Community Engagement for Climate Change Adaptation

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Introduction

Some communities are particularly exposed to climate change impacts such as sea level rise or flooding. Adaptation — physical and societal adjustments — will be needed to respond to actual and anticipated impacts.[1] Academic studies and New Zealand's national guidance both suggest that outcomes are improved for affected communities, as well as for councils, when they work together closely to understand the implications, co-develop plans and undertake agreed actions for adaptation.[2] This requires effective community engagement, whereby local authorities develop active and effective relationships with their communities.[3]

This summary of best practice and relevant academic research was commissioned to help inform the South Dunedin Future programme, a joint initiative between Dunedin City Council and Otago Regional Council to develop climate change adaptation options for South Dunedin.

We outline principles and practices for community engagement that are particularly relevant to climate change adaptation. Part 1 summarises scholarly work on community engagement in climate change adaptation. Part 2 identifies key principles for engagement. Part 3 describes a selection of engagement tools. At the end are references and links to further information.

The development of relationships with mana whenua is not covered here, as this will require different approaches and processes shaped by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the specific local partnerships between mana whenua and councils.

Part 1: Community engagement for climate adaptation

A fundamental requirement for effective adaptation is for councils to work together with the community to solve problems and build social cohesion.[4] Long term council-community relationships are essential as climate change impacts will keep evolving.[5] If care is not taken, existing issues such as inequalities may be perpetuated or worsened by climate change and/or by adaptation actions. Effective engagement can mitigate such injustices and have positive flow-on effects, with many benefits for both for the community and the local authority.[6] Poor engagement (or lack of engagement) brings risks of alienating the community and producing inappropriate adaptation plans.

Table 1: Benefits of effective engagement

Benefits for Community	Benefits for Councils	Benefits for Communities and Councils
Enabling social learning	Helping solve complex problems	Improved policies and services
Supporting active citizenship	Engendering community ownership of decisions and project outcomes	Increased legitimacy of decision-making
Incorporating local knowledge and values into decision-making	Reducing objections and the likelihood of litigation	Ensuring planning and decision-making is responsive to local concerns and issues
Providing those with little voice in society to be heard	Measuring progress more effectively	Building relationships of trust and understanding
Enhancing a sense of community and belonging	Building staff skills	Helping create an inclusive society

Principles for effective community engagement are underpinned by these established theories and frameworks:

Table 2: Academic concepts that inform engagement for climate adaptation

Deliberative democratic theory	Climate Justice	Community Based Adaptation	Tools and frameworks for participation
Basic message			
Strive for equality, inclusiveness and open debate in order to arrive at 'good' decisions. May include collaborative governance and consensus-based decision making.	The causes and direct impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed globally and locally. Climate impacts and adaptation responses can worsen existing injustices.	Top-down approaches can have maladaptive outcomes for communities. Community-led development ensures community wellbeing is at the heart of adaptation responses.	Different engagement tools achieve different levels of participation. Engagement tools should align with purpose of the project.
Key ideas			
Enable equal access to participation; use diverse engagement tools for community input, discussion and debate; include diverse views and participants; equalise power imbalances; ensure transparency and accountability.	Climate justice incorporates five key dimensions of justice: rights, responsibilities, distribution, procedures, recognition.	Adaptation initiatives should be community-led and place-specific. The at-risk community is the focus of analysis and action. Local knowledge and expertise are valued.	Tools must be fit for purpose. E.g. the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has a 'spectrum' to distinguish between methods that inform, consult, involve, collaborate, or empower.
Relevance to engaging for adaptation			
Adaptation must be place- and context-specific, which means developing a unique approach that reflects the needs of that community. Collaboration, collective learning, and inclusive and diverse participation are needed to determine adaptation pathways. Pay attention to who is present at engagement processes, who speaks, and what is in scope.	Community engagement will help decision-makers to identify the equity implications of climate impacts and adaptation responses. While community engagement is a 'process' it is shaped by and has implications for other dimensions of climate justice.	Those who are affected should have a major voice in deciding how to respond. Engagement should centre local knowledge and experiences. Achieving community wellbeing may mean focusing on more than just climate adaptation; existing needs and inequities may also need to be addressed.	IAP2 offers ways to conceptualise the scope, intention, and appropriateness of engagement tools at different moments.
Further Information (see References for links)			
Bächtiger, Dryzek, Mansbridge, & Warren, 2018; Bond 2011; Bond and Thompson-Fawcett 2007; Forester, 1999; Lafont, 2017.	Bulkeley, Edwards, and Fuller (2014); Schlosberg and Collins (2014)	Archer et al., 2014; Ayers & Forsyth, 2009; Forsyth, 2013; Kirkby, Williams, & Huq, 2018; McNamara & Buggy, 2017; Stephenson et al 2020; Susskind & Kim, 2022; Wiseman, Williamson, & Fritze, 2010.	IAP2 Core Values and Spectrum; Good Practice Participate (NZ); The Policy Project (NZ).

Part 2: Principles for effective community engagement

There isn't a single 'best' engagement approach. Every community and every context are different. Climate change impacts will be complex, uncertain, ever-evolving, and locally specific. How to engage on these issues will need to be shaped by the community's characteristics, needs, social dynamics, and local history. A principles based approach allows for the necessary flexibility and responsiveness. The principles in Table 3 have been derived from the academic theories and practical guides on effective community engagement listed in the bottom row of Table 2.

