



Creating Climate Progress at the Community Level

A GUIDE INTENDED FOR ANY COMMUNITY MEMBER WHO WANTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND BRING THE BENEFITS OF CLEAN ENERGY TO THEIR TOWN.

In the current federal landscape, communities must be more active than ever to ensure they benefit from the clean energy future. Exciting approaches such as offshore wind, grid scale energy management and developing sustainable sources of renewable energy are necessary and promising, but they can take a long time to implement.

Communities, however, can move more quickly to reduce their carbon footprint significantly, and save a lot of money in the process. These step-by-step instructions on how to advance the clean energy future can help organize efforts in communities like yours.

1. FIND OR CREATE A CLIMATE COMMITTEE

Making any kind of positive impact requires a person who will take responsibility to keep the ball rolling. One method of moving progress forward is forming an environmental or sustainability committee in your town. In proposing the Committee to your local leaders, you'll want to consider recruiting around six people who:

- have a breadth of experience
- have experience with engineering, law, writing and public speaking
- live and work in the area and are especially connected to their community
- care about sustainability and their community

The most important facet of this committee will be dedication and the ability to stick with a process. Appointing a chair of your committee will clarify responsibility and leadership from the start, and help set you up for success.

2. BE TRANSPARENT

Involve the public at every turn.

- **Start with a clearly defined goal.**
+ Example: Reduce the Town's carbon footprint by at least 2% a year.

- **Establish a list of simple, easy-to-achieve ideas** that might be done in the next six months to reduce the Town's energy use.
+ Example: Switching all lights in municipal buildings to LED lights.
- **Ensure that your goals include a person on the Committee** to investigate that initiative, a timeline for that member to report back to the committee, and a deadline for the project.
- **Accomplish your project!**
- **Begin the research-and-reporting process** again for this new initiative.

The Chair can really help keep the ball rolling on all projects by following up regularly and offering assistance. It's also common that after some preliminary research, it may become clear a project is impractical. This is normal, and it's best not to bite off more than your committee can chew. Acadia Center recommends taking baby steps first, get to the big stuff later.

3. APPROACH THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

Most towns have somebody in charge administratively. This person may have the discretion to simply implement straightforward changes to save money that don't require the representative body's approval. Bring your list of energy reduction measures to them for a discussion of what's viable without an approval process. For example, the town manager could potentially authorize the installation of heat pumps in all municipal buildings.

4. APPROACH THE TOWN COUNCIL

If the Committee is thinking about a large-scale project that requires Town Council (or Select Board) approval, then set up a meeting with the Town Manager to discuss how best to go about approaching the Town Council. Perhaps meet with one or two Council members directly to discuss a proposed project and gauge their receptivity.

EXAMPLE: Let's say the proposed project is to place a 2GW solar array on the surface of the Town dump.

Help the Council understand the implications by doing the research beforehand to show how much money could be saved and how much the Town's carbon footprint could be lowered. Explain that you are proposing the array be placed on the Town dump because no neighbors would complain, and there is three phase power already there to connect the solar array to the electrical grid.

5. PLAY THE LONG GAME

Your reasonableness, your thoroughness in doing research, and your trustworthiness is your greatest asset when it comes to making projects happen.

Be persuasive and persistent and ALWAYS set deadlines for everything. A lack of a deadline can be fatal to any project, as it's always easier to put things off. If Councilors are reluctant to move forward because understanding and implementing your proposal looks like a lot of work, then the Committee must do the work and present the project as a freeze-dried solution to existing and relevant Town problems – the Council only has to “add water” and watch the benefits grow.

6. PITCH AND PERSIST

If, after initiating contact, doing research and gauging interest of Council members, it appears there is political support for the project, the next step is asking to present it to the full Town Council. Pick your most knowledgeable and persuasive Committee member to give the presentation. You could get approval to move forward in your first attempt, but if not, listen to concerns voiced by the Town Council. Address any concerns you can on the spot, then ask to set a date in the near future to return to the Council with more detailed solutions to any remaining concerns.

7. BUILD COMMUNITY BUY-IN

If there is Town Council Support, request a public forum on the project, publicize it, and have a member of the Committee organize a presentation to the public. A presentation that is short and not too technical or jargon-laden is often most successful. The Town Council will listen carefully to public response.

8. TAKE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

In presenting ideas to decision-makers and the public, your project may receive constructive criticism and interrogation.

If criticism of your project or presentation becomes overwhelming, take a break to process the information to determine what is useful feedback and what could simply be misdirected vitriol. Most people are reasonable and will respond to reasonable engagement, especially when contrasted with hyperbole or empty slogans.

And always keep the goal in mind, you are doing something good for your community, your state, and your planet.

9. REQUEST APPROVAL

If everything goes well, ask the municipality's governing body to approve the expenditure of funds necessary for the project, either by way of an order or resolution, depending on the requirements of local municipal ordinances.

Once approved by the governing body, they can issue a request for proposal from contractors and then choose a developer and enter a contract and oversee the project to completion.

GET STARTED WITH THESE IDEAS:

- LED bulbs in municipal buildings
- LED bulbs in streetlights
- Solar arrays at the dump
- Eco trash cans
- Solar carports