning with the public.
- **CONNECTING:** Communicators are creating opportunities to convene and build relationships with the public.
- **OPENING:** Communicators are creating transparency and psychological safety with the public.
- **BELONGING:** Communicators are creating inclusion and empowerment with the public.

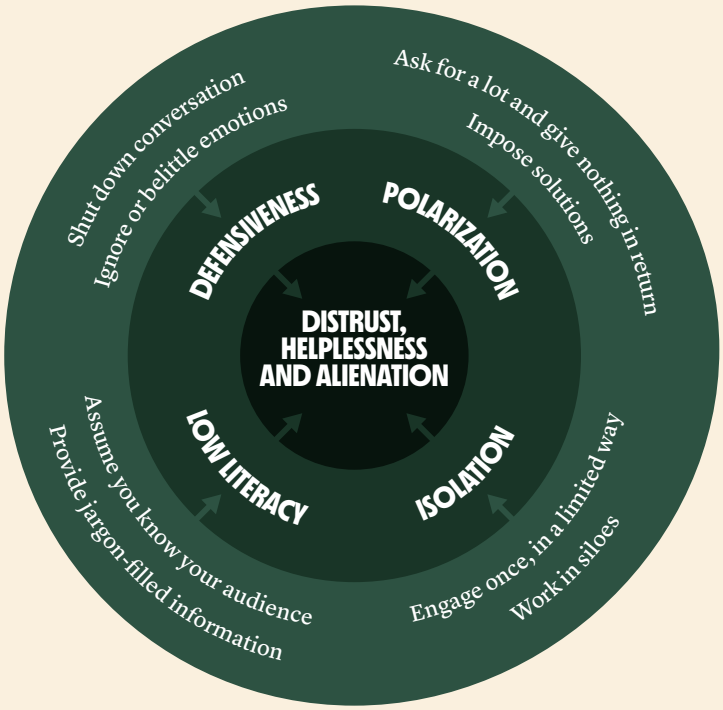
The Outside Ring

The third ring outlines the **practices** that can help build the above capacities:

- **UNDERSTANDING**
  - **Know your audience**
  - **Use stories and translate complexity**
- **CONNECTING**
  - **Engage early, often and openly**
  - **Build institutional alignment**
- **OPENING**
  - **Create space for challenging conversations**
  - **Support working through emotions**
- **BELONGING**
  - **Co-explore risks and co-create solutions**
  - **Start from community strengths**

The anti-framework

The anti-framework represents the barriers communicators face in achieving public support and involvement in preparedness goals, and what can happen if they fail to include the public as partners. The PREPARE framework is meant to help communicators respond to these common and often entrenched barriers.



The centre ring

- **DISTRUST:** People do not trust you and ignore your messaging/engagement attempts
- **HELPLESSNESS:** People feel there is nothing they can do about climate impacts. They feel powerless to act.
- **ALIENATION:** People feel you do not care about them. Climate preparedness actions do not reflect their needs or concerns.

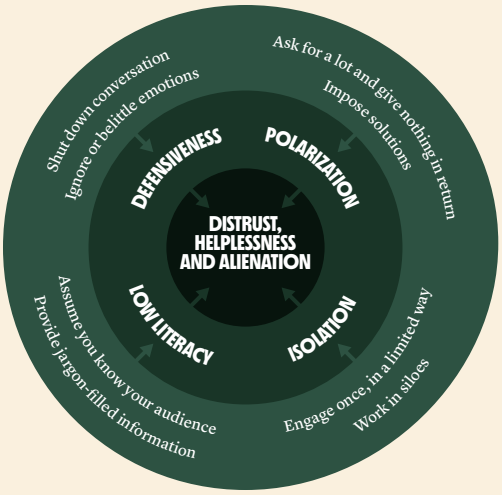
The middle ring

The middle ring of the anti-framework represents the barriers communicators face to building public support for climate preparedness action.

- **LOW LITERACY:** When people don't understand climate adaptation, they won't understand why it matters; when communicators don't build literacy, they won't get their message across effectively.
- **DEFENSIVENESS:** When people are defensive, they may feel protective of existing ways of doing things; when communicators feel defensive, they may not want the public involved in or aware of decision-making.
- **POLARIZATION:** When people feel polarized, they may instinctively oppose an idea because it is linked to something they strongly oppose. When communicators fixate on polarization, they may develop strategies and plans based on fear and a desire to avoid conflict.
- **ISOLATION:** When people feel isolated, they feel alone in their concern about climate change and are less inclined to act; when communicators feel isolated, it can lead to burnout.

The outside ring

- **LOW LITERACY**
  - **Assume you know your audience**
  - **Provide jargon-filled information**
- **ISOLATION**
  - **Engage once, in a limited way**
  - **Work in siloes**
- **POLARIZATION**
  - **Ask for a lot and give nothing in return**
  - **Impose solutions**
- **DEFENSIVENESS**
  - **Shut down conversations**
  - **Ignore or belittle emotions**



The outside ring contains examples of traps and bad habits in communications and engagement. They break trust and lead to challenges such as defensiveness, low literacy, isolation and polarization down the road.

In some places, these challenges are on the horizon. In others, they are already happening. By following the PREPARE Framework, you will be able to address these challenges.

A young woman participates in a Pow Wow at the Forks in Winnipeg as part of National Indigenous People's Day, June 21, 2016. (EMMA BIDER)

UNPACKING THE PRACTICES IN THE PREPARE FRAMEWORK

Each of the eight practices helps to strengthen the framework's capacities, which, in turn, build agency, care and trust.

Understanding

Know your audience

To engage and communicate effectively, take time to understand your audience, what they care about and their prior relationships with governments and organizations, especially around climate impacts or extreme weather preparedness. Identifying community goals, priorities and values is also key for tailoring language and engagement strategies to people's interests and needs. Skipping this step makes efforts less effective. More time may be wasted later trying to recover and rebuild trust. Adaptation programs and policies may be jeopardized altogether.

GETTING TO KNOW PIAPOT FIRST NATION'S COMMUNITY NEEDS

Darlynn Lavallee, an environmental engineer-in-training with Piapot First Nation, Sask., recognized the importance of understanding the community's needs through meaningful engagement. During the land use planning process, she organized an Elder-Youth event to learn what these groups wanted to see in their community. She also went door to door distributing flyers for planning events to encourage Nation members to participate. Rather than beginning with climate adaptation, the focus was on initiatives such as land use planning, energy and housing assessments, water management planning and long-term capital planning. That work ultimately positioned Piapot First Nation to undertake climate adaptation planning from a much stronger foundation.

"The function of Aboriginal values and customs is to maintain the relationships that hold creation together... [v]alues and customs are the participatory part that Aboriginal people play in the maintenance of creation."

—(Bear, 2000 p. 81).

Start from values

> **"I believe that the ethos of Saskatchewan is built on the prairie. We know how to handle drought and floods; we know how to handle cold weather. We've been tilling the soil from the beginning. You know, we've made it through the dirty '30s. That's kind of the ethos that's woven through."**
>
> *—Climate Ready Prairies project advisory committee member*

Values are a person's guiding principles, developed by interacting with our families, community and larger culture *(Corner, et al., 2014)*. Although values are generally stable, significant events, such as the birth of a child, can prompt people to revisit them. People can also hold contradictory values. For example, someone may want to protect their home from wildfire but may also be very frugal and value saving money. They may, therefore, see the cost of wildfire protection as putting their frugality in conflict with the value of security.

Re.Climate has consistently found that people are deeply concerned about protecting the people and places they love *(Re.Climate, 2024)*. Connecting climate preparedness to what people love makes the need to prepare more concrete *(Moser, 2013)*. It is not about preventing change, but about helping people maintain their connections to the places and communities they care about as they change.

There are a number of ways to identify people's values. Start by learning your community's history. Are there important local landmarks or natural spaces that would be unacceptable to lose or change? Interview long-time residents, attend community events, like pow-wows, seasonal fairs or neighbourhood festivals. These types of events can show what a community cares about and, therefore, how to frame your climate preparedness messaging.

EXAMPLES OF VALUES RELEVANT TO ADAPTATION WORK

- **Altruism:** Caring about others and helping them, even when there is nothing to gain personally.
- **Independence:** Valuing the freedom to make your own decisions and take care of yourself.
- **Justice:** Believing that people should be treated fairly and have their rights respected.
- **Equity:** Recognizing that people have different needs and may need different kinds of support to have a fair chance.
- **Frugality:** Using money and resources carefully and avoiding waste.
- **Living in balance with nature:** Valuing a way of life that respects nature and recognizes our connection to it.
- **Security:** Valuing safety, stability and protection from harm or uncertainty.
- **Tradition:** Valuing customs, practices and knowledge passed down through generations
- **Nature stewardship:** Caring for and protecting animals, forests, water and local food systems for future generations.
- **Dependability:** Being reliable and following through on your commitments.
- **Open-mindedness:** Being willing to consider new ideas, perspectives and ways of doing things.
- **Courage:** Being willing to face challenges, risks or difficult situations.

