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COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE

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info@reclimate.ca

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

THE CLIMATE READY PRAIRIES GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING AND ENGAGING ON CLIMATE ADAPTATION

A Tip Sheet for Communicators

Re.Climate

ClimateWest

This tip sheet provides guidance for communicators to communicate and engage people in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba on climate adaptation. Guidance is based on peer-reviewed literature, Re.Climate's research, EcoAnalytics research and interviews with adaptation experts and communicators in the Prairies.

Storm clouds build over the crowds at the Calgary Stampede in Calgary, Sunday, July 5, 2026. (JEFF MCINTOSH—THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Four ways communicating about adaptation is different

Talking about climate adaptation differs from climate mitigation because it focuses on who is impacted by climate change, how they are impacted and the aftershocks of those impacts, rather than how to reduce human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

1. **Climate adaptation is not well understood in the region**
   - People are used to hot summers, drought periods and extreme cold, making it challenging to pinpoint what is the usual varied weather, and what is abnormal and worsened by climate change.

2. **Local Indigenous communities are taking the lead—and bearing the brunt**
   - Climate change has made it harder for Indigenous communities to engage in traditional land-based practices. However, 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 *(Datta et al., 2024)*.

3. **People are not impacted by climate change equally**
   - 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.

4. **Climate adaptation can trigger 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)*.

A sea-doo navigates dry patches in the South Saskatchewan river in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan June 2025 (EMMA BIDER)

Can I talk about climate change?

Yes. Climate change is important to talk about—but audience matters.

Most Prairie audiences are concerned about climate change so communicators can feel comfortable talking about both climate change and extreme weather *(Comeau, 2025)*. In fact, recent research finds little difference between the two terms in building support among concerned audiences for community planning and action *(EcoAnalytics, 2024)*.

For more disengaged or oppositional audiences, extreme weather can be a more effective starting point. It can lower resistance and open the door to conversations about personal experience, practical preparedness, protection and community safety *(Mehlenbacher, et al., 2026)*.

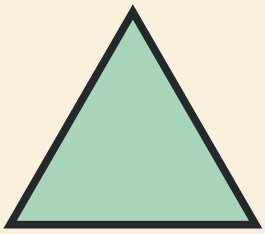
For broad or politically mixed audiences, Re.Climate recommends leading with the tangible impacts people are experiencing—floods, fires, drought and extreme heat—and focusing on what we can do to prepare and protect people and communities.

But don't leave climate change out of the conversation altogether. People don't necessarily make the connection between extreme weather and climate change on their own. Communicators need to make that connection so that people understand why extreme weather will get worse and why we need to prepare now. Start with the extreme weather people are experiencing, connect it to our changing climate, and focus on practical solutions *(Mehlenbacher, et al., 2026; Ettinger, et al., 2023; Re.Climate, 2024)*.

Consider using a message triangle to make sure you remember to communicate three necessary points to deliver a complete narrative.

CHALLENGE

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



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.

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.

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

Narrative frames

Frames are mental models that people use to interpret the world around them. Communicators can present information using frames that highlight what their audiences care most about.

Preparation and protection, instead of adaptation

- Preparedness and safety are important factors when people are considering supporting adaptation actions *(Leger, 2025)*.
- People in Ontario and B.C. consider protecting communities, homes and essential services the most compelling reasons to adapt to climate change, important signals for communicators in the Prairies (*EcoAnalytics, 2026*).
- Protecting future generations is an emerging theme in the Prairies. Thirty-nine 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)*.

> *Use the words "preparedness" and "protection" when talking to people about adaptation plans. Indigenous advisors said the term "climate change adaptation" didn't resonate with them. They preferred language that emphasized lived experience, observation and balance between people and nature.*

People want to protect nature

- Protecting nature and animals are consistently top concerns for Canadians *(Re.Climate, 2024)*.
- Indigenous adaptation experts we spoke to in the Prairies emphasized that they see land stewardship actions as a good opening for talking about climate adaptation.
- Eighty-four per cent of farmers considered protecting or enhancing biodiversity on their farm/ranch a top environmental priority *(Leger and Farmers for Climate Solutions, 2024)*.

