

## INITIATE YOUR CLIMATE RESILIENCY EFFORT

## MILESTONE 1

The following chapters recommend how to reach CRC Milestone One, “Initiate Your Climate Resiliency Effort”:

Chapter 4: Scope the Climate Change Impacts to Your Major Sectors

**Chapter 5: Build and Maintain Support to Prepare for Climate Change Impacts**

Chapter 6: Build Your Climate Change Preparedness Team

Chapter 7: Identify Your Planning Areas Relevant to Climate Change

# chapter 5 build and maintain support to prepare for climate change

Once you have scoped out the impacts of climate change to your community’s sectors, you are ready to develop the support needed from your community and executive-level leaders to conduct a climate resiliency study. Outreach will play a major role in building and maintaining support to launch your planning effort. At later stages of planning, your work will also benefit from the investment in outreach by creating a common understanding among your various partners and stakeholders of how your region’s climate may change in the coming decades. These partners and stakeholders may include public officials, local government staff, key businesses, non-governmental organizations, and the general public. To help build and maintain support for preparedness planning, this chapter provides guidance on how to:

- identify a climate change “champion”
- identify your target audience for your outreach activities
- develop a preparedness message
- spread the preparedness message.

As in other stages of the process, you should scale your activities related to building and maintaining support to fit your local, regional or state circumstances. Most importantly, you should also recognize that preparing for climate change requires an ongoing commitment to internal (i.e., within your government) and external (i.e., with the community-at-large) outreach at levels appropriate for your community.

### 5.1 Identify or Cultivate a “Champion” for Preparedness

Across local, regional and state governments already planning for climate change, at least one element is common: all have a leader or leaders at the high level of government who are committed to learning about climate change impacts and to making the hard decisions that will prepare that region most effectively for those impacts (Penney and Wieditz 2007). These hard decisions can be vulnerable to criticism when they challenge the *status quo*. Therefore, the champion who leads this change must be respected and trusted by the public and other leaders, conversant about climate change impacts, and willing to take risks by developing policy recommendations that will be different in some areas from the old ways of doing business.

In the best case scenario, you may already have a champion who can build support for preparedness planning. If you are a public official or an advisor to a public official, you may be that champion.

In other cases, clear leadership on this issue may be lacking, and you may have to cultivate a climate preparedness champion. You may also want to engage champions outside of your government to validate your internal efforts. You may be able to find a leader who is already committed to other environmental issues and who is willing to expand his or her focus to include climate change preparedness. Other potential champions include, but are not limited to, former elected officials or department heads (e.g., a former utilities director), key business leaders, long-range planners, and/or other respected members of the community-at-large. Depending on the values of your region, an “economic champion” on climate change could be even more powerful than an “environmental champion.”

---

**Checkpoint:** Upon finishing this section, you should have identified a climate change “champion,” and should be involving that person in your preparedness effort (if he/she is not already leading it).

---

## 5.2 Identify and Understand Your Audience for Outreach

Before beginning any outreach activities, identify your target audiences (e.g., other elected officials, senior management, other staff, general public) and understand their basic interests. For simplicity, you can consider your target audiences to be in four groups: the public sector; the private sector; non-profit organizations; and media. The general public is represented across all of these categories. You may also want to identify individuals who especially influence conventional opinion within each of these groups.

During the early stages of your outreach work you will likely need to focus on generating support internally through outreach to other elected officials, department heads, and/or staff members. As planning progresses, increase external outreach to community members and partners, and continue internal outreach to maintain support and interest within your organization for preparedness planning.

Know that different members of your audience will have different opinions and information needs, and that they may trust different sources of information. Be ready to listen and be flexible enough to tailor your message while keeping the core message consistent.

Outreach should be ongoing, especially as both internal and external audiences should later be tapped for input during the development of your climate change preparedness plan (Chapter 10) and/or support for specific preparedness actions. Various types of internal and external outreach activities are provided in 5.4.

---

**Checkpoint:** Upon finishing this section, you should have a list of your target audiences for your climate change outreach activities. Who is your internal audience? Who is your external audience?

