



# University of Victoria Student Survey 2019

**CLIMATE SOLUTIONS ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:  
SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
Background.....	1
Survey and Respondent Details.....	1
Key Findings.....	3
Summary and Recommendations.....	4
APPENDIX A: Survey Responses.....	5

*This survey was written, conducted, and analyzed on the University of Victoria campus, as was this report. We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.*

## Executive Summary

In the fall of 2019, the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) and the University of Victoria Sustainability Project (UVSP) partnered to examine student perspectives on climate solutions and sustainability issues at the University of Victoria (UVic). The survey was completed by 402 students – just under 2% of the student body - from a range of different departments on campus, though the largest numbers of respondents came from undergraduate programs in the faculties of Social Sciences, Engineering and Science.

This document summarizes key opportunities and challenges gleaned from the survey, with specific consideration given to how they pertain to the PICS mandate and Strategic Plan for 2017-2021.

### Opportunities

There is significant need for, and interest in, the creation of further learning opportunities around climate change and climate solutions at UVic

- Most students (**69%**) do not consider themselves ‘very well informed’ on the topic of climate change
- **79%** of students who are not ‘very well informed’ on climate change would be interested in further opportunities for learning and engagement around climate change and climate solutions
- Most students (**76%**) are not currently involved in climate solutions or sustainability activities on campus

There is a high level of interest in engagement opportunities that align with PICS’ mandate and focus on non-partisan research, knowledge transfer and development activities

- In terms of events, **74%** of respondents were most interested in learning and knowledge opportunities such as lectures
  - Significant interest in interactive workshops (**57%**) and research mentoring and skill development (**52%**) was also reported by those surveyed

### Challenges

Many students feel that the promotion and communication of current climate solutions engagement opportunities is inadequate and that this is a barrier to greater involvement

- Only **5%** of respondents ‘strongly agree’ that it is easy to find information about climate solutions and sustainability initiatives on campus, with **47%** of respondents indicating they ‘do not know how to get involved’

Students expressed concern that existing opportunities for engagement are not accessible to the entire student body, and target a small demographic<sup>1</sup>

- Some students feel that existing opportunities for engagement on campus do not target all departments equally in their promotion and/or their content, and would like to see more outreach to departments that are not seen as having an explicit environmental focus
- Some students feel that existing opportunities for engagement are not accessible, as these students perceive them as intimidating or requiring a high level of existing knowledge about climate solutions and sustainability initiatives

Most students (78%) indicated that being ‘too busy to attend’ climate solutions and sustainability events is a barrier to their participation

### Recommendations

Our results suggest that most students at the University of Victoria are not currently involved in climate-related activities on campus. Significant opportunities exist to better engage students in a broad range of event types and development opportunities. Despite high levels of interest within the student body, student workloads and demanding schedules are significant barriers to participation which need to be considered, along with inadequate communication and outreach about existing engagement opportunities. Those working to facilitate knowledge exchange and learning at the University of Victoria could also benefit from increased outreach to underserved parts of the campus community, and aggregating event promotion in a centralized and accessible resource.

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<sup>1</sup>These results were derived from the open-ended questions in the survey and are therefore qualitative rather than quantitative.

## Background

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) is an independent, leading research institute based at the University of Victoria, and delivered in partnership with British Columbia's other three research intensive universities – the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and the University of Northern British Columbia. PICS convenes and connects multidisciplinary partners and perspectives from across academia, government, the private sector, and local communities to develop impactful, evidence-based climate change solutions.

In 2019, PICS initiated the new PICS UVic program to support faculty, students and staff on climate solutions at the University of Victoria. As part of this effort, we partnered with the University of Victoria Sustainability Project (UVSP) on a campus-wide survey to explore student perspectives on climate solutions and sustainability issues at UVic. The survey had the following objectives:

1. To take stock of current engagement opportunities around climate solutions and sustainability on campus, and how students feel about them
2. To assess opportunities for improved climate solutions engagement and events programming targeting students at the University of Victoria
3. To connect with students from the University of Victoria and explore options for further engagement with this group in the future

This report summarizes the findings of the survey in the context of the objectives above. Given PICS' explicit focus on climate solutions, the report focuses on climate-related questions and thus does not include responses specific only to the UVSP. Detailed findings of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

## Survey and Respondent Details

The survey was conducted between November 26<sup>th</sup> to December 8<sup>th</sup> 2019 using the SurveyMonkey online service and distributed through departmental and UVSS listservs and social media channels. The survey included both multiple choice and open-ended questions formulated by PICS and the UVSP.

