

SYNTHESIS OF SOCIAL MOBILIZATION RESEARCH: PRELIMINARY REPORT

Prepared for: Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social Mobilization was one of five major research themes identified by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) in its first round of funded research. Its principal focus was to find and evaluate ways to mobilize British Columbians in thinking about and acting on climate solutions in their communities. The Special Report prepares a unique and substantive synthesis of the PICS-funded Social Mobilization research, and attempts to inform the reader of “**what works**” and “**what doesn’t work**” in developing effective social mobilization solutions on climate change.

The report includes a brief summary of the BC context for social mobilization, as well as key findings from the literature on psychology of behaviour change, social movements, social learning and place-based approaches. BC has a greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target of 80% by year 2050 and municipalities are seeking to implement Community Energy and Energy Plans (CEEPs) to assist in meeting this overall target. Yet, many communities continue to struggle in the implementation of actions and strategies designed to help meet their local GHG emission reduction targets. Research shows that BC residents are largely unaware of these targets and that climate change is still not “on the radar” as a priority for most citizens. The 8 research projects described in some depth in this paper were intended to inform BC’s future course on climate action. They have explored multiple ways & innovative tools to engage and mobilize the public around issues related to climate change, with a focus on communities, the public planning interface and energy and digital media. This report reviews each study, then analyzes the patterns of emerging results across methods, goals, and contexts for social mobilization. It focuses on both top-down municipal processes, and the less well-documented grass roots and innovative 3rd party processes that attempt to reach and mobilize the silent majority.

In general, the PICS research findings support those currently emphasized in the social mobilization literature, but go beyond other findings in several new areas, based on evaluation of real-world engagement processes, innovative digital and visual media, and processes for mobilization on community energy issues. The key findings show that social mobilization on climate change can be fostered successfully at multiple levels, from catalyzing dialogue within communities, to changing awareness over the space of a few hours, and actually achieving significant energy savings and carbon emission reductions for collective groups of people over the course of a few months to 2 years. Various research projects did document the success of social mobilization in terms of rich social engagement, increased understanding of local implications of climate change, and in some cases, multiple co-benefits of climate action. They also document some illuminating constraints and failures in attempting to initiate social mobilization on local energy solutions.

Recommendations on achieving effective social mobilization on climate change are provided which reflect these findings, including: (a) **the importance of multiple pathways for social engagement for any particular stakeholder or community group**; (b) **the key role of digital media in building momentum and interest in community engagement exercises, including structured use of social media and careful application of powerful visual media that are related to the community in question**; (c) **the benefits of collective problem solving at neighbourhood scale with “grass roots” groups**; (d) **the need for coordinated and mutually reinforcing processes conducted by multiple partners, in both top-down and bottom-up roles**; and e) **the important role that 3rd party intervenors (such as NGOs, applied researchers, and scientific bodies such as PICS) can play in introducing new tools and stimulating community and government engagement.**

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION RESEARCH

PICS has defined Social Mobilization in terms of climate change as—engagement and motivation of the public and multiple stakeholders to implement climate solutions, through social learning, social movements, behaviour change, community action, and policy change (adapted from PICS 2010). As such, social mobilization emerges from a range of actors, including citizens, the private and public (government) sectors, and a variety of organizations (including research bodies).

The synthesis Report collates and highlights the success stories, lessons learned and implications identified through the various social mobilization research projects, individually and seen as a whole. These projects comprise:

1. **The Good Life, The Green Life** – led by Shannon Daub, Jonathan Taggart, Shane Gunster and Tina Barisky – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA-BC). *Documentary film and public engagement about what it means to live a good, green life at the climate crossroads.*
2. **From Communities of Interest to Communities of Practice: Digital Media as Catalysts for Climate Action campaigns** – led by Dr. Maged Senbel and Victor Ngo – UBC School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP). *Mobilization and evaluation through the ‘Do It in the Dark’ energy challenge.*
3. **Meeting the Climate Change Challenge (MC3)** – led by Dr. Ann Dale and Dr. Leslie King – Royal Roads University (RRU). *Evaluating innovative municipal and community-led responses and social learning processes on climate change.*
 - a. Eagle Island Neighbourhood Retrofit Program
 - b. T’Sou-ke Nation Solar Community Program
4. **Greenest City Conversations** – led by Dr. John Robinson – University of British Columbia. *Engagement of Vancouver communities through social media, energy workshops and other channels.*
 - a. Social Media Channel - Exploring Vancouver’s Transportation Future
 - b. Neighbourhood Energy Workshops in Marpole and Grandview Woodlands
5. **Measured visualizations as catalysts for mobilization: A prototype for public engagement in municipal planning for climate change** – led by Dr. Ronald Kellett and Dr. Cynthia Girling – UBC School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture and Dr. Maged Senbel – UBC School of Community and Regional Planning. *Revelstoke community engagement and evaluation on urban form and energy.*
6. **Understanding the public uptake and acceptance of a municipal green energy incentive program** – led by Dr. Christopher Ling, Dr. Charles Krusekopf and Ingrid Mitchell – Royal Roads University. *Evaluation of the Solar Colwood initiative.*
7. **Illustrated Community Energy Guide/Community Energy Explorer** – led by Dr. Stephen Sheppard, Rory Tooke and Sara Barron – CALP, University of British Columbia. *Developing a social learning tool on community energy for non-experts.*