---

### 5.3 Develop a Preparedness Message

Establishing a clear message on the importance of and need for climate change preparedness is vital to the success of your planning effort. The following are suggestions for developing a message to raise and maintain awareness and motivation for preparedness planning. Many of these message points also address the common barriers to preparing for climate change discussed in Chapter 3.

- **Describe changes that have already been observed.** There are many indications that the Earth's climate and various physical and ecological systems are changing in response to 20th century warming. Some of these may be changes that local residents have observed firsthand. Including this information can underscore that climate change is occurring and, in many respects, having a measurable impact on Earth's systems. Refer to Appendix A and more recent scientific studies to describe changes in climate, hydrology, and/or ecosystems that have already been observed in your region or similar areas. It is important to note that some of these changes may reflect changes in natural variability as well as long-term changes in average temperature. Be careful not to attribute observed changes to human-caused climate change entirely, unless there is scientific evidence to back up the claim.
- **Describe changes that are expected.** Using the information you collected in your initial scan (Chapter 4) and any additional information collected later in the planning process, provide information on how temperature, precipitation, snowpack, and other aspects of climate and the environment are expected to change in your region as a result of climate change.
- **Describe how climate change may impact the community.** Using the information you collected in Chapter 4, explain the potential regional and local consequences of climate change. Impacts may include sea level rise, changes in water supply, and increased risk of drought, forest fires, extreme events, flooding, and/or disease. Be careful not to overstate what you know about impacts to your region or you risk losing credibility with key audiences.
- **Convey the need for action but balance the challenges with optimism.** It is important to communicate why planning for climate change is needed; see Chapter 3 for more on this point. Be careful, however, that the message does not leave your audience with a sense of hopelessness. Discussions on climate change can quickly turn negative given the scale of the problem, the breadth of projected impacts, and the changes needed to deal meaningfully with these impacts. In engaging the public on the need for preparedness, communicate openly and practically with action-oriented language. Be careful to strike a balance between the realities of climate change, the need for action, and the proactive steps that can be taken to address the problem at all levels.

- **Identify other communities similar to yours that are planning for climate change.** In some cases, it may be helpful for people to see that other communities similar to yours are taking steps to address climate change impacts. ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, its Climate Resilient Communities Program, USEPA, and the Center for Clean Air Policy’s Urban Leaders Initiative are all good resources for identifying other communities working on climate change activities. Other such online clearinghouse sites may also be available (see Appendix D for more sources). With time, it will be possible to focus on those strategies that have worked for other community governments like yours. Identifying your peers and exchanging experiences can be empowering and helpful.
- **Develop a course of action.** Outline what you intend to achieve and the steps your local government intends to take to prepare for the projected changes. Update your message with details on your community’s course of action as the planning process progresses and your plan is implemented.
- **Acknowledge that questions remain.** Do not be reluctant to admit that questions remain. Clearly communicating what you do know – while being honest about what questions still need to be answered – will be critical to gaining and maintaining credibility, interest, understanding, and support for your preparedness work. Be sure to emphasize, however, that enough information is available for (and warrants) moving forward with planning. Also note that your community will continue to follow developments in climate change science for new information that can help close key information gaps.

You will want to modify the content of your message according to your audience, the outreach tool you are using, and the status of your planning effort. Rather than trying to create all materials from scratch, consider drawing on existing sources of information, with permission and proper crediting of the source. A wide variety of materials that describe the causes and consequences of climate change – from fact sheets to posters and PowerPoint slides – may be available online and could be adapted for local outreach purposes. See Appendix 8.4.1 for suggested starting places.

Above all, keep your message simple. Work with local experts throughout your planning process, to distill information into a form that is both technically accurate and understandable. Also consider partnering with others, including other governments, university researchers and/or graduate students, and/or appropriate non-governmental organizations to do this public outreach.