Table 3: Principles for effective community engagement

	Principle	Examples of applying the principle
✓	**Enabling community readiness for engagement**	Supporting and enabling communities to build relationships within them, share information, have conversations, and understand themselves, particularly those most vulnerable.
✓	**Develop council-community relationships that are grounded in trust, reciprocity and care**	Genuine and meaningful engagement. A caring response to community needs. Open and transparent interactions. Deliver on promises and commitments.
✓	**Understand the problem and context before starting to develop solutions**	Engage with the community as early as possible, prior to any plans being developed. Use community engagement to help determine the scope of the issues and the range of potential actions needed.
✓	**Utilise existing networks and relationships**	Get to know how the community is comprised, and how and where people come together. Reach out to existing groups and networks to start the engagement process.
✓	**Prioritise clear communication on expectations and processes**	Establish clear expectations within council and community. Plan and prepare for engagement, including having people with appropriate skills in key roles. Give early notice of any changes or developments.
✓	**Use a variety of engagement tools to suit different contexts, goals, groups of people and timeframes**	Develop a 'toolkit' of engagement methods suited to different purposes, groups and timeframes. Engage for the long term as well as in concentrated bursts. Be responsive and flexible, and change methods where necessary. Engagement is a two-way process; it can be led by the community.
✓	**Recognise and seek to minimise existing injustices**	Be inclusive, and ensure engagement reflects the diversity within the community. Design engagement processes and adaptation solutions that deliver just outcomes.
✓	**Value local knowledge, experiences and expertise**	Draw on local knowledge, including stories, experiences, and emotions, to develop adaptation responses.
✓	**Recognise that the community can benefit from good engagement processes as well as from collaboratively designed adaptation solutions**	Select engagement tools that suit the participants and the goals. Use engagement methods that encourage collaboration, learning and creativity.

Part 3: Tools for community engagement

There are many community engagement tools, each with strengths, weaknesses and varied relevance to different contexts and purposes. Table 4 over the page provides some examples of common engagement tools, grouped according to the IAP2 spectrum of the different purposes of engagement.[7] In Aotearoa New Zealand, the DIA's Good Practice Participate and the DPMC's The Policy Project websites describe engagement methods for our national context, including a Community Engagement design tool.[8]

Engagement can move between the 'levels' in Table 4 depending on the community context, the purpose of engagement, and the stage of any given programme. Deciding on which tools to use will involve weighing up many different factors, including available time and resources, as well as important considerations like the ones below. The principles in Table 3 can also be used to help decide which engagement methods are best to use at a given point in time.

Questions to bear in mind when designing an engagement process:

Who is usually heard?

Who will implement the outcomes of this engagement?

Who is always missing?

Do resources need to be re-allocated?

Who is setting the agenda for the engagement process?

Who is bearing the burden of the engagement process?

Can the engagement process be co-designed with the community?

What is the purpose of this stage of the engagement process?

Table 4: Tools for engagement: "pick and mix"

Purpose of engagement				
Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Examples of tools				
Public meetings Community Education Programmes Newsletters (email and paper)	Community reference or liaison groups Creative tools (storytelling, photovoice, art etc) Online discussion	Conversation cafes Gamification: serious games Roleplay simulations Deliberative processes Workshops, hui	Deliberative processes e.g. citizen assemblies, citizen juries Co-design/Design Charrettes	Deliberative processes, e.g. citizen assemblies, citizen juries Participatory editing of reports. etc Participatory budgeting Community led processes
Links to further guidance and case studies				
Techniques to encourage public participation NZ (tools for all levels) Community engagement in policy design NZ (tools for all levels) US based EPA guide to Public Meetings Adult and Community Education Aotearoa	Information on a range of ideas that generally fall in the 'consult' or 'involve' category List of resources from Community Matters	Serious games for climate change decision-making Sustainable Delta Game Harvard Program on Negotiation's Clearinghouse Design thinking and design workshops for policy making. The Charrette Ideology Design Charettes (Involve, UK)	A comparison of the UK and French climate assembly processes An opinion piece on the Auckland Watercare process A Europe based network to build knowledge and practice re climate assemblies Shared Future in the UK promotes Citizens' Assemblies for climate change action	
Outcomes from use of the tool				
Helps community to understand the climate change risks it faces Helps community to access information required to contribute or understand decisions made by council Builds relationships	Values and draws out local knowledge and perspectives Clarifies expectations re outcomes of consultation, influence on decisions, etc	Utilises local knowledge and perspectives. Includes community voices in adaptation planning Builds trust	Co-develops aspirations for the future Council and community learn from each other. Community influences adaptation plans and outcomes.	Enhances community capacity. Community empowered to prioritise or make decisions. Community may take ownership of enacting changes.
Risks				
Tools must be drawn on at appropriate times in processes.	Single tools must not be relied on as constituting community engagement on their own – engagement requires a diversity of strategies and approaches.	Imbalance of power in who participates, and who speaks and is heard amongst those who do participate.	Unclear expectations over who has ultimate say in outcomes or next steps.	Failure to deliver on agreed outcomes, leading to disappointment or - disillusionment.
				Allocating community responsibility without sufficient resourcing.

Conclusion

Academic studies and best practice guidance both emphasise the importance of community engagement in adaptation planning, and the many benefits for for both councils and communities. There is a range of engagement tools that are suitable for different stages and purposes. These can be combined in creative and innovative ways to suit the community and context. Designing an engagement strategy using the principles of effective engagement can help determine which tools to use, and ensure that processes and adaptation outcomes are inclusive, equitable and empowering.

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Links

Links to the articles and websites referred to in this document are available in the online version which can be found at **dunedin.govt.nz/southdunedin**

Endnotes

1   Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022)
2   Ministry for the Environment (2017, 2022)
3   Department of Internal Affairs (2021)
4   McNamara and Buggy (2017)
5   Stephenson et al. (2020)
6   Arnstein (1969); Bond & Thompson-Fawcett (2007); Forester (1999); DIA (2021); Lafont (2017); Michels & De Graaf (2010); Moser & Pike (2015)
7   International Association for Public Participation (2023)
8   Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2021)

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