

# Resource Guide to Community Climate Action for Youth

Tailored for Canadian youth & budding activists



The Community Climate Council and the Youth Council Coalition of Canada would like to extend their most sincere appreciation to Cities and Climate Action Forum of Windsor Law for introducing our two organizations to one another. Our sincere thanks also go out to the Essex Region Conservation Authority for offering their expertise in editing this document.

We dedicate this document to youth who are striving for better and taking it upon themselves to create change in their communities.

As stewards for a sustainable future, we hope that this document is of use to you and your continued efforts.

February 2021



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# Hello!

Welcome youth, activists, advocates and allies! We are happy you found us.

This guide is a collaborative effort between The Community Climate Council and the Youth Council Coalition of Canada, who hope to inspire youth and their allies to enact change across their communities. These two organizations were introduced by Professor Anneke Smit, of Cities and Climate Action after their forum in 2020. Professor Smit, more than most, understands and is addressing the need for municipalities and communities to tackle climate change locally and with the help of youth.

Unfortunately for younger Canadians, trying to infiltrate local policy to enact change is difficult, and sometimes ineffective. As climate and youth advocates then, it was essential for our organizations to dedicate time towards understanding policy systems and how youth may be engaged effectively and meaningfully in their development.

We hope that you find this guide inspiring and that you feel better equipped and informed in your efforts to enact change as the co-designers of our future!

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# Contributors

## The Community Climate Council

The Community Climate Council is a youth-founded, non-partisan organization advocating for climate action and community resilience through enhancing climate literacy and municipal relations in Peel Region, Ontario. Their mission is to empower their community to take climate action.

The CCC is comprised of young residents who are passionate about the political and non-political processes in taking climate action. They are working with other community organizations and non-profits to educate, inform, and empower our communities to understand the climate crisis' reality and the immediate actions our elected leaders and communities need to take.

They were built from the need to move action on the streets to decision making tables and created a platform for youth in Peel Region to meaningfully engage in climate action.



The Community Climate Council

[@peelclimate](#)



[@Community\\_Climate\\_Council](#)



[admin@peelccc.org](mailto:admin@peelccc.org)



[@peelclimatecouncil](#)



[communityclimatecouncil.org](http://communityclimatecouncil.org)

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## Youth Council Coalition of Canada

The Youth Council Coalition of Canada is a non-profit organization whose mission is to foster the development, success and influence of Canadian youth councils. They are dedicated entirely to ensure a standardized and coordinated approach to youth council development. This includes recruiting, engaging and maintaining members, establishing a course of action, and fulfilling the missions of these committees is no small feat for any organization. They work to create content and opportunities for youth and their municipal allies to learn, connect and improve together.



Youth Council oalition of Canada

[@ycc\\_canada](#)



[Youth Council Coalition of Canada](#)



[info@yccofcanada.com](mailto:info@yccofcanada.com)



[@ycc\\_canada](#)



[yccofcanada.com](http://yccofcanada.com)

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# Plans & Policies in Ontario

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks coordinates Ontario's actions on climate change. The ministry uses [Environmental Registry](#) in lieu of [Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993](#) to consult with public on decision making on environment, and to keep everyone updated on regulations and tools.

## Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan

considers Ontario's specific priorities, challenges and opportunities, and commits to reducing GHG emissions to 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. The plan uses Ontario Carbon trust as a means to mobilize emission reductions in the private sector.

## Cap and Trade Cancellation Act, 2018

repeals the Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy act (2016) in order to wind-down the greenhouse gas cap and trade. The act establishes targets for reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario and aims to prepare a climate change plan.

The [Environmental Protection Act](#) addresses waste collection, disposal and environmental approvals in Ontario.

The [Emissions Performance Standards](#) (EPS), created under the [Emissions Performance Standards Regulation](#), holds polluters accountable for their greenhouse gas emissions in order to minimize carbon leakage and improve business competitiveness.

The [Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act](#) (2016) and its accompanying strategy set out Ontario's vision for a circular economy, including of a zero-waste Ontario with no greenhouse gas emissions from the waste sector.

## Plans focusing on resilience

Under the [Greenbelt Act](#) (2005), the [Greenbelt Plan](#) (2017) protects natural environment and systems: farmland, communities, forests, wetlands and watersheds, particularly in urban sprawl.