Just under 2% of the student body, or 402 University of Victoria students completed the survey. The proportion of graduate versus undergraduate respondents was roughly comparable to the entire student body population (14.2% of registered students are graduate students, based off of 2019/20 enrolment statistics<sup>2</sup>). Students at all stages of their degree responded to the survey, with a fairly even distribution between those in their first to fourth years of study.

Level of Study	Respondents
Undergraduate	79.54% (206)
Graduate	18.53% (48)
Prefer not to say	1.93% (5)

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<sup>2</sup> University of Victoria. (2020). *Facts and reports*. UVic.Ca. Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.uvic.ca/home/about/facts-reports/index.php>

The majority of students who participated in the survey are registered in the Faculty of Social Science, Faculty of Engineering, or Faculty of Science. These results should not be used to interpret the level of interest in the survey's subject matter in each faculty, but is likely more indicative of which individual departments and faculties distributed the survey to their students via social media and email listservs.

Faculty	Percent of Respondents
Social Science	31.13% (94)
Engineering	23.84% (72)
Science	19.21% (58)
Humanities	11.59% (35)
Law	11.26% (34)
Human and Social Development	5.30% (16)
Fine Arts	3.64% (11)
Education	0.99% (3)
Interdisciplinary/Undeclared	0.99% (3)
Business	0.33% (1)

*Note: results do not add up to 100% due to students with minors and double majors.*

## Key Findings

### **Goal 1: Understand the state of engagement opportunities around climate solutions and sustainability on campus, and how students feel about them**

Most students feel underinformed on the topic of climate change

- 272 students or **69%** do not self-identify as ‘very well informed’ on the topic of climate change

Most students are not currently involved in climate solutions and sustainability activities on campus

- **76% of respondents are not currently involved** as a volunteer, participant, or organizer, etc. in activities on or off campus aimed at mobilizing climate solutions or sustainability initiatives

There is significant interest in the creation of further learning opportunities around climate change and climate solutions

- Only **10% of respondents ‘strongly agree’** that that sufficient opportunities exist for student engagement and collaboration on climate solutions and sustainability initiatives on campus
- Of the students who do not self-identify as ‘very well informed’ on the topic of climate change (69% of respondents), **79% responded that they would be interested in the creation of more opportunities at UVic** to learn about climate change and the solutions to this challenge.

Many students feel there that promotion and communication around climate solutions and sustainability engagement needs to be improved, and that a centralized source of information about such opportunities would be beneficial and increase the likelihood of their participation

- Only **5% of respondents ‘strongly agree’** that it is easy to find information about different on-campus events, organizing initiatives, and research that focus on climate solutions and sustainability initiatives
- **47%** of respondents selected **‘I don’t know how to get involved’** as a barrier to their involvement in activities relating to climate solutions and sustainability initiatives
- A number of open-ended responses suggested that many students do not know where to find information about events, research, and initiatives on campus, and that a **central source of information** on climate focused programming would be helpful

The open-ended questions also revealed a few additional themes. Students noted that existing opportunities for engagement are not accessible to the entire student body, and often target a small demographic

- Many students feel that **existing opportunities for engagement on campus do not target all faculties and departments** in their promotion and/or their content, and would like to see more outreach to departments that are not perceived as having an explicit environmental focus
- Some students feel that **existing opportunities for engagement are not accessible**, as these students perceive them as intimidating or requiring a high level of existing knowledge about climate solutions and sustainability initiatives
- Some students also highlighted **other accessibility barriers**, such as a lack of physical accessibility and other accommodations at events, or the perceived whiteness and Western focus of existing initiatives and programming

Most students see lack of free time as a barrier to participation

- **78% of respondents identified being ‘too busy to attend’** as a barrier that prevents them from engaging in activities related to climate solutions

## **Goal 2: Assess opportunities for improved climate solutions engagement and events programming targeting students at the University of Victoria**

