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What works—and what doesn't—for engaging people on climate change

A special report analyzing what works—and what doesn't—for motivating people to take action on climate change has been released today by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS).

The report, prepared by the Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP) at the University of British Columbia, summarizes key findings from seven PICS-supported social mobilization research projects conducted in British Columbia between 2010 and 2014. Social mobilization in this context means engaging and motivating the public and stakeholders to implement climate solutions through behaviour change, community or social action, and through policy change.

CALP director and report co-author Stephen Sheppard says despite BC having legislated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions targets of 80 per cent below 2007 levels by 2050, the reality is that climate change action and policy are still not “on the radar” for most citizens.

He says the seven projects tested different approaches and tools to directly engage with around 3,000 British Columbians, including workshops, social media, a locally produced film, and innovative digital media including games that allow participants to visualize how low-carbon neighbourhoods and homes would look and function. Some of these tools will be on show at the [Renewable Cities Forum](#) in Vancouver tomorrow (Friday, May 15).

“Several of these projects were very successful in raising awareness and reaching ‘the silent majority’ who are not typically involved in climate action, while some achieved significant energy use reductions among participants enthusiastic about reducing their carbon footprint,” Sheppard says. “Making information relatable and accessible to your target audience and getting community buy-in are essential first steps. Making the social activities fun and practical also helps.”

The report provides a range of recommendations—and pitfalls to avoid—for governments, NGOs, scientists and grassroots campaigns that want to mobilize communities effectively on climate change. Overall the 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.

PICS executive director Tom Pedersen says this new report helps bridge the gap between those offering a climate solution and those whose participation will make it a reality.

“The question of what motivates people to take action on climate change is a complex one, but 50-plus years of scientific evidence that humans are changing Earth’s climate clearly isn’t incentive enough,” he says. “Encouraging people to wean themselves off fossil fuels requires effective communication strategies and outreach methods, backed by clean energy alternatives that are both convenient and cost-effective.”

The [full report](#) is on the PICS website, and as well as a [two-page summary](#) of key recommendations.

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