The [Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy](#) focuses on protecting agricultural and soil productivity in changing climate, to improve food security and protect crops from weather and extreme temperatures.

The [Canada-Ontario Great Lakes Agreement](#), [Canada-Ontario Lake Erie Action Plan](#), [A Wetland Conservation Strategy](#) and [Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy](#) all safeguard and restore lakes, beaches and coastlines.

The [Crown Forest Sustainability Act](#), [Professional Foresters Act](#), [Policy Framework for Sustainable Forests](#), [Old Growth Policy for Ontario's Crown Forests](#), and the [Endangered Species Act](#) all regulate sustainable forest management in Ontario,

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# Ontario's Changing Climates

There are many ways that climate change has become apparent in our daily lives and in communities across Ontario. It may surprise some to know that these issues are connected to climate change. Whether allergies, maple syrup droughts or the spread of Lyme Disease, the impacts of climate change are widespread and touch Ontarians from all walks of life.



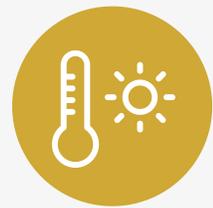
## Lyme Disease

As climate change progresses, the geographic range of black-legged ticks (who carry the bacteria causing Lyme Disease) is expanding. They are able to survive for longer periods during the year as we are seeing more annual cumulative degree days above 0°C. Now, projections suggest that the speed and range of expansion in Canada will vary from 35-55km per year and the area colonized by the bacteria could go from 23,000km<sup>2</sup> (2010) to 317,000km<sup>2</sup> in 2020.



## Flash Floods and Heavy Downpours

Now, if the lack of maple syrup, or a runny nose don't affect you personally, you may have noticed an increase in flash floods and heavy downpours. Conservation authorities have issued flood warnings and watches across the Province, while municipalities and home and business owners fear the weakening of infrastructure, the threats to food security and an increase to waterborne illnesses.



## Extreme Heat

Extreme heat is a contributing factor to an average of 120 premature deaths each year in Toronto alone and a contributing factor to the weakening of roadways and other infrastructure. The 1955 record of most consecutive days of a heat wave (9 days) was tied in 2020, and this is projected to increase in the years ahead. Those who can afford to get out of the heat at home are faced with increased costs for electricity, with air conditioning essential to escaping the heat.



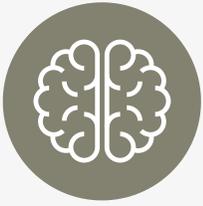
## Maple Syrup

Canadian maple syrup is typically harvested at the end of winter when the Sugar Maple trees begin to create sap to make buds in the spring. The thaw and freeze cycles inside the tree are crucial to harvesting sap, and are becoming more difficult as the transition between Winter and Spring occurs more drastically.



## Allergies

You may have also noticed that your allergies are getting worse. You are not alone. As summer temperatures increase and winters become shorter, more pollen and spores will continue to be produced.



## Mental Health

Mental health concerns are growing across Canada, especially in Ontario. We are seeing new terms such as "ecogrief," "ecoanxiety," and "climate trauma" being used by mental health practitioners and researchers. For youth, who will bear the brunt of this climate crisis longer than their parents and grand-parents, this means finding new mechanisms to cope with stress and anxiety.



## Precipitation Changes

The average annual precipitation rate has increased in Canada from 1948 to 2012. Municipalities across Ontario are now charged with responding to flooding caused by more frequent and intense rainfalls, more instances of rain falling on snow and new snow patterns. This flooding, and overall precipitation changes, can overwhelm infrastructure and cause serious local impacts on life and livelihoods, damaging transportation networks, disrupting access and supply chains, contaminating water and impacting farming and local crops. Even small changes in precipitation patterns can have big impacts on local ecosystems and plant life if persistent over time.



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## Effects on Ontario Wildlife



Warmer water temperatures are enabling invasive species such as phragmites and algal blooms to take hold in our rivers, lakes and streams.

Life cycle changes resulting from warmer winter and spring temperatures are occurring across Ontario. Shifts include earlier breeding by amphibians (i.e. wood frog, norther leopard frog and spring peeper, etc.)



Bird migration, emergence of hatchlings and egg-laying occur earlier in the season which could also leave them exposed to increased spring storms and wild weather.