Students are interested in participating in a variety of event formats that vary in style, focus and intended outcome

- **74%** of respondents indicated an interest in learning and knowledge opportunities
- **59%** of respondents indicated an interest in direct action and protest
- **52%** of respondents indicated an interest in climate research mentoring and skill building

Most students who are currently involved in sustainability initiatives and climate related initiatives do so through direct action or partisan activities, or through ecological restoration focused events and groups

- Of the 79 respondents who indicated they are currently involved (as a volunteer, participant, or organizer, etc.) in activities on or off campus aimed at sustainability initiatives or mobilizing climate solutions:
  - **29%** of respondents indicated they had participated in direct actions (e.g. climate strikes, Rise and Resist)
  - **20%** of respondents indicated they had participated in programming involving ecological restoration, habitation reclamation, and invasive species removal (e.g. the Ecological Restoration Volunteer Network, Surfrider Foundation, Greater Victoria Green Team)
  - **19%** of respondents specifically mentioned involvement with Divest UVic campaigns or attendance at Divest events

## **Goal 3: To connect with students from the University of Victoria and explore options for further engagement with this group in the future**

- **68%** of respondents indicated they had **not** heard of PICS before taking the survey
- 190 respondents indicated that they would like to be contacted by PICS or the UVSP about future events and initiatives
- 101 respondents indicated that they would be interested in volunteering with PICS or the UVSP to help organize future events

## **Summary and Recommendations**

There is significant interest in the creation of more events and programming at the University of Victoria that address climate change and the solutions to this challenge. There is considerable untapped potential for PICS and other climate solutions programs and initiatives at the University of Victoria to respond.

A particular opportunity suggested by this survey is to augment or complement existing initiatives with additional learning and knowledge opportunities, interactive programming such as workshops, and mentorship and skill building opportunities. Further, respondents also emphasized the need to offer engagement opportunities that appeal to different campus demographics with varying prior knowledge levels and skill sets. As one of multiple groups with students' interests at heart at the University of Victoria, PICS' collaborative, interdisciplinary approach makes it well situated to provide such programming to the student body.

The survey also points to a few areas of caution in planning student engagement and highlights that there are significant barriers that may not be addressed simply through the creation of more engagement opportunities. Current student participation in climate focused initiatives is low, with a lack of free time emphasized as the main barrier to participation. Furthermore, the lack of centralized promotion and communication about events and programming was repeatedly emphasized as an issue at the University of Victoria. Consideration should be given as to how improved communication can be facilitated about both existing and new programming and initiatives by PICS and others at the University of Victoria.

## APPENDIX A: Survey Responses

Students were asked if they had heard of the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions prior to participating in the survey:

- 67.91% (254 respondents) responded that they had not heard of PICS prior to participating in the survey

When asked how well informed the students believed themselves to be on the topic of climate change:

- 59.90% (236 respondents) of respondents identify as ‘fairly well informed’ about climate change
- 30.96% (122 respondents) of respondents selected ‘very well informed’
- 8.88% (35 respondents) selected ‘not very well informed’
- 0.25% (one respondent) identified as ‘not informed at all’ about climate change.

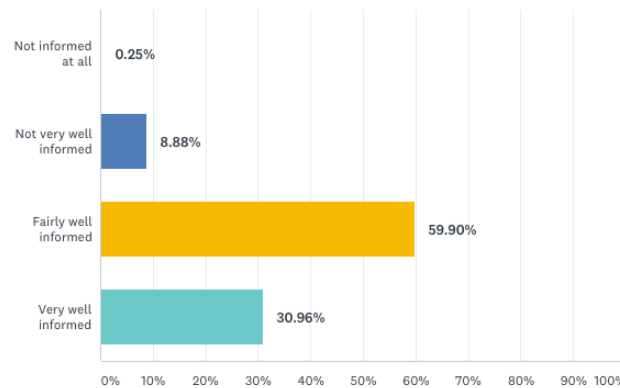


Figure 1: How well informed do you believe that you are on the topic of climate change?