---

**Checkpoint:** *Upon finishing this section, you should have the main points and supporting information of your outreach message assembled. What are the key points you want all audiences to hear? Remember that the details supporting the central message points will evolve over time and will vary with the outreach tool and audience.*

---

## 5.4 Spread the Message

To maximize the reach of a communications effort, use a variety of outreach tools and use them repeatedly. Be aware of which materials work for internal audiences (e.g. departments or city council, if you work in public office) and which are best for external audiences (e.g., general public and other partners or stakeholders). Following are a few suggestions.

*For internal audiences:*

- **Brown-bag seminars.** Brown bag seminars are typically lunchtime presentations where participants bring their own lunches and attendance is voluntary. Seminars can be structured around a theme, such as climate change impacts on water supplies. The substance of a conversation can build sequentially from one brown bag to the next (i.e., starting with the climate change fundamentals then moving into impacts and preparedness). Speakers may include: scientists or other experts; federal, state, or other local governmental agency staff who manage programs affected by climate change; elected officials or staff from community governments already preparing for climate change; and internal staff.
- **Department meetings.** Department meetings can be scheduled as needed to cover specific topics. Presentations from outside parties (e.g., climate or resource management experts) can be scheduled as part of the meeting. The meetings typically provide a good opportunity for discussion and coordination with other departments. Remember, however, that preparing for climate change will not necessarily fit neatly into the mission of a single department. It will probably be necessary to call an interdepartmental meeting that includes other agencies affected by the impacts you identify.
- **Scientific briefings to councils and executive staff.** Scientific briefings provide an opportunity for senior-level decision makers to ask questions of science experts directly. These briefings can be scheduled as part of a regular council meeting, during executive sessions, or as a separate meeting.

*For both internal and external audiences:*

- **Newsletters, fact sheets, utility inserts, and brochures.** Newsletters and other similar print material can incorporate information on climate change impacts and planning. Written materials can be distributed via the mail or at public meetings, libraries, or government offices.
- **Websites.** Websites are a particularly effective outreach tool, given how easily the Internet can be accessed across communities, income levels and professions (both within the government and by the general public). Information posted on the Internet can also be easily updated. A website can be designed to cater to a wide variety of audiences, using links to information of varying detail.

### Box 5.1 – “The Future Ain’t What It Used to Be: Planning for Climate Disruption” – The King County, Washington, Climate Change Conference

On October 25, 2005, King County, Washington, convened a major conference to discuss projected climate change impacts for Washington State, potential adaptation strategies, and broader goals for moving forward on planning for climate change. The conference, titled “The Future Ain’t What It Used to Be: Planning for Climate Disruption”, featured speakers from across disciplines and levels of government, including researchers, public officials, tribal representatives, private sector leaders, and citizens from across the region. The audience was equally diverse. Details on how the conference was organized are provided here.

**Work in partnership.** King County co-hosted the conference with 17 partners and 23 contributing organizations. Organizations represented a variety of different sectors, fields, and expertise, including insurance and financial services, environmental engineering, construction, architecture, and non-profit climate change advocacy organizations. Municipal government partners included the City and Port of Seattle. King County gained financial sponsorship, in-kind services and support from these entities and individuals by providing them with time at the speakers’ podium, advertising space and opportunities to participate in shaping the discussion sessions. The conference also significantly strengthened the county’s existing relationship with the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington.

**Develop a common picture of climate change and its regional consequences.** Organizers worked with the Climate Impacts Group to prepare 1) a scientific white paper about the effects of climate change, and 2) a series of primers containing compelling discussion questions about how to begin planning. These materials were distributed to participants at the conference and used to guide discussions during the conference working sessions. Organizers also structured the “bookend” plenary sessions 1) to provide an overview of climate change science, given by scientists, to establish a common understanding of the way regional climate has already changed and is projected to change, and 2) to elicit perspectives from elected officials to establish political direction and support for adaptation. More than a year after the conference, the background materials continue to be critical for developing a shared regional picture of climate change impacts to the Puget Sound region, and inspiring and guiding action across the region and within King County government.

