



PICS Special Report: What works and what doesn't for motivating people to act on climate change

A Special Report has been released by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) summarizing key findings of a unique cluster of Social Mobilization research projects, conducted in British Columbia (BC) during 2010 – 2014. This report explains “what works” and “what doesn’t work” in engaging the public and motivating people to act on climate change solutions.

The 7 research projects described in *A Synthesis of PICS-Funded Social Mobilization Research* explore innovative tools and multiple ways to engage and mobilize the public, connecting ordinary citizens to climate change issues, with a focus on reducing energy use and carbon footprints at the community scale. The report describes how engaging processes, social media and novel visual tools can be used to foster behaviour change, improve citizens’ learning about local climate change solutions, and enhance participation to meet carbon reduction targets. These findings can help inform BC’s future course on climate action and policy.

The report, prepared by the Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP) at the University of British Columbia (UBC), addresses the reality that, despite BC’s legislated greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets of 80% below 2007 levels by year 2050, climate change action and policy are still not “on the radar” for most citizens.

The report provides a range of recommendations for governments, third party intervenors (such as NGOs), and community-led groups on effectively mobilizing communities on climate change. These recommendations emphasize: (a) the importance of multiple social engagement methods; (b) the power of digital, visual and social media; (c) benefits of collective action at neighbourhood scale; and (d) the need for coordinated top-down/ bottom-up action between citizens and government.



3,000 British Columbians directly participated in these seven social mobilization projects



Our Social Mobilization research projects:

1. **The Good Life, The Green Life** – led by Shannon Daub, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA-BC)
2. **From Communities of Interest to Communities of Practice: Digital Media as Catalysts for Climate Action campaigns** – led by Dr. Maged Senbel, UBC
3. **Meeting the Climate Change Challenge (MC3)** – led by Dr. Ann Dale, Royal Roads University
4. **Greenest City Conversations Project (GCCP)** – led by Dr. John Robinson, UBC
5. **Measured visualizations as catalysts for mobilization: A prototype for public engagement in municipal planning for climate change** – led by Ronald Kellett, UBC
6. **Understanding the public uptake and acceptance of a municipal green energy incentive program** – led by Dr. Christopher Ling, Royal Roads University
7. **Illustrated Community Energy Guide/Community Energy Explorer** – led by Dr. Stephen Sheppard, UBC

Social mobilization means – engagement and motivation of the public and stakeholders to implement climate solutions, through social learning, social movements, behaviour change, community action and policy change.

Outcomes of the research projects included:

- Significant reductions in energy use and carbon emissions.
- Success in reaching beyond the 'usual suspects' to involve the 'silent majority'.
- Success in increasing the public's knowledge and awareness of local climate change issues.
- Improved citizen motivation and capacity to act on climate change or energy issues.
- Effective community engagement, stimulating new dialogues, relationships, and fun activities.

WHAT WORKS IN MOBILIZING THE PUBLIC ON CLIMATE CHANGE:

- Inviting community-members to contribute their knowledge and get 'hands-on' in problem solving.
- Building & maintaining trust with all partners involved.
- Specifically addressing people's concerns, values, questions, & ideas.
- Focusing on solutions & emphasizing co-benefits.
- Exploring future options and scenarios.
- Building public literacy on climate change issues & energy solutions.
- Engaging with target audiences on their turf, using media/channels/spokespeople they already know.
- Making the process fun, social, active, and visible, e.g. competitions, creative activities.
- Using multiple tools & channels for engaging stakeholders (e.g. social & digital media, interactive workshops).
- Making information local, immediate & tangible.
- Using compelling, interactive visual learning tools that attract attention and stay in people's minds.
- Providing regular feedback and mediation to contributors in social media exchanges on planning issues.

Governments should:

- Identify and support climate champions and grassroots groups in the community.
- Develop training programs to embed innovative practices in real-world planning and capacity building projects.
- Provide stable, long-term and simple-to-understand financial incentives for energy improvements.
- Reintroduce climate change to high school curricula.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK IN MOBILIZING THE PUBLIC ON CLIMATE CHANGE:

- Providing scientific or policy information on climate change without making it relevant and relatable to people's lives.
- Top-down government energy programs, even with funding incentives, without early involvement, lead-up and community buy-in.
- Expecting typical citizens to come to public presentations and meetings in large numbers.
- Letting people think they are on their own in doing something about climate change.
- Too much 'doom and gloom', and not enough fun, positive solutions and opportunities
- Lack of accessible & simple information.
- Lack of visibility of positive actions
- Uncertainty on incentive programs

NGOs/community groups should:

- work in discrete geographic areas (eg. block scale) with interested neighbours, where activities are highly visible.
- experiment with 'do-it-yourself' visual media to attract attention, provoke discussion, and spread ideas
- form local buyers' clubs to get discounts on building retrofit supplies

For a copy of the report please visit [PICS' website](#) or contact: Deepti Mathew Iype at CALP: Email: deepti.mathewiype@ubc.ca

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