



CAPITAL REGION  
CLIMATE READINESS  
COLLABORATIVE

# Community Engagement Toolkit

Capital Region Urban Heat Island Mitigation Project



Local  
Government  
Commission

*Leaders for Livable Communities*

SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN



AIR QUALITY  
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

# INTRODUCTION

Communities across the Capital Region (SACOG 6-county region) are increasingly vulnerable to rising temperatures and extending heat waves, due in part to the urban heat island (UHI) effect. Exposure to excessive heat not only threatens public health, quality of life, worker productivity, and economic vitality, but also degrades the already deteriorating transportation infrastructure such as roads and train tracks. Underserved and under-resourced communities are especially burdened by extreme heat and the UHI effect, often having fewer resources to respond.

To better understand the exposures and potential cooling solutions to excessive heat across the region, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD) and the Local Government Commission (LGC) led the Capital Region Urban Heat Island Mitigation project with Altostratus and WSP. This project identified priority strategies to reduce heat pollution and provide cooling benefits. SMAQMD and LGC engaged residents and community leaders to provide input on heat-related transportation concerns, priorities for UHI mitigation strategies, and how local jurisdictions can better serve community members living in Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, Sutter, Yuba, and El Dorado counties.

**We are now calling upon community leaders to help us engage residents to create heat-resilient communities throughout the region.**

The Community Engagement Toolkit is intended to be used by community leaders in the Capital Region to share about heat risks and resilience solutions with community members. The project team designed the toolkit in a manner that enables community leaders without deep expertise on extreme heat and the UHI effect to be able to successfully present the findings of the project and engage community members.

## TOOLKIT COMPONENTS

Communities may use the following materials, which can be found on [climatereadiness.info/uhi-project](https://climatereadiness.info/uhi-project) to present at neighborhood association meetings and/or to family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues, in an in-person or virtual format.

### Community Engagement Best Practices

This document highlights a set of principles and best practices for effective and inclusive community engagement, which community leaders can utilize when organizing community gatherings.

### Presentation & Facilitator Agenda

These resources are intended to be used hand-in-hand. The presenter or group of presenters are recommended to review the presentation slides and facilitator agenda in advance. The facilitator agenda follows the slides included in the presentation and provides guidance on what should be presented to the audience for each slide.

### Handouts

To spread further awareness and equip community members with information, the toolkit includes:

- **Heat PSA Posters**, highlighting key risks and strategies for staying cool, which may be posted in community centers, offices, and/or businesses.
- **Tip Sheets**, which can be distributed in-person or via email to provide a quick reference guide to community members on the UHI effect and cooling strategies.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

## Glossary of Terms Used

**Community members** are residents, customers, business owners and others who live, work or otherwise engage in local activities. More specific communities of interest may exist for a specific program or policy. Communities of interest may share a common geographical location, interest or attribute.

**Culturally and racially inclusive outreach and public engagement** are public processes that ensure the participation of people of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and low-income people in agreed-upon outreach and public engagement processes.

**Organizer** is a person assigned to manage a meeting, event, or process, also referred to as a facilitator. This person is often scoped to be a neutral party. The organizer is responsible for ensuring participation, helping the group maintain focus, knowing when to move or to slow down, avoiding repetition, and dealing with problem people and situations.

**Member** refers to any person or group that has an interest in or is affected by the action or process in question. Members include residents, business operators and owners, property owners, non-profit, public and private agencies and organizations. Identifying the full spectrum of stakeholders is on the early and critical steps in developing an effective public involvement strategy.

## Principles of Inclusive Community Engagement

### 1. Build personal relationships with community members.

It is important for organizers to identify how the purpose of the meeting will serve people and places and building relationships with the intended audience – before, during, and after community engagement activities. By understanding the needs, concerns, and priorities of community members, organizers can ensure that the way in which information is presented and how meetings are hosted aligns with community values. The community engagement activities themselves can serve as important opportunities to build these relationships, such as through small group discussions or other interactive activities that strengthen relationships between the organizer and participants, as well as peer-to-peer relationships among participants.

#### Questions to consider

- Are there key individuals that I already have or should be building a relationship with?
- Who should be present and how can I shape the activity in a way that will better engage them?
- Are there other meetings that I can attend to discover existing community leaders and neighborhood advocates?