Phenological mismatches happen when the life cycles of species no longer align. For example, migratory species may arrive after their prey have already left the area.

Climate-induced changes in insect population distribution and abundance is significant as they are a food source for many species.



In many cases, climate change is occurring faster than species of plants and animals are able to evolve and adapt, meaning additional native species are at risk in our local habitats.

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# Engaging Youth

If you are a young person looking to make a difference, or a councillor or administrator looking for ways to engage younger citizens, this section is for you. Too often we notice that representation is missing far too late in our work. It is time that we make the case for early and consistent engagement of youth across our communities. This next section seeks to inspire just how we might do that together.

## Who are they?

Young Ontarians, those younger than 24 years-old, make up approximately 29% of the province's population. Of this demographic, 12% were between the ages of 15-24 in 2016 and roughly 17% of our communities are made up of those members of the public that cannot yet, but will be able to vote. Millennials now make up the largest voting block in Canada during federal elections, with Gen Z coming up quickly behind them.

Municipal governments, with generally lower rates of voter-turnouts, would be best served to connect with these future voters and decision makers.

Youth are also entering the workforce and taking their place in working groups and organizations charged with addressing climate change.

## Where are they?

Youth are everywhere in our communities. They are working for local businesses, enjoying outdoor and indoor recreation spaces and attending local schools. They are key members of the public, interacting with infrastructure, services and programs that operate through the municipality and local organizations.

However, the problem many organizations and government entities are having is engaging with youth in a meaningful way – whether in person or online, Youth are at the forefront of technological and societal change, with many of them serving as climate leaders beyond the confines of their schools. Still, it can be difficult to create the right incentives and means for engagement.

## Youth at the Decision-Making Table

Across Canada there are fantastic examples of youth councils at every level of government, as well as within large non-profit organizations. There is the Prime Minister's Youth Council at the federal level. In Newfoundland and Labrador there is the Premier's Youth Council. And there are over 80 municipal youth councils across Ontario.

Mandates of these committees or councils vary by organization, but often include providing a youth perspective on civic and policy matters, and services and programs that affect the daily lives of youth. Committee members help to identify gaps or barriers to participation and suggest solutions to the participation of youth. Moreover, they participate in related stakeholder forums on matters of collective community interest.

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In the area of climate change, it is essential that youth are integrated and leveraged as these policies and plans are drafted and approved. With many policies offering 30 years of implementation, those professionals starting to address climate change will be retired before their work is completed, meaning an engaged younger generation can be a part of succession planning.

The most effective way to ensure that there is a mechanism for youth engagement at the municipal or organizational level is to ensure that there are standing youth positions available.

For a municipality, this may mean that a youth council or youth advisory committee becomes a standing committee of Council. This allows your elected officials and administration to set its own terms of reference, and recruit members for set terms. Missions and mandates may vary at this stage, but it provides a stable and recurring method for soliciting the feedback of your community's youngest citizens.

For a for-profit or non-profit organization, it is suggested that the Board of Directors create a position for a youth director. It is, however, essential that this person be given the same voting rights and influence at the table. To ensure that this is efficient and effective, a Board ought to have a strong onboarding and training session for new members.

## Examples of Engagement Models

### Advisory Committees

Advisory committees provide recommendations to a board, Council or body of government. Advisory committees typically provide comment on legislation and policies prior to adoption, and have no working budget or a limited working budget to accomplish their mandate as approved by its governing body.

### Working Committees

Working committees serve a similar function to advisory bodies but are provided with the guidance and freedom to organize events or other initiatives that benefit the target audience. It should be noted that working committees are typically provided a specific mandate with a larger operating budget than advisory committees, as they likely still serve the latter's function as well.

### Councillor & Board Appointments

Youth councillors are appointed to Council in municipalities through an application process. Their attendance at meetings does not count towards quorum and their positions exist to provide a youth perspective on agenda items. They, like councillors, receive the agenda package in advance and are encouraged to participate in discussion, and ask questions throughout meetings.

Similarly, youth directors participate in all meetings. However, they receive full voting rights and are included when seeking to achieve quorum. These positions, like any form of youth engagement, allow for increased perspectives to be shared at the table. They support the professional development of future leaders, create inclusive and accessible practices and ensure equitable engagement and policy development.