Use stories and translate complexity

Facts help build understanding and identify potential solutions, but motivation to act comes from people's values and emotions.

Stories and lived experience allow emotional expression, cultural grounding and connection to the land. Indigenous stories can provide insights for sustainable practices. Stories and plain language can make complex issues easier to understand by showing the problem, what people can do and the opportunities that action can create.

For example, it isn't always clear to people how "working with nature" helps communities adapt to a changing climate. Stories about planting trees to cool buildings and restoring floodplains to protect homes and buildings combine these two important ideas—meeting people's direct needs while benefiting nature.

Language and frames that meet people where they are

No publicly available research explores climate adaptation communications in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This significant gap makes communicating about adaptation in the region very challenging.

As a result, the guidance on language and communication frames (the mental models people use to interpret the world around them) in this section relies on national and international surveys, data from other provinces and interpretations of social sciences research on political and social culture in the provinces.

Communicators should test any message strategies proposed here prior to using them in their communications plans.

FRAME: PREPARATION AND PROTECTION, NOT ADAPTATION

National research suggests that preparedness and safety are important factors when people are considering supporting adaptation actions *(Leger, 2025)*. This resonates with research from B.C. and Ontario, which showed that respondents preferred "prepare" over "resilience" or "adapt," and that protecting communities, homes and essential services were considered the most compelling reasons to adapt to climate change (*EcoAnalytics, 2026*).

People in the region also want to protect future generations and the environment *(Marshall et al., 2018)*. Recent research found that 39 per cent of Albertans, 42 per cent of Saskatchewan residents and 46 per cent of Manitobans believe future generations will be harmed a lot by climate change *(Comeau, 2025)*.

These findings also correspond with recent research from the UK, showing that "protection" is a preferred term for discussing climate adaptation. Being specific—providing a clear vision of what adaptation will look like and how it will make the future better—led to significantly more support than presenting technical terms for adaptation or a basic explanation *(Climate Outreach, 2026)*.

> *Use the words "preparedness" and "protection" when talking to people about adaptation plans. If you must use adaptation, avoid using it without discussing preparedness. In interviews with Indigenous communities for this project, participants said the term "climate change adaptation" didn't resonate with them. People reported a preference for language grounded in lived experience, observation, balancing the needs of people and nature and land-based realities.*
>
> *Emphasize how preparedness actions will protect people and infrastructure. Provide details about how these actions will be paid for and how much future risks will be reduced. Be specific and local with your messaging; don't just present technical terms or brief explanations. Share a vision of how this adaptation action will make people's lives better and safer.*

FRAME: PROTECTING NATURE

Canadians consider protecting future generations, protecting agriculture and food production and conserving nature and biodiversity as the main reasons to adapt to climate change *(Leger, 2025)*. This is backed up by Re.Climate's own research, which shows protecting nature and animals are consistently top concerns for Canadians *(Re.Climate, 2024)* and by interviews with Indigenous adaptation experts who emphasized the importance of land stewardship as a motivator for action. In their 2024 poll of producers' perceptions of climate change and sustainability, Farmers for Climate Solutions found that 84 per cent of farmers considered protecting or enhancing biodiversity on their farm/ranch a top environmental priority *(Leger and Farmers for Climate Solutions, 2024)*.

Find opportunities to demonstrate how planning for climate impacts will protect nature and places people love. Tying this to cultural revitalization and self-determination can be effective motivation for Indigenous communities. Emphasize opportunities for nature-based solutions like tree planting, restoring traditional food systems through gardening or ecosystem restoration.

FRAME: CELEBRATE COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

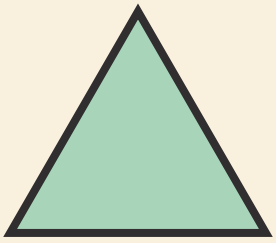
Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba share a history of mutual aid and collectivism, which can be powerful motivators for taking action on climate impacts *(Wesley and Wong, 2022; Saunders and Adams, 2025; Diamantopolis, 2012)*. Emphasize the importance of relationships and how adaptation actions can build a better future for small, rural communities struggling with depopulation and a lack of services *(Fletcher et al., 2020; Campbell-Gate et al., 2023)*. Celebrate the existing adaptiveness of agricultural producers and the volunteerism of women in their communities *(Warren and Diaz, 2012; Mantei, 2024)*. Focus on what communities already do, and recognize the high importance placed on taking care of each other. Ground messaging in existing stories in which people in the region will recognize themselves.

FRAME: INVESTING IN COMMUNITY PROTECTION

The cost savings of climate adaptation are increasingly competing with concerns about the cost of living. Canadians want to feel confident that investments will actually reduce risk, deliver tangible protection and can be completed on time *(EcoAnalytics, 2026)*. This suggests that people in the Prairies have similar expectations. In particular, people want to know the cost of adaptation measures, who will pay for it and how much it will reduce risk. People also want to see investment in public infrastructure, but they do need to understand the details of the costs and feel confident that their municipality can deliver on time and effective preparedness measures.

CHALLENGE

Climate change is making extreme weather—storms, floods, drought, extreme heat and wildfires—more frequent and severe.



OPPORTUNITY

The choices and investments we make today can make our communities safer, protect the services we rely on, and reduce costly damage to homes, roads and infrastructure.

CHOICE

We can take practical steps now to protect our homes, communities, health, infrastructure and nature—from building flood protections to making homes and buildings safer from wildfire and extreme heat.

INSTEAD OF...	TALK ABOUT...
Climate change	Extreme weather and specific, locally relevant impacts such as more frequent wildfires, floods, droughts and heatwaves
Adaptation/resilience	Preparedness
Vulnerability	Community strengths and independence
Reducing future costs	Keeping residents safe from flooding, extreme heat, wildfire smoke and water shortages now and in the future
Nature-based solutions	Taking care of the land and saving water
Global temperature trends	Local climate impacts
Addressing climate change impacts	Protecting our homes, communities, health, infrastructure and nature

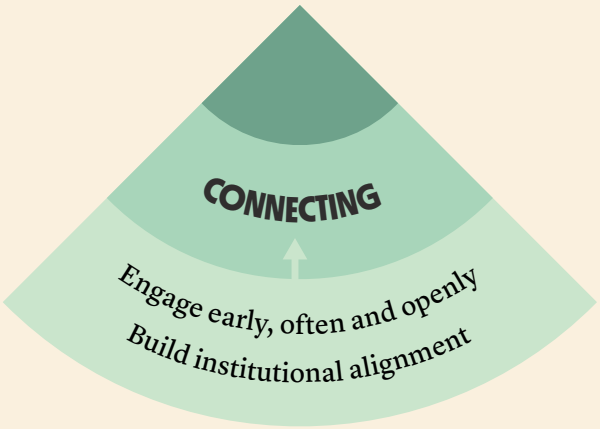
Note: Trust is fundamental to how people shape their attitudes and their willingness to listen to a message about climate adaptation. For example, the Alberta Narratives Project found that "[p]eople who were skeptical or dismissive of climate change often did so because of a lack of trust or respect for those they saw communicating climate change: especially the media, environmental campaigners and politicians" *(Marshall et al., 2018, p. 35)*.

Developing agency, care and trust requires more than language. Communicators must consider who is best placed to communicate certain adaptation concepts and how people want to be engaged in the work.

People take a break from sandbagging in flooded area in Swan River, Man., Thursday, July 2, 2026. (THE CANADIAN PRESS/MIKE DEAL - POOL)

Connecting

Engage early, often and openly



When communicators see their community as contributors to policies and programs rather than recipients, they can better address polarization, reduce the likelihood of misinformation spreading and work alongside residents to handle tough emotions. It also leads to better climate preparedness programs because they are designed by those who will benefit from them.

Working with people early, before a project or policy's design has been finalized, is crucial to building trust. According to Re.Climate's (2026) literature review "Getting to Yes," fairness and openness are two important factors in building trust. Fairness perceptions in public engagement meetings, for example, "are influenced by how public meetings are held and how public comments are incorporated into project-related decisions" (p. 8).

Extensive research shows that people want to influence projects happening near them or in places they care about *(Re. Climate 2026)*. This requires that communicators invite communities into decision-making (our modified version of Movement Strategy Centre's Spectrum of Community Engagement tool can help clarify the purpose of an engagement effort and its goal).

It can also be helpful to ask community members how they want to be involved in a decision-making process. This can be especially useful when working with consultants, who can then get a clear sense of when and how they will be expected to engage with the community members.

It is important to clarify how much capacity a community has to be involved in the process. For example, farmers might not be able to participate in discussions about drought management during harvest time. But that doesn't mean they don't want their views heard. Try to receive input openly and be willing to change a project plan based on community feedback. Otherwise, there is a risk that engagement will come off as tokenistic or performative.