### 2. Create a welcoming atmosphere.

In order to facilitate inclusive engagement, it is important for organizers to create a welcoming atmosphere for community members to feel safe and comfortable in actively participating. An organizer should greet attendees at the door and thank them for attending before and after the event occurs. Facilitating meetings in a more informal manner and with a personal touch can also help to put participants at ease.

### Questions to consider

- Does the process reflect, honor, and welcome the community?
- Do the chosen venues invite participation and engagement?
- Does this gathering place feel comfortable and allow for interactive activities?

### 3. Increase accessibility.

Inclusive community engagement aims to maximize accessibility with consideration to cultural and language needs, the venue itself – in terms of where it is located and to ensure that it does not present physical barriers to people with disabilities, the day and time in which the meeting is held, and how the meeting is conducted to avoid jargon and technical language.

### Questions to consider

- Is the location of the meeting easy to get to?
- Can the building itself be accessed by people with disabilities?
- Are there issues or barriers (language, location, time, transportation, childcare, food, incentives, appeal, power dynamics, etc.) that should be considered throughout the whole process?

### 4. Develop alternative methods for engagement.

With an understanding that it is important to reach community members in ways that work best for them, it is important to use a variety of tools and approaches to enable engagement. A meeting that is organized to increase accessibility may still present barriers for some based on their own schedules, resources, and other factors. Providing alternative methods for engagement, such as through online channels (e.g. emails, websites, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) can enable more community members to participate.

### Questions to consider

- How do community members in this neighborhood or in this group communicate with one another on a regular basis?
- Am I offering multiple ways for community members to learn about the content?

### 5. Partner with diverse organizations and agencies.

To maximize engagement, organizers are encouraged to consult with community representatives before, during, and after planned engagement activities. These representatives can serve as “sounding boards” to help address questions and to shape the community engagement activity.

### Questions to consider

- Who are the trusted community leaders and organizations in this neighborhood or group?
- What am I asking of community representatives, such as helping to shape the agenda, identifying ways to make the meeting more interactive, or promoting the meeting to reach as broad of an audience as possible?
- Do I have any day-of support needs that I can ask community representatives to help fill?

## Climate Communications

The following 15 steps craft emotionally resonant, personalized, and effective messages on climate change originally by EcoAmerica and the Local Government Commission.

- 1. Start with people, stay with people.** In order for members to care about climate change, the organizer must care about them. As this guide states above, it is important for organizers to start from the member's perspective, not of those who are convening the engagement. Organizers should infuse all communication with tangible, relevant concerns - this may require additional research and community engagement to determine what climate concerns the particular community shares. Lastly, when engaging with members about climate, it is important to move discussions from people to climate - not the other way around - and to keep going back to people.
- 2. Connect on common values.** If organizers build the relationships and knowledge to really understand member's priorities, concerns, and values, that allows organizers to try and open member's hearts and minds by talking about those values and by showing them they share and honor them. Common values, such as family, community, freedom of choice, health, and fairness, are powerful motivators and connectors. Affiliation or "tribal" connectors such as being fellow congregants, business leaders, organization members, or professionals are also helpful. In order to determine common values, prior community engagement efforts may be necessary.
- 3. Acknowledge ambivalence.** People approach climate from different perspectives and often have different levels of concern, sense of urgency, and other priorities to focus on. It is important for organizers communicating about climate to avoid being self-righteous and to instead respect member's perspectives, and allow them their own space. A simple line like "Some of us are more worried about climate change than others" allows people to be comfortable and listen with an open mind.
- 4. Make it real.** Though times are changing, Americans are latently concerned about climate change. In order for communities and their members to learn how to adapt to a changing climate and to be emboldened, it is critical they are moved from concern to action. By focusing on local realities members can see with their own eyes that climate change is relevant to them. Simple, irrefutable facts about changing seasons, air quality, or record weather make climate change real. Assume the realities of the member's climate impacts, but don't argue the science. Instead, it is best for organizers to use one or two minor examples of climate impacts (more wildfires); then pivot quickly to solutions (resilience and adaptation).
- 5. Emphasize solutions.** Many people have not been informed California has developed solar and wind energy systems that cost less than even cheap natural gas. Transportation systems are improving their efficiency and energy consumption, and comprehensive energy storage systems are just around the corner. California has proven climate policies that reduce carbon pollution that can also accelerate economic growth. There is a suite of economic, health, nature, and security co-benefits that come along with the energy solutions, so it is important for organizers to make a powerful case with tangible examples that show solutions exist in order to inspire and empower members.
- 6. Inspire and empower.** Oftentimes, people feel or are repeatedly told that they can't make a difference on climate change, when the exact opposite is true. Any action individuals take can have lasting impacts. Every day, almost everything people do - from the way (and if) they drive to what they eat and how they talk about climate change - impacts of climate, and the people around them. America can lead on climate solutions, and so can California, the Inland Empire, neighborhood associations, and individuals.