PROJECTS AND THEIR RESULTS AT-A-GLANCE

OUTCOMES & CONTRIBUTING FACTORS		PROJECTS								
		Good Life Green Life	Do it in the Dark	Meeting the Climate Change Challenge (MC3)		Greenest City Conversations (GCCP)		Revel-stoke Urban Form Workshop	Solar Colwood	Community Energy Explorer
				Eagle Island Retrofit	T'Sou-ke Solar Community	Transport Facebook	Energy Workshops			
MEASURABLE RESULTS	Actual GHG reduction/energy saving		✓✓	✓✓ ¹	✓✓				✓	
	Progress toward achieving GHG targets		?						?	
	Per capita GHG reductions	?	?	✓✓	?				?	
	Reduced vulnerability to impacts/ improved resilience			✓	✓					
	Co-benefits realized	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓				✓✓	
REAL ACTIONS TAKEN	Social behaviour change (positive)/ collective action	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓				×	
	Mitigation actions taken, e.g. facilities built, technology installed	?		✓✓	✓✓				✓×	
	Adaptation actions implemented									
POLICIES ENACTED	Sustainable development pathway adopted				✓✓		?		✓	
	Mitigation policies adopted				✓	?	?			
	Adaptation policies adopted				✓					
COMMUNITY ATTITUDES/CAPACITY IMPROVED	Mitig/Adapt. policy support increase	?	?	?	?	✓	?	×	?	?
	Broader cultural shift or ripple effect on values/perceptions/ norms		✓	?	?				×	
	Increased community capacity			✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓	?	?
	Increased motivation/concern/ caring about climate change/energy	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	?	?	?	?	?
	Shifted/increased awareness/ understanding of climate change etc.	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	?	✓✓	✓	✓	?
	Increased/improved community dialogue on climate change/energy	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	?
PROCESS EFFECTIVENESS/ ACHIEVEMENTS	Integrated decision making or design development					?	?	✓		
	Community-led planning			✓	✓✓					
	Social movement ongoing/ripple effect	✓	?	✓✓	✓✓				?	
	Effective community engagement - reaching beyond the usual suspects	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓×	?
	Effective community engagement - engaging/rewarding experience	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	?	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	?	?
	Effective partnering		✓	✓✓	✓				✓	
	Peer-to-peer learning (among practitioners) ²								✓	
	Neighbour to neighbour interaction		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓✓		
	Action campaign event(s)		✓✓							
	Preparatory social learning	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	×	?
CONTRIBUTING / ENABLING FACTORS	Financial incentives applied/ available to users			Yes	Yes				Yes	
	Government support of intervenor			Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes
	Compelling visual media used	Yes	Yes	Yes	?		Yes	Yes	?	Yes
	Active social media used	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes			?	TBD
	Fun activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	?		Yes	Yes		TBD
	Emergent dialogue/co-creation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Spiritual values engaged	Yes			Yes					

Key:

	Intended outcome	✓✓	Strong positive result overall	✓	Weak positive result overall
×	No positive result overall (for intended outcome)	?	Outcome unknown or uncertain (lack of available data)		

Table 1 - Key findings of PICS research & outcomes of selected Social Mobilization interventions

¹Actual GHG reductions have not yet been quantified, but are based on estimates provided by members of Cool Neighbourhoods.

² Peer to peer learning among practitioners was a major goal and successful outcome of the broader MC3 project.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of general recommendations (draft format) for effective social mobilization is provided in the PICS Special Report. The report also offers more specific recommended solutions tailored to the responsibilities and potentials of various intervenors in BC: upper level and local government; climate scientists; and community-based/citizen groups. These recommendations stem from the findings from PICS projects reported above and/or previously published research and guidance on social mobilization. In most cases, the PICS research findings and recommendations support those currently emphasized in the social mobilization literature, yet go beyond them in new areas, based on the evaluation of real-world engagement processes, innovative digital and visual media, and processes for mobilization on community energy issues. While prepared with the BC context in mind, many of the proposed solutions may apply more widely.