HOW MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK ENGAGES WITH ITS PARTNERS

The Climate Safe, Green City project builds climate resiliency alongside neighbourhood associations in lower-income areas of Winnipeg. Actions include urban gardens, emergency preparedness workshops and creative urban cooling projects. Sorsha Moore-Peters works for Manitoba Eco-Network on this project. She doesn't tell the community associations what projects to do. Instead, she says, they "give us the puzzle pieces and we just figure out where they go." Sorsha spends lots of time in the communities so people can ask her questions about the projects or share their ideas. She attends farmers' markets and regularly meets with urban garden coordinators to discuss how the project is going and how Manitoba Eco-Network can better facilitate it.

Build institutional alignment

Preparing a community for climate impacts cannot be the job of a single person in an organization or a single department in a community. Identifying and supporting internal champions and, eventually, integrating preparedness into everyday processes are critical tactics. This matters more for communities because, to implement climate preparedness well, alignment across departments is essential.

Alignment does not have to happen only within an organization. Regional partnerships, such as those between Indigenous communities and municipalities or across watersheds, can help share consistent information about climate impacts and preparedness and avoid confusion or conflicting messages.

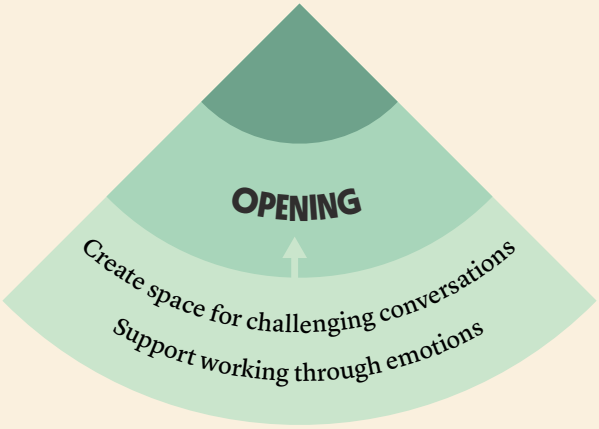
Climate impacts can affect many parts of a community, so it is important to build a shared understanding of the risks and how they may affect people. Practitioners and experts interviewed for this guide said that identifying internal champions who can make preparing for climate change "normal" in their work was critical to ensuring the longevity of related programs or policies.

"Adaptation is how we as a community respond to changes. What are those impacts going to be, and how does it impact our municipal services? How do we prepare for that? Because preparing now is a lot more cost-effective, and less harmful socially and environmentally, if we start now and develop those strategies."

—Selkirk Climate Change Adaptation Strategy team member

Opening

Create space for challenging conversations



Part of working on climate preparedness is addressing future impacts. That often means having tough conversations with groups regarding risks, options and trade-offs.

In some situations, using the term "climate change" can derail conversations *(Fletcher et al., 2020)*. For example, municipalities, depending on past actions or their history with communities, may not be trusted, leading to automatic skepticism and pushback toward a proposal related to preparing for climate impacts *(EcoAnalytics, 2026; Agrawal et al., 2022)*.

Ultimately, these are legitimate emotional responses, brought on by fear, anxiety and grief, and it is important that communicators not assume the causes of these emotions. Instead, enter conversations from a place of curiosity and empathy. American peacebuilding professor John Paul Lederach argues that addressing conflict means focusing on relationships and looking beyond the immediate issue to understand the history and context behind it *(Lederach, 2003; Re.Climate 2026)*.

Research also shows that using independent facilitators for hard conversations and avoiding town-hall-style meetings (which can encourage confrontation and conflict) can help communicators ensure conversations build trust and relationships *(Re.Climate 2026)*.

Creating safe spaces for conversation is a crucial step toward shifting social norms, which will be required to act on climate impacts.

Resources on creating safe spaces for hard conversations

- CEDI Stronger Together Toolkit
- Knowing The Do's and Don'ts of Climate Conversations
- Faithful Climate Conversations
- Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing
- Kitchen Table Dialogue Guide
- Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement
- Conflict Navigation: A Guide Towards Transformation

Support working through emotions

Emotions are often ignored in climate communication and engagement efforts because they can be difficult to deal with. Yet communicators must recognize that emotions drive both action and inaction. When a person has no control over a situation, their emotional response can intensify *(Lizarralde et al., 2025)*.

Preparing for climate impacts can be part of the grieving process. Communicators can lean on positive emotions, such as deep love of place, connection to the land, and its animals and medicines, and pride in community, that commit communities to helping the coming generations thrive.

You can also tap into these positive emotions to build support for action. People love where they live and actively care for it—from spring garbage clean-ups to working with groups like Ducks Unlimited on wetland conservation. Ironically, these positive emotions are why preparing for hard and terrifying events like fires or floods can be so painful and uncomfortable: something we love is being destroyed.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS

Dr. Sherilee Harper, a professor of public health at the University of Alberta, conducted a study on the long-term psychological impacts of the 2016 wildfires in Fort McMurray, Alberta. At the 2024 ClimateWest Forum, she shared findings showing many Grade 7 to 12 students continued to meet the criteria for PTSD, anxiety, depression or substance abuse years after the wildfire. One and a half years after the wildfire, 46 per cent of students surveyed met those criteria. Three and a half years later, that figure was 51 per cent. While these findings do not establish that the wildfire was the sole cause, or indicate how levels compared to pre-fire baselines, they demonstrate that psychosocial impacts can remain significant well into recovery and should be considered in preparedness, communication and engagement efforts.

Emotions and uncertainty

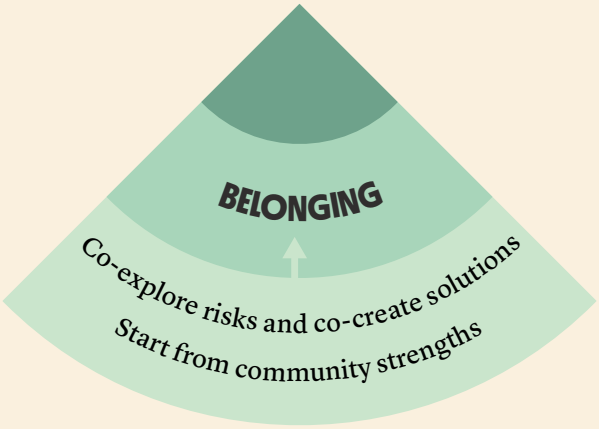
A 2023 review of people's decision-making approaches on climate change adaptation found that people may be more averse to uncertainty than to risk *(Moure et al., 2023)*.

Building tolerance for uncertainty is part of building trust. People are more willing to explore action options when an organization they trust presents them and when trusted messengers share the information. Options also need to be grounded in local climate data and the needs and concerns of community members.

Youth Water Council members taking a winter lake health survey with the Alberta Lake Management Society on March 11, 2025 (JILLIAN CALVERT)

Belonging

Co-explore risks and co-create solutions



Climate risks are locally specific. This is why it is critical to draw on local knowledge to propose solutions that meet a community's needs. People know about where they live and what is or is not possible in that context. In a 2020 literature review on what makes climate adaptation effective, researchers found that effective adaptation activities often included collaborative decision-making, resource sharing and actions that enhance wellbeing and relationships between institutions *(Owen, 2020)*.

Communicators have a unique opportunity to bring people together to learn from one another. Knowledge gained from experiences outside the region may still be relatable to people living in the Prairies. For example, newcomers may already have profound experience with climate impacts, and this knowledge can be valuable when identifying solutions in the Prairies.

Two-Eyed Seeing

Two-Eyed Seeing was developed by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, who defined it as "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing" *(Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 146)*. In this way, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Western knowledge can complement each other.

Indigenous knowledge is highly localized and deeply historical. It is often thought of as place-based, accumulated and transmitted across generations within specific cultural contexts *(Jessen et al., 2022)*. The Indigenous approach to climate change is holistic. Many communities do not separate the land's well-being from their own and easily connect climate change impacts to other challenges *(Cameron et al., 2021)*. A two-eyed seeing approach to climate preparedness intentionally, respectfully and equally brings together ways of knowing to find common ground. The Climate Atlas of Canada's Indigenous Knowledges section is a great resource that provides examples of a two-eyed seeing approach.

"I feel this work is very crucial for First Nations, especially because, as a First Nations person, I can't just move, right? I can't just move because I don't like the government; I'm tied to this land. My ancestors have been here forever."

—Cody Sharphead, Director of Land Use and Environmental Planning, Treaty 8

Members of Treaty Landsharing Network in Saskatchewan share a meal at Box H Farm on June 4, 2025. (VALERIE ZINK)

PRAIRIE CLIMATE CENTRE: CRIPPING CLIMATE ADAPTATION: DISABILITY JUSTICE AND CLIMATE CHANGE REPORT

In 2023, the Prairie Climate Centre, in collaboration with the University of Winnipeg, held an event to address the gap in research and practice on disability justice and climate change. Participants identified that disabled people are already creative and innovative in living in a world not built for them, meaning they are well-primed to think creatively about responding to climate impacts. They also noted that people who assist disabled people have experience and knowledge critical for successful adaptation planning and must be part of adaptation conversations.