Celebrate community strengths

- The region has a history of mutual aid and collectivism. This can be a powerful frame for action to limit the impacts of climate change, especially when channelled through local, trusted champions of climate adaptation *(Wesley and Wong, 2022; Saunders and Adams, 2025; Diamantopolis, 2012)*.
- **Be specific.** Show how preparing for climate change can also help small, rural communities become stronger and more resilient—especially communities facing population decline and a lack of services. *(Fletcher et al., 2020; Campbell-Gate et al., 2023)*.
- **Celebrate what people are already doing.** Recognize how farmers are already adapting to change, and highlight the important role women volunteers play in their communities. *(Warren and Diaz, 2012; Mantei, 2024)*.

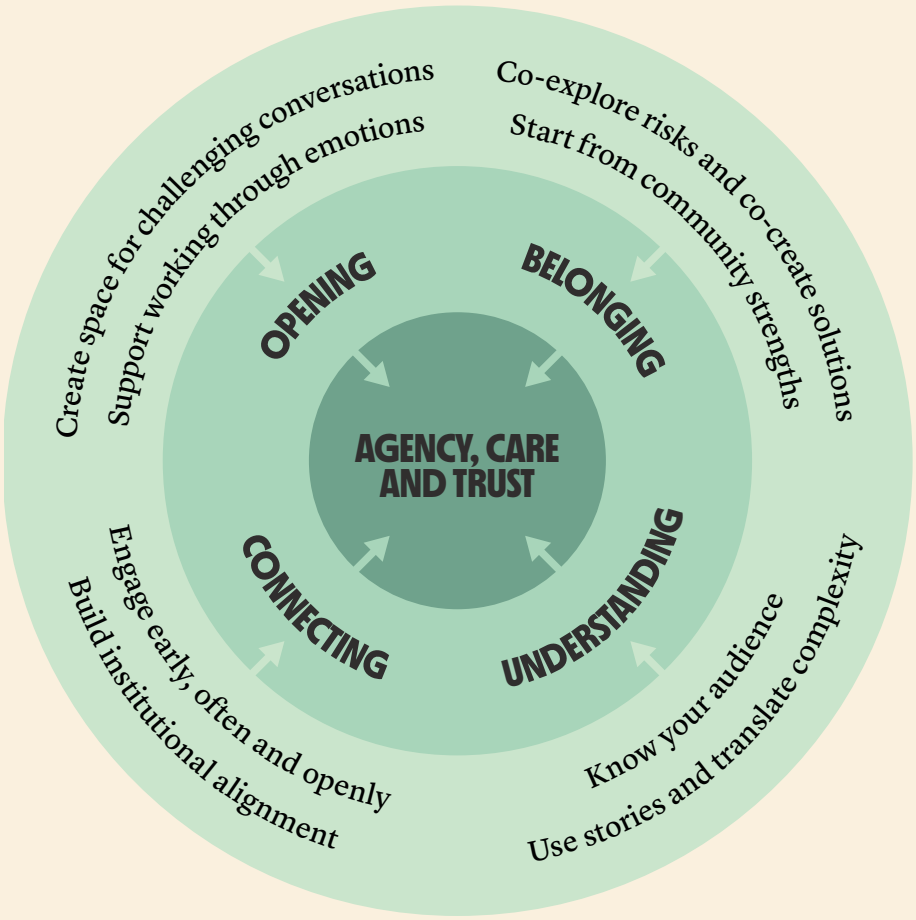
Investing in community protection vs. future cost savings

- 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.
- Be prepared to answer practical questions: How much will an adaptation measure cost? Who will pay for it? How much will it reduce risk? And what will people get for that investment?
- Research by EcoAnalytics (2026) suggests that people want to see investment in public infrastructure like stormwater systems and cooling centres, instead of investing in individual homes and buildings.

The PREPARE Framework: Building trust, care and agency for climate-ready communities

The PREPARE Framework helps communicators move concern into action. It starts with what communities know and value, and brings people into decisions that affect them. By building trust, care and a sense of agency, PREPARE helps make climate preparedness a shared community priority—and gives people greater confidence to make the choices and changes needed to protect their homes and communities from more frequent and severe weather.

