

First steps for engaging communities on climate change

A toolkit for local authorities



What is this toolkit for?

Creative engagement

Building relationships

To flourish in our changing climate, all places in Scotland will need to adapt.

However, to promote climate justice and an equitable transition, solutions should centre the priorities of frontline communities who feel the impacts of climate change first and worst. Working closely with communities is crucial to ensuring action provides direct benefits to residents and aligns with public sector policies such as the Scottish National Adaptation Plan.

This toolkit, co-created with local authorities, provides first steps on how to creatively engage with communities on climate change and sustainability topics, integrating learning from projects such as Creative Climate Futures.

Creative engagement approaches can:

Help rethink problems

Provide new perspectives

Elevate different voices

Be more enjoyable for participants



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venture 

1. Defining What's the aim and what resources do you have?

Developing a community engagement plan is recommended as a first step, even for short engagement periods.

Questions to consider when developing your plan:

- What issue(s) do I want to engage people with and how does it impact them? Has similar engagement been done before - if so, what happened and what can I learn from it?
- Am I the right person or team to engage? Are there any local organisations who can help?
- What is the timeframe for the engagement period? Is this flexible or fixed?
- What capacity do I have? What can be achieved with this?
- How does this engagement directly benefit communities? Why would people engage with you?
- What will you do with the engagement output(s)? What can you realistically change?

2. Deciding What engagement type(s) will you use?

Communication

Purpose: informing specific groups

One-way flow: local authorities → communities

Method: notices, newsletters, emails, websites, videos

Consultation

Purpose: answering specific questions

Two-way flow: local authorities ⇌ communities

*but limited local influence beyond consultation

Method: Surveys, focus groups, forums, one off events

Participation/partnerships

Purpose: building relationships

Two-way flow: local authorities ⇌ communities

*and between communities

Method: Workshop series, community-led plans, power sharing

- Short-term
- Less resource
- Simpler
- Shallow insights
- Less likely to establish trust

- Long-term
- More resource
- Complex
- Deeper insights
- More likely to establish trust

3. Doing Principles for better climate change engagement

Prioritise learning and training

Improve your climate expertise and engagement skills with dedicated capacity building. See section 5 to explore options.

Begin engagement early

This ensures communities can contribute from the outset. Digital and non-digital formats can increase reach. Include contact information if possible.

Listen and respond to community needs

If things don't work or you have low attendance, find out why and try something different. Community leaders and creatives can help at this stage, or try a method from section 4.

Be honest

Explain how input will be used and how people can stay informed. If you can't answer questions, say why and give an indication of when you can answer. Follow up with people after to maintain transparency and integrity.

Stakeholder mapping of key groups

Use a climate justice approach to identify affected groups and who to prioritise – for climate adaptation, this may be people most exposed to climate risks.

Make engagement welcoming and enjoyable

Use trusted local hosts to cultivate connections and employ creatives to design things. No budget? See section 4 for creativity tips.

Reduce barriers to participation

For example: cost, lack of time, low relevance /understanding. Providing meals, hot drinks and/or event-based childcare could increase attendance.

Use plain English and accessible language

Develop communal definitions to avoid confusion and a glossary for written documents. Best practice is to translate materials into the languages spoken in the communities you want to engage with.

4. Designing Embedding creativity into engagement events

Keep it simple

Use white paper and felt tips to start. Doodling and brainstorming throughout the session can capture a breadth of ideas and priorities.

Accessible design

Think about the function of seating/tables to facilitate different types of engagement. Limit written instructions and encourage drawing if people don't have shared languages.

Maps and photos

Giant maps or photos of local places with post it notes for people to write on is a quick way to get opinions about local issues

Set the scene

Use props or photos to inspire and an ice-breaker ready for people as they arrive.

Touchable materials

They help guide discussions to key issues. For example, using natural materials to talk about growth and how this relates to growing and changing communities over time.

Recording conversations

Be open about information you are capturing. White boards or paper around the room allows facilitators to write down quotes so people can see and edit their own words.

Example Priority actions for 1 - 2 team members leading engagement in part-time roles

Shorter term engagement

If you have three months or less, focus on quickly engaging the most affected people and get the basics right



Preparation stage

- Plan how many days/hours a week you can spend on engagement
- Develop a priority community engagement plan
- Quick stakeholder mapping to identify most affected people e.g. using the [Climate Ready Clyde Climate Vulnerability Map](#)
- Quick scoping exercise to find out any previous engagement and learnings
- Embed engagement within existing community events to save resource
- Develop communications for affected communities and distribute messaging quickly - asking local organisations to share can save time



Active engagement stage

- Run and oversee the engagement - attend all events if you are the only lead
- Adjust schedule if needed and where possible within time constraints
- Clearly communicate next steps to participants, and ideally more widely to affected people who didn't participate
- Share contact details to answer questions where capacity allows

Longer term engagement

If you have more than three months, focus on sustained engagement with the most affected people and build local relationships



Preparation stage

- Plan how many days/hours a week you (and others) can spend on engagement
- Outreach to community leaders to understand who needs to be involved to build trust
- In-depth stakeholder mapping and analysis to identify the most affected people
- Spend time researching previous engagement, learnings and other frameworks
- Focus on creating dedicated climate events that community partners can help lead as well as attending existing community events



Active engagement stage

- Run the engagement with help and take turns to attend events to free up time
- Gather extensive feedback and adjust schedule as needed
- Clearly communicate next steps to participants and more widely in the communities, outlining opportunities for others to be involved
- Evaluate progress against your engagement plan and consider the next phase(s)
- Share contact details to invite questions, or offer time for deeper conversations

Things to consider if you have more capacity and/or budget

- Partnerships with Climate Action Hubs and Community Advisory Boards to build deeper relationships
- Enable community leaders to become a bridge between local authorities and communities
- Increase understanding of how climate risks could increase future vulnerability of other groups
- Work with other teams to reduce siloed working and multiple engagement with the same groups
- Involve creative practitioners at every stage of your project, including governance, processes and planning

5. Developing Other resources to help you

Courses and further training on climate resilience

[Adaptation Capability Framework](#)

[Public Sector Climate Adaptation Network](#)

[Becoming Climate Resilient Course](#)

[Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment](#)

[Using Arts and Culture for a Climate-Ready Future](#)

[Carbon Literacy](#)

Tools to enable more participatory and creative engagement processes

[How to do Participatory Mapping](#)

[Community Climate Change Adaptation Routemap](#)

[Stakeholder and Power Mapping Tool](#)

[Place Standard Tool with a Climate Lens](#)

[Climate Ready Places Resource](#)

[Climate Action Towns Toolkit](#)

[Creative Climate Futures "How To" Guide for Organisations](#)

[The Promotor Model](#)

Authors:

Alex Cameron-Smith (Verture)
Louise Comrie (Glasgow City Council)
Charlotte Wallace (Glasgow City Council)
Kyle Kline (North Lanarkshire Council)
Rebecca Fraser (Creative Climate Futures Embedded Artist)

Designer: Annie Etherington

Get in touch:

info@verture.org.uk
verture.org.uk

Verture Edinburgh Climate Change Institute,
High School Yards, Infirmary Street, Edinburgh
EH1 1LZ, Scotland, UK,

Scottish Charity No SC022375 Company
No SC149513

Registered Office: Caledonian Exchange,
19a Canning Street, Edinburgh, EH3 8HE