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## Youth, Committees and Administration

Organizations, whether political in nature or not, all vary in which departments may oversee the operation and function of youth committees or appointments. If the focus is to engage youth in development and planning, community services, transportation, or public works, you can align the terms of reference to work with these members of your administration and existing councils. Similarly, if you are searching for youth to take part in general discussions of the board, or partake in diversity, inclusion, or financial oversight of the board, these measures can be integrated into a policy or by-law of the board.

These relationships with administration or other members of Council or the board are crucial in helping youth understand the scope and potential of their power as individuals and as a collective. There ought to be clear measures and means of participation. Likewise, administrators are essential in identifying the policies, practices and topics that ought to be brought to an advisory committee for comment prior to an official recommendation to Council.

## Your Commitment to Youth

For many organizations, the thought of developing a new advisory committee may seem daunting or out of the question due to budget or staff restraints. What we would caution against is creating a youth council or advisory committee for the sake of having one. For young people, particularly millennials and Gen Z, they will share their time when there is a tangible difference to be made. We encourage organizations to take review the checklist below to see if you have the resources necessary to support a successful youth committee.

### An Organization Should be Able to Offer:

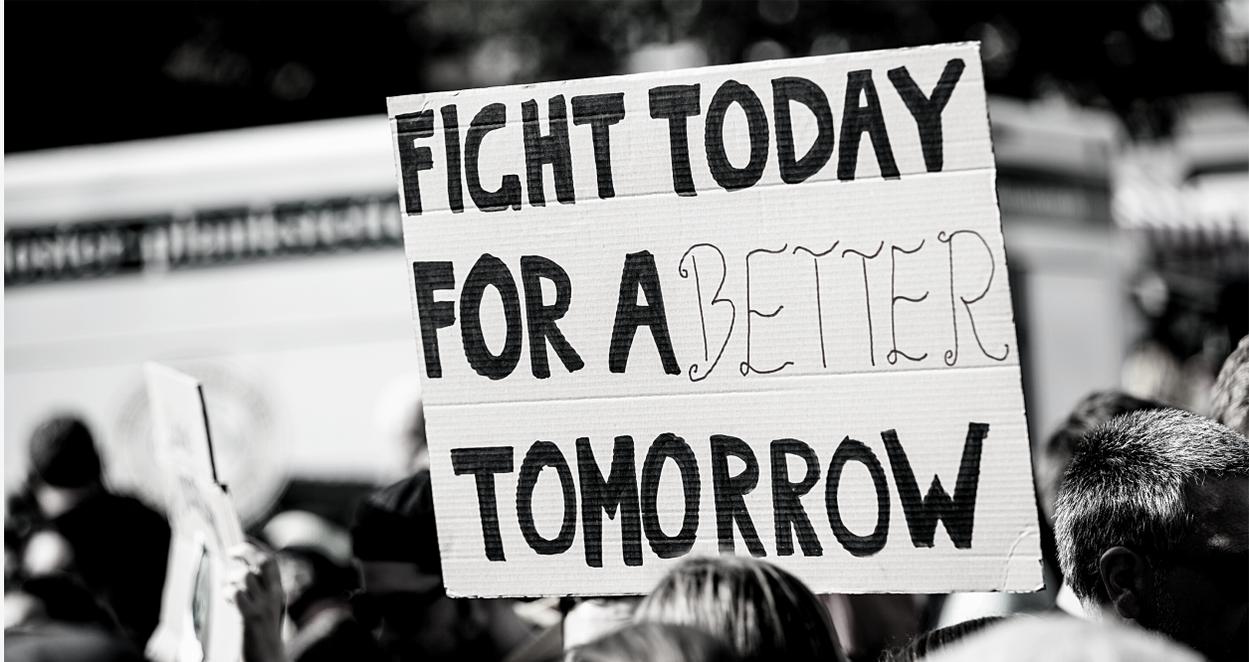
- A commitment to seeing youth as co-designers of your community's future
- A commitment to ensure credibility of thought and expression
- A commitment to a safe, flexible, welcoming and encouraging environment
- A commitment to sustainable recruitment and succession planning
- Support to recruit, retain, and train new members and administrative supports
- Support and time to schedule, attend and support meetings and initiatives
- Willingness to reach out for additional support and learning opportunities
- Willingness to research and discover best practices
- Financial contributions, if decided, to support ongoing initiatives

To get started, email the Youth Council Coalition of Canada [info@yccofcanada.com](mailto:info@yccofcanada.com)

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# Mobilizing Youth

Inspiration for community impact



Conversations with youth and their allies from across the Province have often been centred on one topic: engagement. From one side, governments at all levels are asking how to connect better with youth. Youth, in turn, want to be engaged meaningfully. They want a seat at the table, a vote that counts, and for their voices to be taken seriously.