For more information, see the full *Climate Ready Prairies* guide.



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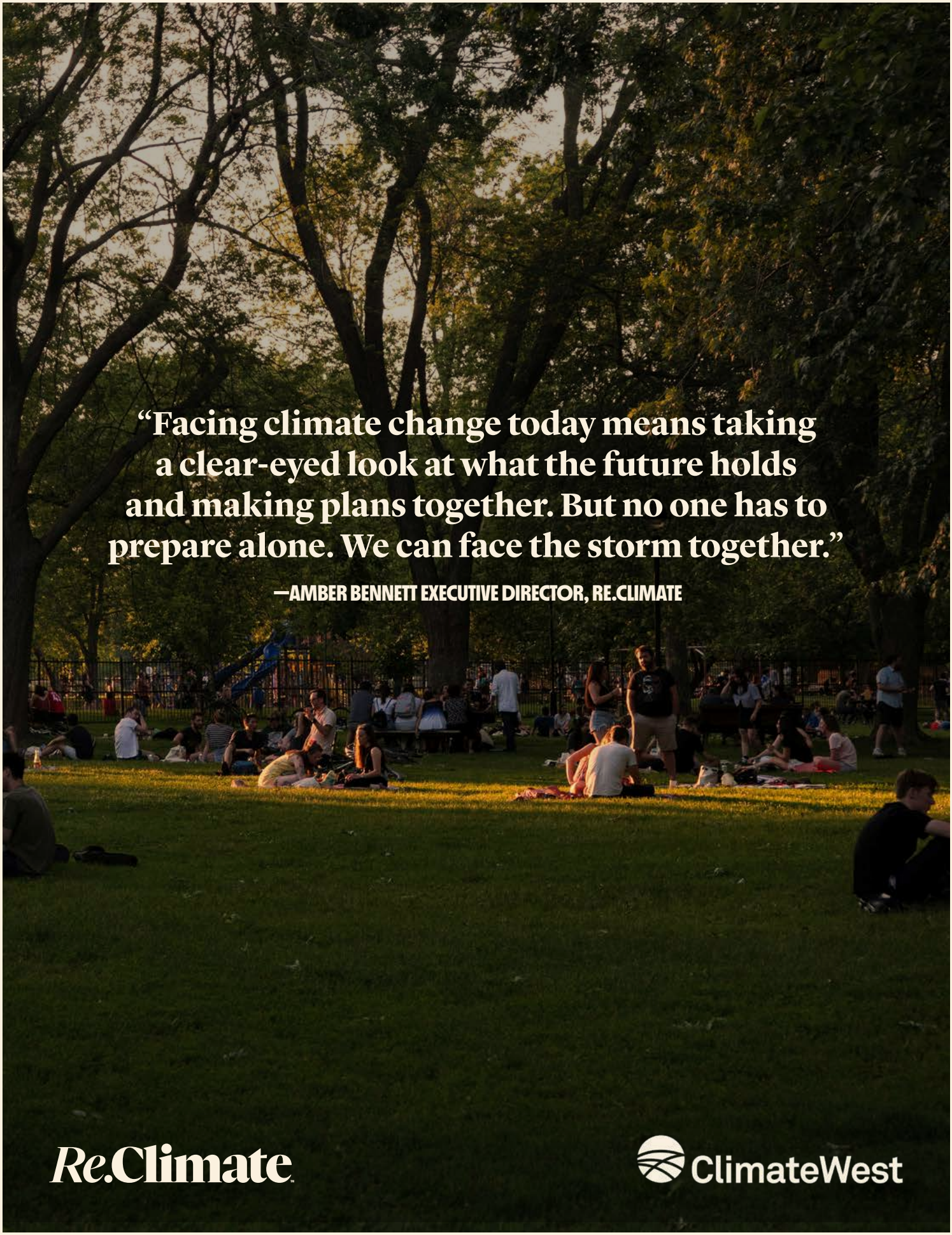

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