*For external audiences:*

- **Public meetings.** Public meetings on climate change and its regional impacts can be scheduled as a means of reaching the general public. Meetings may be scheduled around particular events, such as launching a new program, decisions about major infrastructure investments that may be affected by climate change, or specific climate-related events such as drought. See Box 5.1 for an example.
- **Press releases/public statements.** Press releases and public statements, including legislative resolutions, can be distributed to draw the public’s attention to specific activities that a community government is pursuing to manage the process of climate change preparedness.

**Bring both scientific “expert” and stakeholder voices to the discussion.** Conference organizers consciously brought together scientific experts, public officials, and stakeholders to begin to wrestle with the range of compelling questions about how to move forward. Speakers included former New Jersey Governor and former administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Christine Todd Whitman, the mayor of Washington State’s capitol (Olympia), and the business director of the Port of Seattle. From this diversity of people and disciplinary backgrounds emerged many compelling scientific, environmental, political, economic, and social questions. These discussions have been transcribed and can be found on the King County website.

**Consider how climate change will affect different sectors.** Breakout sessions of the conference were focused on impacts to specific sectors (e.g., agriculture, coastal areas, fish and shellfish, forestry, hydropower, water supply) with materials identifying probable “winners” and “losers” of climate change impacts. Sessions offered experts in those areas and concerned stakeholders an opportunity to come together to brainstorm solutions, raise questions and flesh out some initial opportunities or constraints for action. The papers and related discussion spotlighted memorable illustrations of how certain sectors, such as the Pacific Northwest ski industry, will be more vulnerable to climate change impacts. In the

case of the ski industry, the winter preceding the conference had seen a record low snowfall, which had forced nine of 11 ski resorts to close in mid-January (ordinarily the height of the ski season). This lack of snow had forced some resorts cut staffing by 80 percent.

Planning for and holding the conference had many important benefits. First, the conference helped King County get organized on climate change adaptation. The conference prompted the county and region to assess climate change effects on our natural and built environments more systematically. The conference also began to involve a broad range of county staff, including capital improvement project managers, division directors and supervisors, and engineers and science staff, in thinking about the tradeoffs and decisions related to the new topic of climate change adaptation. Finally, the conference greatly enhanced the interactions and long term working relationships of County staff with their business, nonprofit, and academic counterparts for their specific sectors. All of these benefits fed into the knowledge, ideas, enthusiasm, and collaborative spirit that helped to launch the county’s climate change action team and preparedness team in 2006, and later to develop the county’s first comprehensive climate change action plan in February 2007. The conference also contributed to the State’s subsequent funding of a statewide study of the economic impacts of climate change.

- **Media training events.** Media training events for reporters and editors can be used to increase media awareness of climate change, local impacts, and governmental action. Speakers may include climate scientists, other experts, and/or members of the community government. This can be an opportunity to showcase what you are doing about climate change, and for the media to talk directly with regional experts and local officials without the pressure of a deadline.
- **Events aimed at businesses and nongovernmental organizations.** Special events could include a large-scale leadership summit on climate change or, if resource constraints are an issue, one-on-one relationship building or smaller events such as workshops and seminars geared to the business community and nongovernmental organizations. These events can be used to solicit targeted feedback on preparedness options as well as for general outreach.

It is critical to view outreach as an ongoing activity rather than a one-time event. In general, timing is not a concern; outreach activities can be implemented at any point. Much can be gained, however, when outreach is tied to external events. For example, increased public or political concern about a drought or severe forest fires can create a more receptive audience for climate change preparedness messages if these events are likely to increase as a result of climate change. Be careful in these instances not to attribute a specific event to climate change. The cause-and-effect linkage of any single event to climate change is not scientifically possible at this time. Also, as your outreach continues, continue engaging and utilizing experts within your community government, in non-governmental organizations, at universities, and in professional associations to help to educate and engage.

---

**Checkpoint:** *Upon finishing this section, you should have a general idea of the different tools you can use for internal and external public education efforts and how you might want to employ these tools to build and maintain support for preparedness planning.*

---