Students who did not identify as ‘very well informed’ about climate change (69.04% of respondents) were then asked if they would be interested in the creation of more opportunities at the University of Victoria to learn about climate change and climate solutions:

- 79.08% (223 respondents) then responded that they would be interested in the creation of more opportunities UVic to learn about climate change and the solutions to this challenge.
- 15.60% (44 respondents) believe that existing learning and engagement opportunities are sufficient
- 5.32% (respondents) are not interested in learning more, or don’t find it relevant to their studies, even though they don’t feel well informed on the topic.

Asked if they believe that there are enough opportunities for student engagement and collaboration on climate solutions and sustainability initiatives on campus, student responded:

- 9.64% (38 respondents) strongly agree
- 35.03% (138 respondents) somewhat agree
- 33.76% (133 respondents) somewhat disagree
- 11.93% (47 respondents) strongly disagree
- 9.64% (38 respondents) were unsure/had no opinion



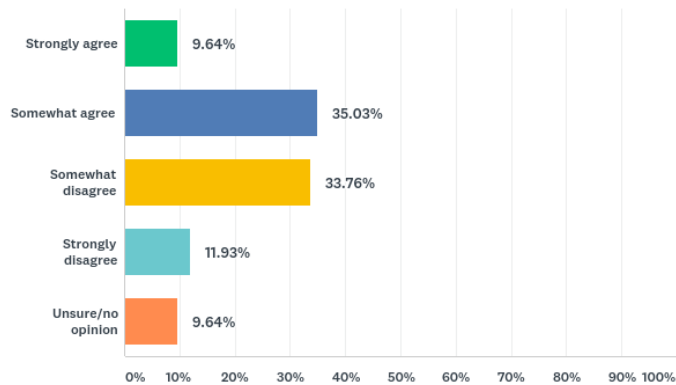


Figure 2: I believe that there are enough opportunities for student engagement and collaboration on climate solutions and sustainability initiatives on campus

**Students were then asked if they think it is easy to find information about different on-campus events, organizing initiatives, and research that focus on climate solutions and sustainability initiatives:**

- **5.35%** (20 respondents) strongly agree
- **34.49%** (129 respondents) somewhat agree
- **38.50%** (144 respondents) somewhat disagree
- **12.83%** (48 respondents) strongly disagree
- **8.82%** (33 respondents) were unsure/had no opinion

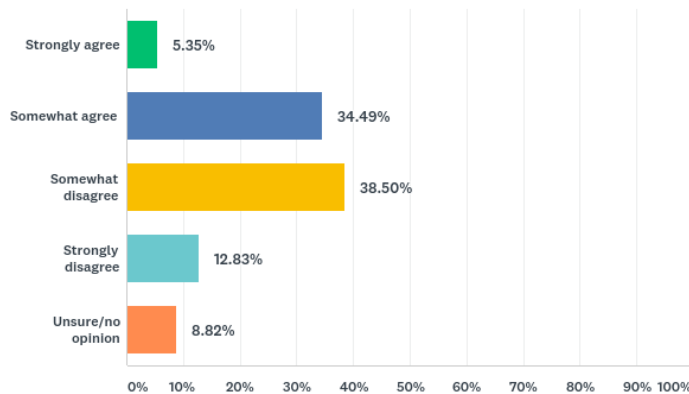


Figure 3: I think it is easy to find information about different on-campus events, organizing initiatives, and research that focus on climate solutions and sustainability initiatives

Students who agreed with the above statement (159 respondents) were then asked what resources they use to find out about these events, campaign and research initiatives. Students were given a text box in which to respond and their responses have been grouped according to common themes:

- **61.76%** (84 respondents) rely on social media
- **35.29%** (48 respondents) use physical advertisements (posters, message boards, hallway tabling)
- **24.26%** (33 respondents) use email correspondence and listservs
- **14.71%** (20 respondents) use the University of Victoria website and events calendar
- **12.50%** (17 respondents) rely on word of mouth

- **11.76%** (16 respondents) rely on correspondence from clubs they belong to or receive communications from
- **10.29%** (14 respondents) rely on correspondence from the UVSS or information found in the Student Union Building
- **5.88%** (8 respondents) use in-class announcements and promotion
- **5.15%** (7 respondents) provided unrelated answers

*Within their responses, nine students (unprompted) highlighted that they think finding information about events at the University of Victoria is difficult, and/or that a centralized information source for events, initiatives, programming, and research about climate solutions and sustainability initiatives would be helpful.*