7. **Focus on personal benefit.** A common misconception is that Americans think taking action on climate change comes with a cost to their lifestyles and pocketbooks - when the opposite is true. Organizers should communicate to members that conserving energy, for example, saves them money - and by choosing active transportation and better food, members will be healthier, and their air quality will improve as more individuals take action. It is important for organizers to always emphasize the personal and health benefits of climate solutions - the members will take note.
8. **End with an "ask".** As mentioned previously, it is important for organizers to always empower the audience whenever possible. Organizers should encourage members to turn the information and understanding into individual and community action. It is helpful to give members a variety of examples, ideas, and steps they can take to make a difference, and to also remind and show them how behavior change is easier and cheaper than they may think (i.e. Carpooling).
9. **Sequence matters.** Research reveals that it's possible to take the same set of six facts, arrange them in different ways, and end up with very different results. It is important for organizers to first connect on common values and acknowledge ambivalence, then move from impacts to solutions, and focus on personal benefits. If organizers start negative and impersonal, it's very hard to get back to the positive, personal, and relevant, and it is common for members to disengage if they are presented with negative information. As a best practice, organizers should follow the first 8 steps in order.
10. **Describe, don't label.** Organizers should use the language of the audience, not their own. Jargon and labels often confuse people and do not help communicate the message. It is helpful when communicating about climate to avoid terms like "mitigation" or "adaptation." Statements like, "We need to slow and stop the pollution that is creating poor air quality and changing our climate and begin to prepare for those changes we can't prevent." are easier to understand for community members, as opposed to using scientific jargon. For example, when referencing "alternative energy," organizers should switch their language to describe the need for "clean, inexpensive energy from the wind and sun". The most persuasive language for organizers to use should be vivid, familiar, and simple yet descriptive.
11. **Have at least one powerful fact from a trusted messenger.** One or two obvious facts with relevant and emotional power add significant weight to a message. Highly trusted messengers or organizations lend credibility and importance when communicating to communities about climate change. Conveners should use at least one memorable and relevant example, fact, or quote from someone the audience trusts, such as Pope Francis, the American Public Health Association, or a respected local leader.
12. **Ditch doom and gloom.** When communicating about climate, it is common for organizers to try to provoke climate action by portraying it in dire or fatalistic terms. While that is true, and can be acknowledged, emphasizing these aspects to members promotes fatalism and emotional numbing, causing people to turn away and disengage. Solutions, benefits, and personal empowerment are the messages organizers should leave members with.
13. **Use stories to strengthen engagement.** Stories can help make a message relevant and vivid. Stories can connect with audiences, allowing organizers to build bonds, enhance empathy, and open members to new perspectives. Stories can also provide community-wide connections that can lead to a congregation of supporters. Organizers can deepen their message to members by weaving in a personal story - i.e.: how they became concerned about climate change or how climate change has

affected them (flood or fires), for instance, or an account of how they've seen climate solutions benefit someone or some community that members can relate to.

14. **Stay above the fray.** It is important for organizers to focus on the big picture and on what's important. To the fullest extent possible, organizers should avoid getting caught in a trap of arguing or preaching about details or sidetracked by an individual in the audience who tries to poke holes in their thesis. In addition, organizers should absolutely avoid demonizing members, blaming, and arguing. Distractions distract organizers and can cause them to lose their audience, which creates ineffective engagement.
15. **Message discipline is critical.** Organizers should stay on their agreed-upon talking points - provided by community partnerships - and repeat key points throughout the meeting. Organizers should avoid explaining the same concept in different ways, as it can be more confusing than enabling or empowering for members. The most important thing for organizers to keep in mind is to be consistent across all messaging platforms and partnerships, and to also tailor communications to the particular audience.