Start from community strengths

Every community has strengths it can harness to prepare for climate impacts. These can be emphasized in communications plans or better understood through engagement.

Campbell-Gale *(2023)* notes that in rural Saskatchewan communities, there is a lot of pride in how close-knit small towns are, the volunteerism they often share and their shared history of self-sufficiency. She also saw how people's individual skills were put to use during a 2013 flood event. Knowing how to use large equipment, experience with sandbagging and the ins and outs of accessing provincial financial support—all of these skills proved essential and offer great storytelling opportunities about how a community can come together to manage present and future climate impacts.

"One huge lesson here is that having community conversations about climate means having conversations about *everything*. Climate touches every aspect of our lives and health. Walking down that path with my neighbours, and going at a pace that works for everyone, is worth it."

—Idris F., Climate Connector with Neighbouring for Climate (emphasis added)

Communities are already well-aware of their vulnerabilities. For example, for rural communities, depopulation, poor infrastructure or dependence on a single industry can all make it harder to adapt *(Campbell-Gale, et al., 2023; Friberg, 2022)*. People do not need to be reminded of all that stands against them. Instead, communicators will find more success telling the story of a community's long-term vision and the steps a nation, municipality or organization is taking to get there.

Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, Man. builds strength from the ground up

As part of the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation's youth work program, the lands department encouraged young people to engage in adaptation actions. While the youth planted trees or collected seeds, organizers took these opportunities to share land-based learnings and the Dakota language, so the youth could see how their culture was connected to the work they were doing.

To build confidence and a sense of power in the youth, they were invited to important lands department meetings and paid for their contributions, emphasizing that their knowledge and opinions were as valued as those of lands department staff. The youth program also invited youth to share their accomplishments with friends and family. This got the youth more excited about the initiatives. They became community ambassadors, sharing their stories at the Canadian Western Agriculture conference, on radio shows and on podcasts. One youth, Meadow, is now leading a Youth Land Warriors Advisory Circle, which brings together youth from different Nations to share knowledge.

"We planted the first orchard, and on my way to school, I could see apples growing. We can eat that. I did that."

—Meadow Leaming, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation

The work program wasn't explicitly about preparing for climate impacts. But the lands department took advantage of a community strength—good relationships with partners Skinner Seeds and Nature Conservancy Canada—and ran with it to expand the program's opportunities. The department also recognizes the Dakota language and culture as strengths and taught them to the youth during planting and seed collecting. Meadow now wants the community to be self-sufficient and sovereign, while still sharing knowledge to uplift others.

CONCLUSION: FACE THE STORM

People across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are already doing remarkable work to communicate with and engage their communities on climate adaptation. But more work remains. Climate change is not going away.

Using the PREPARE framework as a guide, communicators doing adaptation work can create the conditions for communities to prepare themselves for more frequent and intense extreme weather. The stories, lessons and practices outlined in the guide provide a solid foundation from which communicators can start developing their own communications and engagement strategies. Tools and case studies available on Re.Climate's website will help make these strategies concrete.

Now is a great time to start talking about climate change and how communities can adapt to it. Though it isn't possible to outrun the storm, as Sandra Lamouche said in the introduction, it is possible to get through it, maybe even learn from it. Facing the storm today means taking a clear-eyed look at what the future holds and making plans together. But no one has to prepare alone. We can face the storm together.

Do you have more questions or feedback about the Climate Ready Prairies guide? Reach out to Re.Climate or ClimateWest, and we can answer your questions or connect you to a community we profiled in the guide.

A large herd of plains bison in a field near Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site October 6, 2021 . (ARTUR WIDAK/NURPHOTO VIA AP)

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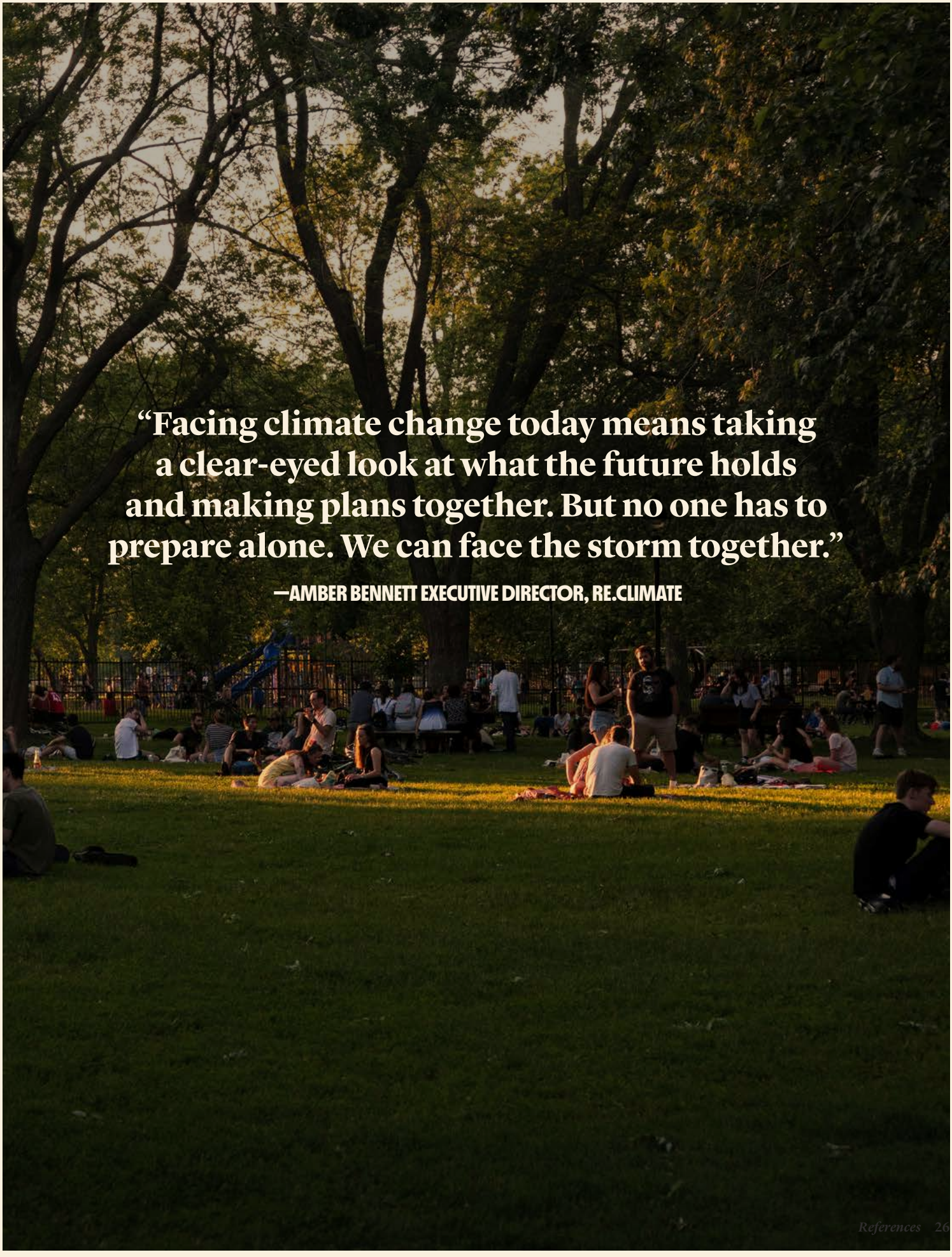


PHIL DESFORGES/UNSPLASH

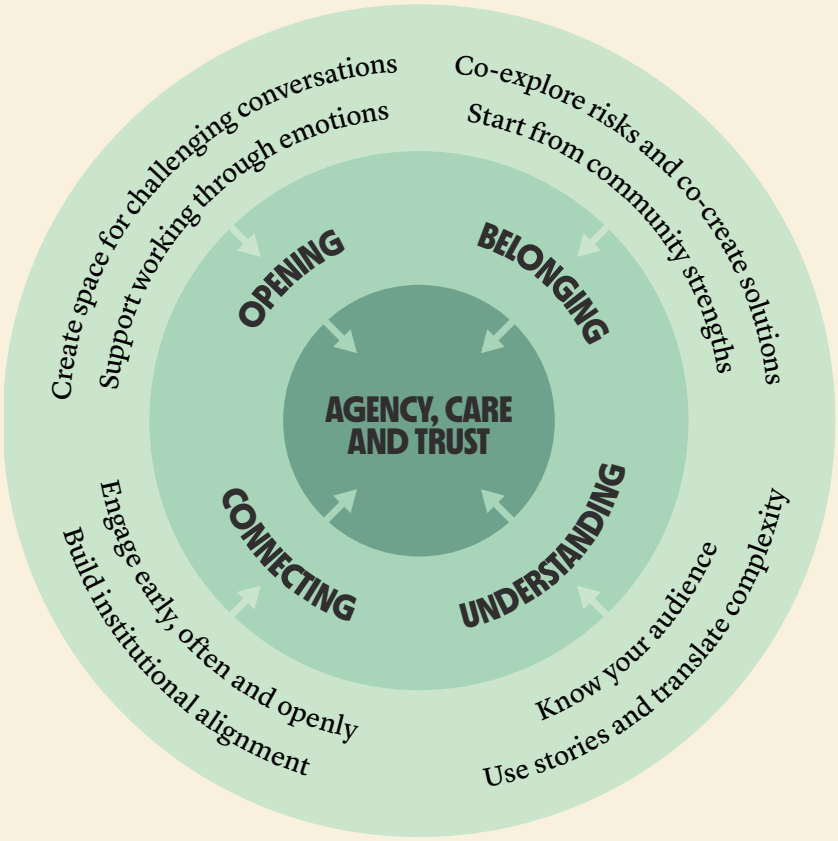
"Facing climate change today means taking a clear-eyed look at what the future holds and making plans together. But no one has to prepare alone. We can face the storm together."