Fig 1 - Workshop participants discuss future visions for the City of North Vancouver (Source: Illustrated Guide to Community Energy http://web.forestry.ubc.ca/calp/CALP_CommunityEnergyGuide_highRes.pdf)

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL MOBILIZATION (DRAFT)

General recommendations for effective social mobilization by diverse actors and intervenors include principles that address both the *planning* of initiatives and the *focus and framing* of content and innovative approaches for carrying out social mobilization activities:

Planning of Social Mobilization:

1. **Be clear about the intended outcomes** of social mobilization interventions: for example, does the activity wish to achieve more public discourse or widespread behaviour change? Is it early or late in a formal process? Is there already a consensus justifying a persuasive approach or is there contention that calls for an emergent dialogue?
2. **Plan for the long-term:** short-term projects or programs, even if well-funded, are often not very effective in achieving long-term impacts/solutions (Ling, et al., 2014). They can stimulate substantial dialogue and some activity, but need to be followed up and actively maintained/built upon, if to be successful in the future.

3. **Prepare the ground:** allow lead time to foster initial social learning before the project is formally introduced to the community (e.g. to build awareness, explain the process, explore their values and concerns, get their suggestions, get them comfortable with the idea, etc.). Good initiatives are unlikely to be successful if introduced to a community that is not particularly interested in the issue and does not see solutions that address their concerns (Ling, et al., 2014).
4. **Build and maintain trust:** this is particularly important for government and businesses, and often requires collaborating with or leadership by representatives of the citizen groups or stakeholders involved. People respond best to people they trust and feel comfortable with, and the most persuasive source in trying to develop new social norms “are not experts, academics, advocates or activists, but every day, ‘ordinary’.... people whose words, ideas and experiences can serve as compelling evidence” (Gunster, 2011).
5. **Coordinate with partners:** work with other bodies and groups from government, business, civil society and stakeholder organizations in a multi-faceted approach, as in the Eagle Island retrofit project, to provide resources and local knowledge, and build community appreciation of actions that are widely supported.
6. Within the identified audience, **engage with groups, not just individuals:** mutually reinforcing collective action (as with Alcoholics Anonymous) tends to be more successful than reaching out to individuals or scattered households. The topic of climate change can be too large and overwhelming to expect people to take on as individuals. If people think that no one else is taking action, they may feel isolated and unable to make a difference. Also, existing networks are often more efficient at involving people than new mechanisms.
7. **Provide multiple pathways for engagement:** campaigns or projects with various ways for people to become involved are likely to be more successful than those that only provide one channel for engagement. The ‘Do it in the Dark Campaign’ used video, Facebook, different group activities, and competitions to attract participants (Senbel et al., 2014). Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.
8. **Use credible facilitators:** the credibility of the organizer, researcher, sponsor, etc. is important for recruitment and success of the initiative, in terms of science, social connectivity, and practicality.

Focus and Framing of Content and Innovative Approaches:

9. **Explicitly address people’s values:** many people are more likely to take action based on their personal values than on a technological argument, financial incentive or other forms of engagement, though these can be important support mechanisms once a community is engaged. For example, the hands-on “name the neighbourhood” exercise in the GCCP energy workshops clearly identified local values and concerns, and demonstrated to residents that the intervenors were listening and interested in learning what was important to the community.
10. **Emphasize co-benefits:** it isn’t necessary always to lead with climate change issues, but don’t hide them either; many communities may not be ready or fully open to a climate change specific agenda, but respond to shared values or common ground (Marshall, 2014) such as energy efficiency, cost savings, or the ‘cool factor’. At the same time, climate change realities can and should be introduced, as green benefits or ‘doing the right thing.’
11. **Focus on solutions:** too much doom and gloom on climate change impacts can turn people off, whereas many can get behind positive action that has social adherence. Recent CCPA workshops on Climate Justice with members of the public adopted a policy of 75% solutions to 25% problems in guiding discussion of climate change issues.
12. **Explore the future:** most people have never been involved in a structured look at their own future: it can be a novel, eye-opening exercise. Using scenarios or visioning exercises on sustainable or alternative futures, “placing people and, more importantly, community at

the centre of a vision of sustainability” (Gunster, 2014) can be transformative (Schroth, 2010).