The question is, where do we find each other? How do we meet each other half way?

This section provides inspiration for elected officials, administrators and youth on how to open the door for meaningful dialogue and partnership. We are inspired by actions of youth across Canada, and speak from a place of success.

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COLLECTIVELY.**

”  
**- CANADA'S YOUTH POLICY**

**Fun fact:** The Community Climate Council got its start after organizing a climate march in Brampton. Creating an opportunity for like-minded youth to get together often leads to great things!



## Stewardship Day

Ecological learning of natural areas within the community. Pair up with or join a local conservation authority to learn about plants, animals and any specific environmental issues faced by the conservation area/park in question.

**Impact: Youth will gain ecological knowledge and connect with natural spaces within their immediate environment.**



## Nature Centre Partnership

Pair up with a local nature centre to learn about plants, animals and any specific environmental issues faced by the conservation area or park in question.

**Impact: Youth will gain ecological knowledge and connect with natural spaces within their immediate environment while exploring careers in conservation.**



## Trivia Night

Host trivia game nights on various topics such as climate change literacy, biodiversity, sustainability, environmental racism etc. Invite students and community members alike to participate.

**Impact: Youth gain an opportunity to build an audience and network while having a fun learning experience.**



## Youth Eco Connect

Whether remotely, or in person, provide youth the opportunity to pitch project or policy ideas to local organizations, government bodies or climate change heroes.

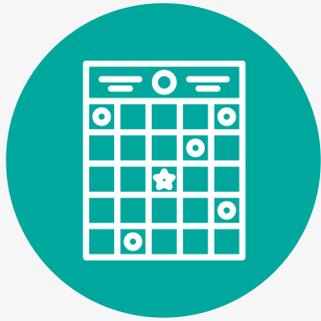
**Impact: Strengthens the local environmental community and creates opportunities for youth to work on projects with groups of similar or same interests.**



## Eco Art Show

Organize and collect artwork to display. While you may choose to offer challenges to use recycled or natural materials, there are opportunities to work with local arts councils, makers and organizations.

**Impact: Boost art expression and display youth talent**



## Climate Bingo

Create a Bingo sheet with activities to complete within a set period of time. Participants check off completed items as they go. Create a challenge by entering participants into a draw for eco-friendly prizes.

**Impact:** Youth learn more about individual environmental actions at home. If a one-day event, it connects like-minded individuals.



## Meet Your Council Day

Meet with Councillors for a round-table, panel or discussion about environmental changes the youth would like to see in their community.

**Impact:** Youth meet local politicians and create an environment where all feel comfortable engaging in productive discussion and debate,



## Webinars

Organize webinars on eco anxiety, climate literacy, climate justice and other topics of interest. Invite experts, community catalysts and decision-makers to the discussion for broad impact and input.

**Impact:** A collective learning space is created for all to explore new terminology, information and expression.



## Climate Doc Screening

Choose a movie to screen, or host a watch party, for peers. Make sure to schedule time after the movie to discuss its impact and any lasting impressions or inspiration.

**Impact:** Allows for engagement with climate media, as well as the inclusion of climate discussion into daily dialogue.



## Adopt-a-Park

Choose a park within the community and engage volunteers who can clean, maintain and learn about its native species. Be sure to consider how youth access this park. Is it accessible by foot or bike, or only by car?

**Impact:** Creates a greater connection with nature within the immediate neighbourhoods, as well as a sense of responsibility for green spaces in the community.

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# Communicating Your Perspective

## Strategies for effective communication



Today, there are many ways to connect with elected officials. So, whether you are engaging over a social media platform, e-mail, telephone or in person, we have put together a few tips and tricks.