—AMBER BENNETT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RE.CLIMATE

APPENDIX A

Tools for communicating and engaging on climate adaptation in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba

These tools help communicators and organizations put the PREPARE Framework into practice. The checklists offer practical ways to apply the framework and strengthen agency, care and trust through climate adaptation communication and engagement.



Understanding

Practice #1

Know your audience

Tool

Five Canadas audience segmentation

People respond to information, policies, risks and trade-offs in different but often consistent ways according to their values.

Audience segmentation helps communicators understand these differences so they can:

- Understand what motivates different groups;
- Anticipate public reactions, information needs, and susceptibility to misinformation;
- Avoid one-size-fits all communication;
- Design more effective engagement strategies;
- Reduce resistance by connecting to people's existing values and priorities;
- Build coalitions of support.

EcoAnalytics and Re.Climate have developed a values-based segmentation that groups Canadians according to shared worldviews, social values and political attitudes—not just demographics like age or income.

The Five Canadas segmentation was created using the following criteria*:

- Climate beliefs
- Emotions around climate change
- Identity
- Political and social values

*Criteria explanations can be found in an earlier EcoAnalytics segmentation report. Note that in this report, Populist conservatives are called "Fossil fuel conservatives," a term no longer used in The Five Canadas segmentation.

Understanding where your audience fits within the Five Canadas can be a helpful starting point for choosing communications or engagement strategies, what messaging to avoid or language to emphasize.

For example, a recent study by EcoAnalytics on adaptation messaging in B.C. and Ontario found that in B.C., Centrist liberals, Disengaged middle and Populist conservatives segments preferred that cities focus on "preparing for extreme weather impacts" instead of "preparing for climate change."

Actions for Communicators

- ☐ Set up interviews with community leaders or key interest holders to determine how best to talk about an adaptation issue, their levels of concern and priorities; alternatively, run focus groups with those people deemed most important for the project's success.
- ☐ Look for existing engagement reports and review them to understand what engagement has already taken place, and what has and hasn't worked.
- ☐ Use online surveys to find out what people know and understand about climate adaptation. When possible, go door-to-door to talk with people about what matters to them and what they want from adaptation programs and policies.
- ☐ Listen and learn in the community. Attend community gatherings, meetings and events to better understand people's experiences, priorities and connections to where they live, as well as how they think about climate adaptation.
- ☐ For Indigenous communities or organizations consider setting up Elder Circles to hear perspectives on an adaptation project at the outset.
- ☐ Ask yourself the following questions to get to know the people you want to talk to:
  - Has the group been engaged on adaptation or climate change before? How did it go?
  - What are the concerns of this group? What are their priorities? What are the demographics of this group?
  - Have you ever engaged with this particular group before? Do you have any shared lived experiences? What's their history with your organization?

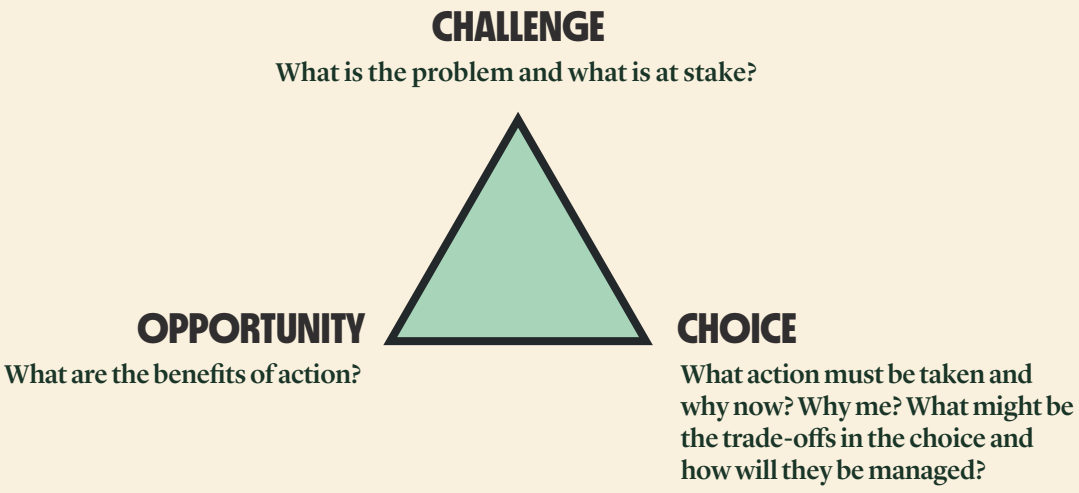
Practice #2

Use stories and translate complexity

Tool

Narrative triangle

The narrative triangle is a tool adapted from Marshall Ganz's guide "Organizing: People, Power and Change." The triangle is a distillation of a compelling narrative arc. There is a **challenge** that must be addressed, a **choice** about how to address it, and an **opportunity** that this choice provides. The main characters in the story are your audience, which is why it is so important to do the work beforehand to understand their concerns, experiences, values and histories.



Example #1 Motivating your audience and working with nature: Ducks Unlimited Canada

CHALLENGE: Many farms in the Prairies have low-lying or flood-prone areas where crops do not grow well. These areas can be difficult to manage because of poor crop growth, weeds and unpredictable yields.

CHOICE: Ducks Unlimited Canada worked with Olds College and Farm Credit Canada to test a different approach. They planted hay and pasture grasses in these wet areas so they could be used to feed livestock.

OPPORTUNITY: Instead of trying to grow crops in areas where they often struggle, farmers can use these wet areas to grow hay or pasture. The study found that these areas produced good yields, and the hay remained valuable even when harvested later in the season. This means farmers can get more value from parts of their fields that are often unproductive, while reducing the challenges of farming wet land.

Example #2 The story that Otipemisiwak Métis Government tells about its Seed Mail out Program

CHALLENGE: It has become harder and more expensive to access healthy, culturally appropriate food. Climate change is also affecting traditional food sources and making it harder to rely on them.

CHOICE: Métis Nation members can apply for a Seed Mail Out kit. Each kit includes seeds, gardening tools, materials and learning resources to help people grow their own food at home.

OPPORTUNITY: Growing food at home gives people another way to access fresh, healthy food when food becomes harder to find or more expensive to buy. It can also help households and communities become more food secure and better prepared for changes in food availability, affordability and quality.

The kits also include resources to support pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, moths and hummingbirds, which help plants produce fruits and seeds. Supporting pollinators can help create healthier gardens and ecosystems.

The three elements of the narrative triangle have to be in balance. Too often in climate communication, the focus is on the challenge. Presenting a large-scale problem without solutions can increase fatalism in an audience.

Actions for Communicators

- ☐ Be specific and concrete when you describe an adaptation action, plan or project.
- ☐ Tell stories about adaptation actions that have happened in similar contexts and the benefits they provided.
- ☐ Use the Challenge-Choice-Opportunity triangle when constructing your narratives.

Connecting

Practice #1

Engage early, often and openly

Tool

Trusted messengers

People often trust members of their own community more than people from outside it because they understand the local impacts and challenges. A trusted messenger is someone who shares experiences with their audience, who is invested in understanding risks and finding relevant solutions. These are people who already have expertise, trust and care about their community. Communicators are simply providing trusted messengers with platforms to get their story to audiences.

How to find trusted messengers

- Friends and family remain the biggest go-to source of information for people in the three provinces.
- Seek out respected locals with strong, long-standing relationships in the community, they may have suggestions for trusted messengers for a variety of contexts.
- Fire chiefs and health professionals are two other examples of trusted messengers.
- Importantly, it is best for trusted messengers to be non-partisan.