### Students were then asked to indicate what kind of climate solutions focused events they would be interested in participating in:

- **73.64%** (271 respondents) are interested in learning and knowledge opportunities (e.g. guest lectures, PechaKuchas, etc.)
- **58.70%** (216 respondents) are interested in direct action and protest (e.g. Climate Strikes)
- **57.34%** (211 respondents) are interested in interactive programming (e.g. skill building workshops)
- **56.52%** (208 respondents) are interested in career and professional development opportunities
- **51.63%** (190 respondents) are interested in climate research mentoring and skill building
- **47.83%** (176 respondents) are interested in networking and social opportunities
- **8.97%** (33 respondents) selected 'Other', and of those, 18 provided responses relevant to the question.
  - **5 respondents:** learning about lifestyle changes that can reduce their individual carbon footprint.
  - **3 respondents:** programming involving ecological restoration
  - **3 respondents:** programming that addressing climate anxiety and community burnout through more “hopeful” approaches to climate solutions
  - **2 respondents:** event programming that is accessible to off-campus student through online programming or live webcasting.
  - **2 respondents:** programming that integrates and highlights Indigenous knowledge and leadership

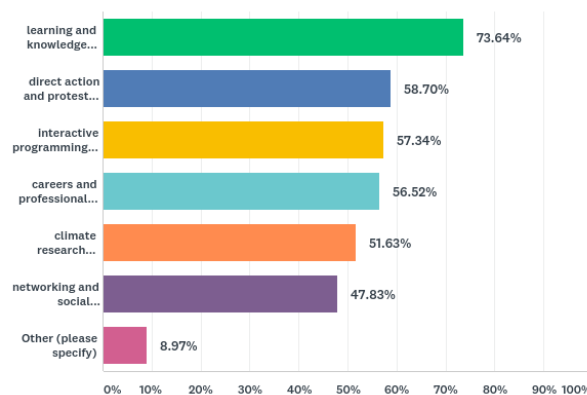


Figure 4: I'm interested in participating in climate solutions focused events that include (select all options that apply)

**Respondents were asked if they are involved (as a volunteer, participant or organizer, etc.) in activities on or off campus aimed at sustainability initiatives or mobilizing climate solutions:**

- 76.42% (256) of respondents are **not** currently involved with on or off campus activities

The 79 respondents who indicated that they are involved in activities on or off campus aimed at sustainability initiatives or mobilizing climate solutions were then asked to elaborate on what group(s) they are involved with, and what kind of events and programming this group currently offers (providing examples where possible):

There was a large amount of variation among respondents, with some students indicating involvement with multiple organizations and clubs, while others indicated they engage with a singular group, or participate in occasional events (such as climate strikes or clothing swaps). The majority of respondents explicitly indicated they participate in existing events and groups but are not directly involved with organizing said initiatives.

- **29.11%** of respondents indicated they had participated in direct actions (e.g. climate strikes, Divest UVic, Rise and Resist)
- **20.25%** of respondents indicated they had participated in programming involving ecological restoration, habitation reclamation, and invasive species removal (e.g. the Ecological Restoration Volunteer Network, Surfrider Foundation, Greater Victoria Green Team)
- **18.99%** of respondents specifically mentioned involvement with Divest UVic campaigns and events
- **10.13%** of respondents indicated involvement with the Campus Community Garden and/or Community Cabbage
- Other groups and organizations which multiple students indicated involvement with include: The UVic Environmental Law Club, The UVic Residence Green Team, and the Environmental Studies and Geography course unions

**Respondents were asked what gaps they see in terms of approach, target audiences, or accessibility within existing programming and events on campus that focus on climate solutions:**

