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COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE

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THE PREPARE FRAMEWORK

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

TOOLS

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

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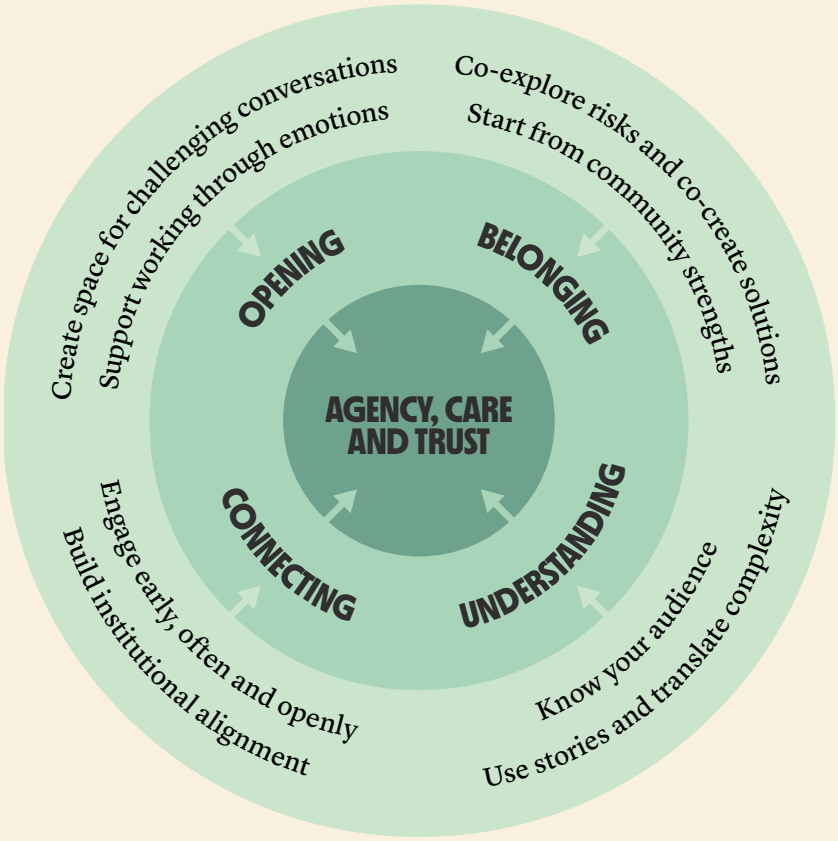
ClimateWest

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?

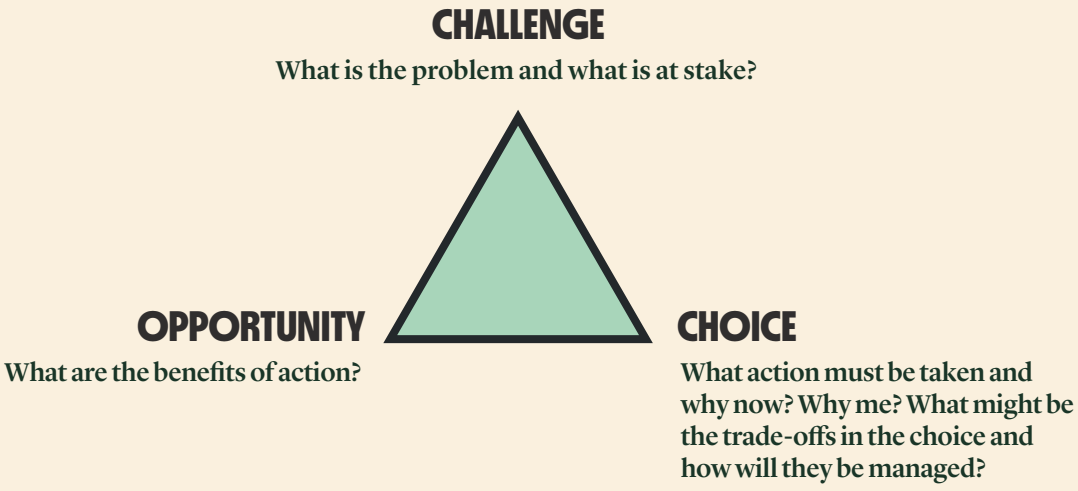
Practice #2

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.

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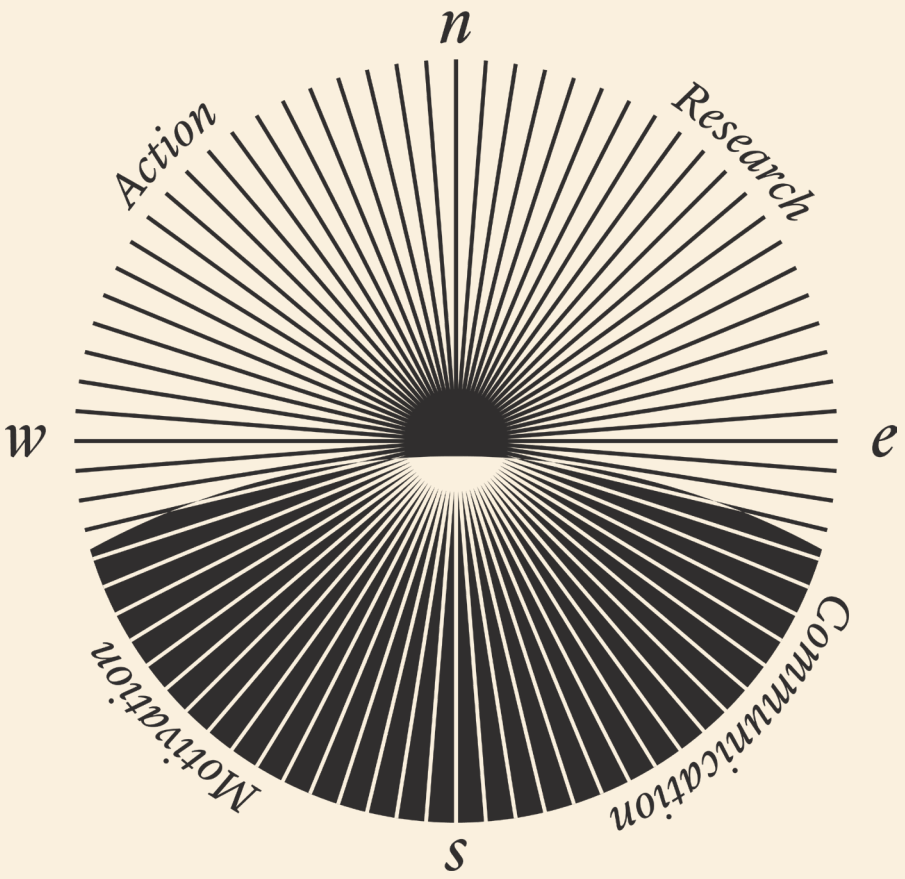

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