Finding trusted messengers will depend on your audience and organization. For example, an organization that focuses on the agricultural sector might create opportunities for peer-to-peer conversations, since producers often prefer hearing from other producers about new or sustainable practices. Consider looking for trusted messengers in unexpected places. For example, a local, well-respected plumber may be the perfect person to share information about how to protect homes from floods.

Tool

The spectrum of community engagement

This tool has been adapted from Movement Strategy Centre.

Adjustments were made based on conversations with SevGen around how non-Indigenous organizations should engage with Indigenous Nations. The spectrum can help involve people in decision-making. It can also help clarify why you are engaging people and what you hope to achieve.

The example below outlines what engagement choices an urban municipality might make when developing an extreme heat response plan with the help of the spectrum. The spectrum goes from "inform" all the way to "negotiate," and each option on the spectrum requires different engagement strategies that lead to different levels of community participation.

INFORM

- The municipality **added a page on their website** that informs people about its extreme heat response plan, the risks of extreme heat and the location of cooling centres.
- There are **infographics** that show the signs of heat stress and how to respond.
- **Goal:** Give people plain-language information about the municipality's plan, the dangers of extreme heat and what people can do about it.

CONSULT

- The municipality asked residents to respond to a **survey** about the extreme heat response plan and get feedback on it.
- There were **two open-houses** where the public could learn about the plan, ask questions and voice concerns.
- **Goal:** Get feedback on how to adjust the plan based on community awareness and concern.

INVOLVE

- The municipality decided to do some **Community Mapping**, a participatory process where residents map the location of cooling centres in relation to known hot places and green spaces to determine if there are service gaps. They detailed the location of water fountains, splash pads and libraries where residents can visit to escape the heat. These maps were then incorporated into the extreme heat response plan.
- **Goal:** Ensure community buy-in for the plan by having them involved in the design process.

COLLABORATE

- The town set up **MOUs** with two community-based organizations; an organization that supports unhoused people and a Friendship Centre. Both organizations' leadership and experience were critical to how the town developed its Extreme Heat Response Plan.
- **Goal:** Create an Extreme Heat Response Plan that is shaped by those who may be most impacted by heat or most harmed by a plan that does not understand or properly address their needs.

DEFER TO

- The municipality invited community members, alongside emergency service providers and healthcare professionals, to help steer the development of the plan. They set up **resident committees** that represented diverse perspectives from the community. Members met regularly to provide ongoing input and advice for the plan.
- **Goal:** An Extreme Heat Response Plan developed entirely for and by those who need it most.

NEGOTIATE WITH

- The municipality is near a First Nation reserve. The mayor, CAO and councillors recognized that, as Treaty people, they share responsibility for proactively addressing extreme heat risks and for working collaboratively on potential responses. They **negotiated an agreement** with the Nation to share back-up power resources in the event of a demand-induced power outage. They agreed to learn from Indigenous knowledge about the land and seasons, using these insights to help spot heat risks early and shape local solutions.
- **Goal:** Develop an extreme heat response plan based on Two-Eyed Seeing principles—using the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and Western science—and participate in the process of reconciliation.

Actions for communicators

- ☐ By engaging people early, communicators can get a sense of how well people understand an issue and how ready they are to act on it. For those not ready to get into climate adaptation conversations, **host interactive educational events**. The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) organized six events, including farm visits, photo tours and a cooking class as part of their Uniting Rural Producers and Urban Consumers project. Dedicated to bridging divides between urban communities and the producers of their food, the project helped urban people understand food production and the challenges producers face like drought, wildfire smoke or floods due to climate change.
- ☐ **Showcase the project process, milestones and outcomes.** Hold open houses to share progress on a project, set up milestone events and hold appreciation events for volunteers. Set up report-backs on how community involvement has impacted the project, through "what we heard" documents or presentations. Explain how feedback is being incorporated.
- ☐ Operate at the speed of trust. Relationship building may take time. It is not productive to try and rush this step.
- ☐ Ask yourself the following questions when preparing to engage early, often and openly:
  - What is this group's capacity to engage? Do you need to start from addressing concrete needs before talking about adaptation? Are there gaps in literacy? Time constraints?
  - Have you shared opportunities to engage broadly, across multiple communications channels? Have you explicitly encouraged participation from groups whose perspectives may be underrepresented, such as permanent residents, renters, urban Indigenous communities or youth?"
  - What are some potential barriers to participation such as transportation, food, childminding or honoraria? How can you address these barriers? For example, provide activities for children so that parents can participate in the conversation.

Practice#2

Build Institutional Alignment

Tool

Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Municipal Asset Management Program

The Municipal Asset Management Program (MAMP; 2017-2024) from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) was designed specifically to help municipalities make good decisions on how to maintain, replace and repair municipal infrastructure. Though now closed, the MAMP still has a suite of guides, tools and examples on its website to help municipalities determine where they are in their asset management journey. Asset management is an important part of climate adaptation planning, because it helps determine not only what infrastructure needs to be prioritized, but invites decision-makers to think through how they can incorporate adaptation actions into regular asset management. The MAMP also emphasizes that asset management is a process that requires an internal team of key people with whom you can build a shared vision and key objectives.

"Adaptation is how we as a community respond to changes. What are those impacts going to be, and how does it impact our municipal services? How do we prepare for that? Because preparing now is a lot more cost effective, and less harmful socially and environmentally if we start now and develop those strategies."

—Selkirk Climate Change Adaptation Strategy team member

The City of Selkirk's Climate Adaptation Plan, an FCM-funded program, is a great model for building internal alignment that creates buy-in for adaptation action through asset management. The plan provides useful detail about the city's collaboration with the Prairie Climate Centre (PCC). PCC developed a series of workshops for city staff and filmed them to show what they learned and how they worked through ways to include climate adaptation in the city's asset management strategy.

The Climate Adaptation Plan explains each step of the planning process and how the workshops were structured. It identifies the project team members and their roles, which can help other municipalities think about who should be involved in their own planning. It also shows how PCC's local climate projections—estimates of how the climate is expected to change in the future—could be connected to team members' own work and experiences.

Actions for Communicators

- ☐ Conduct internal stakeholder mapping. Who's already doing work related to adaptation? Whose work will be most affected by climate risks?
- ☐ Set up peer learning sessions to talk through how work on adaptation is related to core government priorities.
- ☐ Especially for municipalities, it can be helpful to share success stories from other places with relatable contexts that developed adaptation plans and implemented them. Knowing something has been done elsewhere and what ingredients led to success can help reduce uncertainty. The Institute of Catastrophic Loss Reduction's Cities Adapt books are a great resource.

Opening

Practice #1

Create space for challenging conversations

Tool

Citizens' assemblies

A citizens' assembly invites members of the public or a particular community to participate in decision making or planning processes related to a specific issue. Participation is voluntary and participants are often chosen via lottery or random selection from within a group of self-selected, interested people. This ensures a representative group of community members.

In early 2024, Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS) brought together 36 producers to create The Prairie Farmers and Ranchers Forum to develop recommendations for a strong, sustainable, and prosperous Prairie agriculture sector. FCS designed a selection process that matched the demographics and population distribution of the agriculture sector in the Prairies. They chose to use a Citizens' Assembly model so that the forum could be farmer and rancher led and collaborative. The Forum members met over three weekends in January, February and March. During these events, farmers and ranchers heard from experts and identified their priorities for the recommendations. There was also time reserved for the forum members to socialize and get to know one another. All recommendations were adopted through consensus using an approach called Gradients of Agreement. As a result of the hard work and commitment of the Forum members, the group was able to write up recommendations that were supported by all members.

Actions for communicators

- ☐ Collaborate with trusted groups in your community who can speak to people authentically.
- ☐ Consider having independent facilitators for community meetings if resources allow for it.
- ☐ Avoid meeting styles where there's a small group of experts presenting followed by an audience question period. This can encourage conflict or confrontation, where participants use questions as an opportunity to set the agenda. Instead, consider **open houses, one-on-one meetings or facilitated dialogues**.
- ☐ Try ground truthing exercises—**tour sites where proposed adaptation actions would take place** and explain how it would work, what they can be expected and how it might affect their property or important places.
- ☐ Consider including reflection time for your team after a hard conversation. Questions to guide the reflection can include:
  - How do you feel about this process today?
  - How has this feeling changed from the last time we spoke, if it has?
  - What would you wish to see as this engagement progresses?
  - Are you willing or able to propose tools for managing traumas/ challenges that surface through this process?

Practice #2

Support working through emotions

Tool

Serious games

The Adaptation Game (TAG) is an Australian storytelling game that helps people explore how they and their community might respond to climate change over the next 10 years. It puts a serious topic into a game setting, similar to a tabletop role-playing game. A facilitator walks a group of four through a story, where they simulate how they and their community might adapt to floods, wildfires or other extreme weather. There is now a TAG game specific to Calgary. It was designed at Bow Valley College and invites participants to play through the impacts that might occur, and how the college could respond to climate impacts over the next 10 years, though the game can be tailored for groups beyond the college. The game offers a safe environment to think through how to practically respond to climate change instead of feeling overwhelmed by big emotions.