**The advice and information that follows has been tested by our writers, as a Councillor, as previous delegates and as constant advocates within their respective communities.**

As you are likely aware, elected officials and political staffers are accessible online through email and social media. It is easy enough to send an email, tweet at someone, or drop a comment on social media. However, it is far more difficult to create a meaningful relationship that fosters great lines of communication.

Where social media is concerned, we want to help you avoid falling into the all-too-common pattern of only expressing your displeasure. Sure, calling someone out on poor decision-making or inappropriate behaviour seems to be the norm, especially because we assume that people in positions of power "should know better." And they should, most of the time. But it is always more beneficial to get ahead of a situation and to educate from your perspective and lived experience.

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## Questions to Ask Before You Hit Send or Post

### Is what you have to say...

#### ...necessary?

If you are emailing a member of Council or other elected official to ask a question or elicit a response, be clear and concise in your presentation. Be sure to clearly highlight the desired outcome. Raising a problem while also including a proposed solution or offer to discuss strategy will foster stronger relationships and more inclusive and positive conversations.

#### ...relevant?

Is the information you have included relevant to your ultimate goal and the ultimate goal of a Councillor? Make sure that what you are requesting is within the jurisdiction and power of a municipality, understanding whether the issue is dealt with at the lower or upper-tier in municipal government, or whether it may be best to reach out to your Member of Provincial Parliament or Member of Parliament.

#### ...kind?

Playing to the strengths of your elected officials is sure to keep a positive tone to the conversation, ensuring that no member of Council is put on the defensive. Remember, many Councillors are not voting along party lines and they are only one vote at the table. To achieve their intended goals, they need to reach a consensus that serves their residents well and responsibly.

## See something great in another community?

Tell your elected official why you think your idea or request is needed, and how you think it could apply to and improve your community. Remember, that though it is beneficial to point out what isn't working, offering a solution or desired outcome will ensure that the conversation is positive, open-ended and leaves room for your elected official to bring their perspective to the table.

## Is it within municipal jurisdiction?

It is important to know whether the issue at hand is dealt with at the lower or upper-tier in municipal government, or whether it may be best to reach out to your member of Provincial Parliament or Member of Parliament. Councillors, if informed, can support this information exchange to other levels of government on your behalf or alongside you. So, don't be discouraged if it seems you reached out to the wrong person as they may turn out to be your ally.

## Are you inspiring change?

Elected officials are supported and informed by experienced and knowledgeable administrators – be they engineers, planners, economic development officers or finance directors. While Councillors are responsible for understanding a wide range of issues, they are not experts in all things within the municipal jurisdiction. Be sure to inspire change, to enlighten where possible, and to support tangible change when presented with an opportunity.

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# Social Media Tips & Tricks



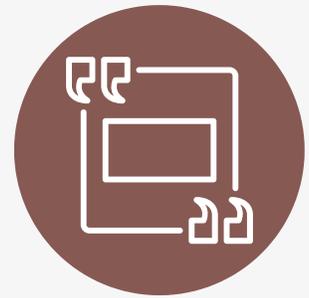
## Make It & Use It

Now more than ever, social media is a powerful tool to connect and grow your organization. Some tips for growing your account & reach include following non-climate groups in your area, posting regularly, and, if possible, trying to build a unique look or brand, so people recognize your work.

## Cite & Credit Your Information

Whether you're delegating at a council meeting or creating an Instagram resource post, it is essential to credit and cite where you're getting your sourcing your information. This is an important way to build your credibility as an organization.

**Tip:** Have a friend or volunteer review your post or presentation before you publish it to catch for areas where you could strengthen your arguments or need to add additional citations.



## Emphasize Your Climate Story

The most powerful tool in your climate action toolkit is your personal story and its influence over those around you. People connect with emotions and stories and not facts and statistics. Think about the last time your way of thinking changed, and what caused that? Use what brought you into this space and your feelings to guide your narrative when talking to people. As author James Clear says, "facts don't change our minds. Friendship does."

## Grow as You Go

Social media is a powerful way to gain connections, recruit new volunteers, and share your work with the world. Make sure your platforms include who you are, what you do, and how to find further information on your organization or ways to get in contact with you. A key volunteer position for any organization to have is someone to manage social media platforms to ensure your platforms are continually updated with news on your work.

**Tip:** The best way to grow your platform is to follow accounts of other local community organizations in your region or municipality.