- **27.69%** of respondents noted that there is a lack of promotion and outreach regarding existing events, or existing promotional materials are difficult to find
  - “I’m unaware of any events because of lack of marketing of the events”
  - “I don’t know that I have seen a whole lot of events focused completely on climate solutions. This may be a marketing issue or that there aren’t as many events as there are for sustainability”
- **18.67%** of respondents feel that existing opportunities for engagement only target a small demographic and focus mainly on departments and individuals who are engaged with environmental issues (e.g. environmental Studies, biology, geography). Other students noted other demographics that they think existing initiatives fail to engage: non-Western ways of knowing/Indigenous perspectives, mature students, off-campus students, non-partisan interests
  - “I feel that most existing initiatives are targeted to students who are heavily engaged and passionate towards environmentalism, and do not appeal to those who are not as informed.”
  - “Lots of emphasis on ES, GEOG, eos and bio students.... less so in other departments”
  - “This is an echo chamber; issue is targeting non-motivated persons or fence-sitters.”
- **13.85%** of respondents suggested that campus initiatives relating to climate solutions should target the administration and advocate for systemic change, rather than focus on the student level
  - “not enough systematic change- i feel like the university as an institution has prioritized profit over environmental sustainability by investing in fossil fuels, not making buildings on campus

more sustainable, and generally participating in the creation of tons of waste. I think it's hard for any educational events on campus to feel like they're actually doing much when the university itself is not stepping up."

- "UVic itself could do more but I'd prefer to delegate to them to do what's best and hold them accountable rather than taking it on myself"
- **11.25%** of respondents feel that existing opportunities for engagement are actively exclusionary or intimidating because of a perceived expectation of prior knowledge or a specific partisan positionality, or are inaccessible for other reasons, including: lack of physical accessibility, lack of non-white participants
  - "Gatekeeping, exclusionary language, an expectation of prior knowledge that might deter folks just starting to learn. Also accessibility is often forgotten, and events lack chairs, room for mobility devices, or appropriate signage."
  - "The radicalization of the groups promoting solutions on campus. Advocating for immediate and direct action is important, but I find the Divestment movement discourages people from participating. I feel like it sets the precedent that you have to be radically involved or you're part of the problem."
- Students noted other gaps in existing programming and initiatives, including: a lack of Indigenous perspectives, events conflicting with class time/busy schedules, a lack of class content related to climate solutions, few research focused events/opportunities to learn about climate research and solutions

### **Students were then asked what suggestions they have for event and campaign organizers to address these gaps:**

Many of the 162 responses echo the gaps that students identified in the perceive question regarding approach, target audiences, or accessibility within existing programming and events on campus that focus on climate solutions. Common themes within responses to this question were:

- Improve communication and outreach strategies to increase student awareness of, and participation in, events and initiatives
- Make events more accessible (both through improved physical accessibility, and offering low-barrier opportunities for engagement that appeal to different campus demographics with varying prior knowledge levels and skill sets)
- Increase university support (through increased funding and administrative support and/or taking more action as an institution)
- Increase cross-faculty collaboration (at both the student and faculty level)

### **Respondents were asked barriers what barriers they experience that might prevent them from engaging in activities relating to climate solutions and sustainability initiatives:**

- 77.82% of respondents indicated they are too busy to attend
- 46.30% of respondents indicated they do not know how to get involved
- 13.23% of respondents indicated they do not find existing activities accessible
- 12.06% of respondents indicated that existing activities are not of interest to them
- 3.50% of respondents indicated they are not interested in activities related to climate solutions and sustainability
- *11.67% of respondents selected 'Other', but the majority of their individual responses aligned with options presented above, but with more detail provided*

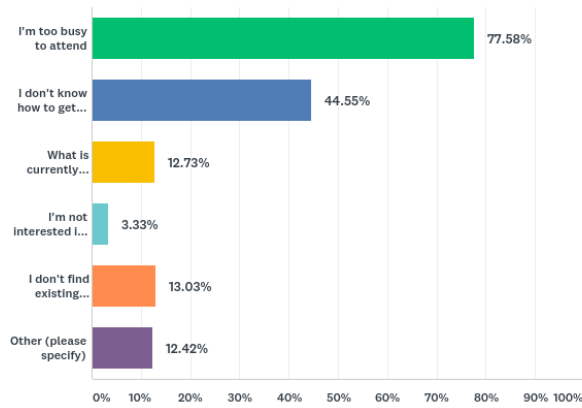


Figure 5: What barriers do you experience that might prevent you from engaging in activities relating to climate solutions and sustainability initiatives?



# PICS

PACIFIC INSTITUTE  
FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

PICS would like to acknowledge the work of Elora Adamson (University of Victoria Sustainability Project) for her assistance in the creation, distribution, and analysis of this survey.

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