Other examples of serious games or facilitated workshops that help people work through tough climate emotions:

- ➤ Resilience by Design: an online game from Royal Roads University based on the Bow Valley College project.
- ➤ We're Ready! Community Disaster Preparedness workshops
- ➤ ICLEI Canada has a suite of games to educate and prepare communities for changing climates.

Actions for communicators

- ☐ **Lean on fairness.** Make sure policies are people-centred. Ensure that information is available and accessible and that people can tell that the benefits and burdens of a plan are evenly distributed.
- ☐ Listen more than you talk. Many times, when people behave in conflictual or angry ways, it is because they **feel out of control** and that no one is listening to them.
- ☐ **Take care of yourself.** If you are the only person in your Nation, organization or municipality doing this work, it is critical that you prioritize your emotional well-being so that you can do this work well. This might mean getting enough rest, leaning on cultural values, spending time with friends and family and doing fun things outside of your work.

Belonging

Practice #1

Co-explore risks and co-create solutions

Tool

Best practices in using visuals and visualizations

Visuals and visualizations can really bring climate risks into focus for your audience, helping them to actually visualize/understand the impacts in their community. This list was adapted from Climate Visuals' *7 core principles for climate change communication*.

- ➤ **Show real people**
  - Discussion groups, undertaken by Climate Visuals, favoured 'authentic' images over staged photographs, which they saw as gimmicky or even manipulative.
- ➤ **Show adaptation actions at the local level**
  - Show fixing roads to new standards after a flood or a landscaper planting drought-tolerant plants to reduce water usage. Avoid large landscape images that imply action, but don't show something specific.
- ➤ **Tell new stories**
  - Less familiar (and more thought-provoking) images can help tell a new story about climate adaptation. Bring people into the images so the impacts aren't so abstract. Show community members serving food to firefighters or a farmer evacuating their animals. Work with artists to tell stories in creative or impactful ways.
- ➤ **Show emotionally powerful impacts locally (connected to action)**
  - Images of climate impacts can encourage people to take action, but they can also feel overwhelming. Pairing these images with clear, practical actions people can take to prepare can help. However, people will respond to images in different ways, so it is important to understand your audience and consider how they might react before using them.
  - When images of localized climate impacts show an individual person or group of people with identifiable emotions, they are likely to be most powerful.
  - Show impacts that are already forcing communities to take adaptation and preparedness actions in the region—long-term drought, wildfire smoke or wildfires, for example.

- **When visualizing impacts, put them in a community context**
  - When Up North on Climate wanted to visualize climate impacts on Piikani Nation, they placed them into visuals of the community, and included Blackfoot titles for each impact: fire, flooding, drought and wind. Another option is to get people to sketch out their communities and identify where they're seeing impacts.
  - Consider also using renderings of local streetscapes or natural spaces that show what they'll look like after the adaptation action is completed.
- **Consider showing climate data on human time scales**
  - Rather than only presenting graphs showing how climate impacts may worsen over a 50-year time scale, consider framing data in ways that connect to people's lived experience. The Canadian Centre for Climate Services has used calendars showing changes in the number of snowy days over time and has used descriptions of how younger generations may experience climate change over their lifetimes.

Note: It is very challenging to find the kinds of photos recommended above of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in online image databases like Canadian Press, Flickr or Unsplash. Consider hiring a local photographer (if you have the budget), getting to know your local photography club, find amateur photographers in your area via social media or connect with communications colleagues to get your own images. When taking your own photos, always make sure to get consent from the community or person being photographed.

Actions for communicators

- ☐ Let your audience lead on solutions. For example, Living Lab Central Prairies knows farmers, ranchers and Indigenous communities have deep knowledge of their land. **It's producers themselves who experiment with different solutions on their land**, and Living Lab coordinates with scientists to study outcomes of these experiments and shares results to their network.
- ☐ Ask your community partners about **how they want to see actions implemented** and what they see as important indicators of success for your adaptation solutions.
- ☐ Explore community risk mapping—identify on a map, or create your own, what infrastructure or natural spaces are most at risk from climate impacts. Check out this creative Story Map from Otipemisiwak Métis Government that shares citizen experiences of climate change alongside graphs of climate projections.
- ☐ Consider **arts-based events** that can get youth involved in imagining solutions. Check out Creating Climate Resilience's workshops for inspiration.
- ☐ Use compelling visuals of your community and its natural spaces **to ground conversation in real places and the experiences of local people**.

Practice #2

Start from community strengths

Tool

Tamarack Institute's Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a model to help communities identify their unique strengths in order to create opportunities. Not only does it invite community members to think about their own skills, it helps them consider how these skills can be combined in order to meet a given goal.

Communicators can act as connectors—identifying individuals' assets and then matching them with groups of similar interests to build on and reinforce community activities that move towards an adaptation goal.

Communicators can also *identify* connectors. These are people who are trusted, who see things from a positive perspective and are already well-connected in their community. A communicator's job, in this case, is to support connectors, however they need.

There are communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba already using the ABCD model. One example is the City of Edmonton's Neighbouring for Climate program. The city provides climate adaptation action cards to communities, but does not prescribe what they should or can't do. Rather, the communities themselves identify what strengths they have, what actions they can take and what they might need to do in order to take other actions in the future. They are also in contact with the city's program coordinator to suggest changes or seek support. You can read more about the Neighbouring for Climate program in our case study or check out their website.

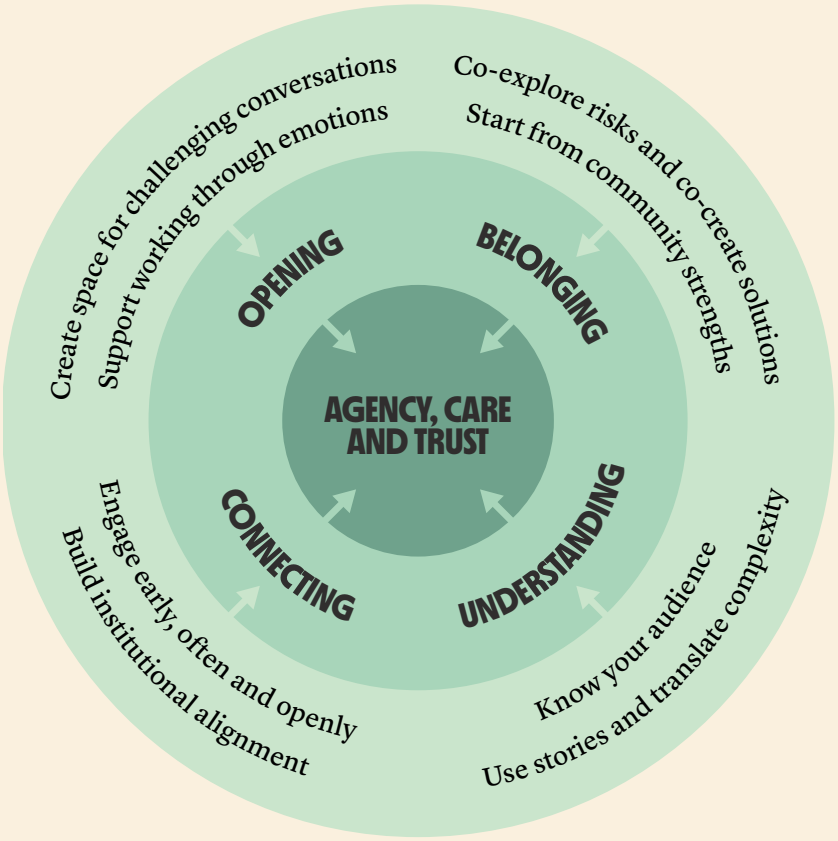
Actions for communicators

- ☐ Create an asset inventory with the community. Gather this information about, for example, who has back generators or experience in emergency situations from individuals, organizations, businesses and service providers. Alternatively, invite residents to create their own asset inventories at a neighbourhood level.
- ☐ Think about where asset data will be located. Consider if there is existing digital infrastructure that can hold it or if something new needs to be created or developed.
- ☐ Organize social events that invite community members to develop relationships and hear about what volunteering and projects are already happening in the area.
- ☐ Try to provide or seek funding for communications materials (newsletters, blogs, digital asset maps) that can help maintain awareness of community actions and assets.

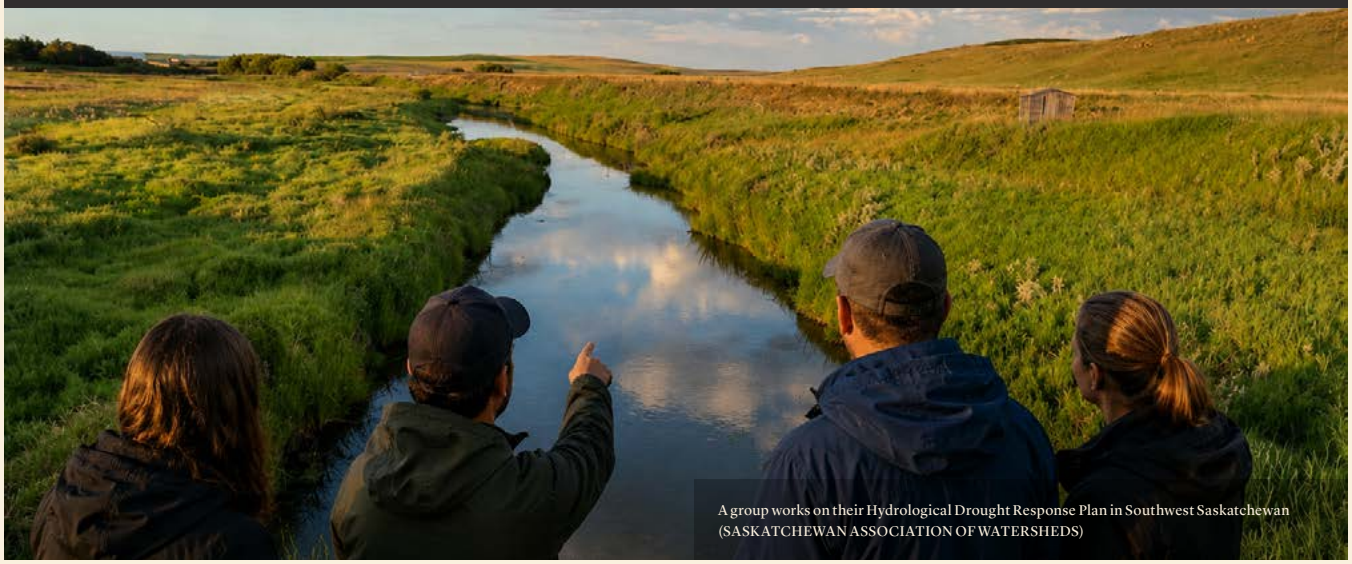
APPENDIX B

Case studies

Four case studies from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba that show how the communication and engagement practices outlined in the Climate Ready Prairies Guide and PREPARE Framework can be put into practice.



CASE STUDY 1



A group works on their Hydrological Drought Response Plan in Southwest Saskatchewan (SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION OF WATERSHEDS)

Who

Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW)

What

Make the hydrological drought response plan for Herbert, Sask., accessible, engaging and relatable

How

Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW) knows its audiences. When developing a hydrological drought response plan for Herbert, Sask., for example, the organization was focused on making the plan accessible, engaging and relatable for the residents. A SAW team met with community stakeholders in person twice to build trust. They shared SAW's previous work, brought in a respected hydrologist and paired their drought data with easy-to-understand graphics. During the meetings, they focused more on changing climate patterns and extreme events than on climate change. The eventual plan's recommendations were based on local experiences and knowledge about drought, and suggested a range of individual actions, like checking that toilets aren't running after flushing, as well as municipal actions, like implementing odd-even watering days. There is no scientific jargon in the plan and it is short: just five pages long.

> **"This work should be about knowledge sharing. It shouldn't just be about us saying 'this is how it is.'"**
>
> *—Samantha Kerr, Director of Water Resources SAW*

PREPARE Framework practices

Understanding:

- Know your audience
- Use stories and translate complexity

Belonging:

- Co-explore risks and co-create solutions

CASE STUDY 2

Alberta Wildfire crews return from fighting wildfires near Fort McMurray, Alta., Thursday, May16, 2024. (JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Who

Department of Emergency Management at the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations

What

Make monthly meetings with emergency managers more engaging

How

Michael Martineau, the lead for the department of emergency management at the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, wanted to host monthly meetings with emergency managers from each Nation to talk about how to coordinate their efforts, especially after the 2023 wildfire season, when twelve of the sixteen Nations were dealing with fires and five concurrent evacuations. Fires are now a year-round concern. Initially, however, these meetings weren't met with much interest. But when Michael asked "what is an emergency in the Nations?" he started to see more engagement. The group started to share information and strategies which have built momentum. They focus on one issue at a time and talk about it until everyone is on the same page. These meetings with the Nations are always in person, unless people need to join virtually. Whenever a new person joins the group, Michael takes a step back to onboard them and will go out to Nations to present to their departments. Building these networks has led to conducting mutual aid instead of calling the province to help when wildfires come. This has been a game changer, as they now share training and have great working relationships. They see fires as a cycle now and work to prepare for future ones. Another coordinated effort has been Fire Prevention Week activities in the Nations, where firetrucks go to the schools to show the kids how to be fire smart. They are also working with Fire Smart Canada to get assessors trained in every Nation so they can sit with families and talk about hazards in their houses.

> **"Naming the firefighters 'modern warriors' has resonated among many, and the network in Treaty 6 is using that language to reflect their work in adaptation."**
>
> *—Michael Martineau, emergency management lead, Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations*

PREPARE Framework practices

Understanding:

- Know your audience
- Use stories and translate complexity

Connecting:

- Build institutional alignment

Belonging:

- Start from community strengths

CASE STUDY 3

A participant at the Climate Ready Prairies Regional Summit looks at City of Edmonton's Neighbouring for Climate action cards on May 12, 2026. (PJ JORDAN/FRIENDLY VISUAL)

Who

City of Edmonton's Neighbouring for Climate program

What

Give Edmontonians the tools to make their neighbourhoods climate ready

How

Edmonton's Neighbouring for Climate program began in 2024, with the goal of inspiring communities to take adaptation actions with their neighbours. The city used a combination of paid marketing and grassroots promotion in rec centres and libraries to encourage people to sign up to become climate connectors, order the Neighbouring for Climate Toolkit—a set of cards with various mitigation or adaptation actions communities take—and start adaptation actions in their neighbourhood. The Neighbouring for Climate toolkit was designed to meet the needs and capacities of a wide range of audiences. Action cards include the following information:

- **Level:** to indicate if an action is a good starting place or if it requires advanced effort
- **Tags:** like "family-friendly" or "low-cost" to help narrow down your choices
- **Seasons:** shows the best time of year to prepare or complete a seasonal action
- **Next up:** shows you which action cards can be done together to maximize results

After two years, the program now has 120 climate connectors. Ashlyn Renner, the project coordinator, checks in with them regularly and shares their stories on the City's various platforms. Ashlynn and her team host virtual workshops, respond to the needs of Climate Connectors (e.g. make new action cards for renters) and are hoping to host more in-person events in 2026.

Climate Connectors have taken all kinds of actions in their neighbourhoods. Some have installed rain gardens and rain barrels on their own properties. Others have hosted in-person workshops with their neighbours to talk about their vision for the neighbourhood. One Climate Connector, Idris, led a community workshop in the Keegano Housing Co-op in south Edmonton. The group discussed emergency personal water filters, an updated rain barrel program and improved access to climate retrofit programs. People were eager to shape the co-op's future. To foster this work, they are now hosting these conversations every month.

PREPARE Framework practices

Connecting

- Engage early, often and openly

Belonging

- Co-explore risks and co-create solutions
- Start from community strengths

CASE STUDY 4

Members of the Prairie Farmers and Ranchers Forum gather to develop recommendations on sustainability and land stewardship in agriculture. (FARMERS FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS)

Who

Farmers for Climate Solutions

What

Build consensus among producers in the Prairies on how to build a prosperous agriculture sector

How

In early 2024, Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS) brought together 36 producers to create The Prairie Farmers and Ranchers Forum, to develop recommendations for a strong, sustainable, and prosperous Prairie agriculture sector. Farmers and ranchers were chosen by randomly selecting individuals from the group of people who applied to join the forum, and FCS used a citizens' assembly model for the engagement. Forum members were selected to represent the diversity of producers on the Prairies. This explicitly included different opinions on climate change, which ranged from denial and skepticism to a sense of urgency and anxiety about climate impacts. Forum members met three times in person over two days, followed by virtual sessions. They also connected with each other in between meetings.

At the first meeting, the producers had some serious disagreements about the role and existence of climate change. As a result, forum members decided to shift focus from climate change to sustainability and good land stewardship. The forum was then able to move forward, acknowledging disagreements, but finding common ground through honest, challenging conversation.

"Early in the process, there were tensions, doubts, and apprehension. Some members feared that there were predetermined outcomes or hidden agendas in the process. But trust formed through respect and open dialogue. Forum members were selected for their differences, but they soon learned that they had much in common. We had a lot of fun, too."

—Mary Smilie, Chair of the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum

PREPARE Framework practices

Understanding

- Know your audience

Connecting

- Engage early, often and openly

Opening

- Create space for challenging conversations

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