13. **Make information local, immediate, and tangible:** because climate change science is normally considered global and very long term, relating information to a personal and/or local level will make it more meaningful (Scannell et al, 2013; Moser, 2010; Sheppard, 2012).
14. **Use compelling visual learning tools:** making things visible (e.g. energy, climate change impacts, adaptation solutions) with simple or sophisticated visualizations can be powerful (Cohen et al., 2012). Images that are based on data but tell memorable “stories” can improve understanding and engage participants who enjoy visual media and “cool” technology. Processes that go beyond visual experiences, as in hands-on interactive or creative exercises and physical activities such as field walks or tree-planting, can be very effective and rewarding for participants.



Fig 2 - Solar project in T'Sou-ke First Nation (Source: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca>)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS (DRAFT)

Governments and large organizations such as Crown Corporations or utilities such as BC Hydro, may sometimes instigate their own top-down social mobilization efforts intended to reach implemented solutions (as in Solar Colwood). They can also play a crucial role in framing, enabling and supporting social mobilization activities undertaken by multiple actors.

Recommendations to all levels of government (including provincial, regional and local) include:

1. **Develop and enable a multi-faceted but coordinated and collaborative approach to any direct social mobilization efforts**, coordinating top-down efforts and incentive schemes with parallel initiatives by 3rd party and community-based partners, as proactively as possible. Well-planned joint studies add value to each organization’s work, relative to working in silos or reinventing wheels, and networks can be shared for efficient participant involvement.
2. **Provide more sustained support for grassroots social mobilization at neighbourhood scale**, without driving or taking control of the initiatives. Such support can include providing: stable ongoing funding programs for local volunteer organizations and community-based NGOs; media support/dissemination to reinforce the messaging; and in-kind resources (such as West Vancouver Sustainability staff time allocated to the Eagle Island project or potentially a Climate Action Advisor for strata councils).

3. **Take leadership in providing or hosting 'one-stop shopping' via online information hubs** that are easily accessible via Google search, structured in a way that allows each neighbourhood or sector to find information tailored for them, and that are fun, attractive, and intuitive to use. For example, websites such as LiveSmart BC (developed by the Climate Action Secretariat) provide a valuable source of information and support to all British Columbians and should be continued. It is also possible that regional governments may be a good scale for accessing data and resources to support local climate action, enabling comparison among communities and sharing of locally relevant contacts and success stories.
4. **Maintain and widely publicize the Provincial and local carbon emission reduction targets:** for such an important and transformative policy of declaring targets of 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 to be so little known among BC citizens (Rhodes et al., 2014) is extraordinary. A major campaign to build awareness of the existence, need for, and benefits of these targets to ordinary citizens is long overdue. The concept of an overall carbon budget for everyone could help shift the social norms of the public (e.g. "the status quo is no longer acceptable," "doing my bit" etc.), and support local governments in their attainment of OCP and CEEP targets, if we are to move away from high carbon lifestyles.
5. **Maintain and widely publicize other impressive but little known achievements of BC's governmental climate action program, such as:** reductions in province-wide GHG emissions since 2010; the Carbon Neutral program for public entities; and other municipal innovations such as district energy plants running on renewables, which can produce important symbols of local resilience. Higher levels of government should support municipalities in developing **demonstration projects** that are highly visible in the community (Sheppard, 2012) and applicable to local businesses or private buildings.
6. **Develop programs to embed innovative practices in real-world planning** projects and train practitioners and staff in successful new techniques of social mobilization.

In particular, **higher levels of government** such as the Province of BC and utilities, should:

7. **Maintain consistent messaging to the public** across policies relating to climate change (e.g. moving away from fossil fuels and towards carbon targets, encouraging renewable energy, etc.) to avoid confusing would-be actors or providing dis-incentives to parallel climate action by society at large. (e.g. "if the government doesn't care about carbon emissions, why should we?").
8. **Provide stable, long-term and simple-to-understand financial incentives** for householders and building owners, for low carbon energy implementation and energy conservation/retrofitting (e.g. eco-audits, feed-in tariffs for local energy, Pay as you Save schemes, etc.). Variation, uncertainty, and complexity of incentive schemes are disincentives to all but the most committed householders. Government and industry need to be able to demonstrate significant benefits to home-owners from low-carbon energy technologies for residences that outweigh the upfront costs and inconvenience of installation.
9. **Ensure that industrial scale or private sector renewable energy developments (such as wind or run of river) are developed in cooperation with affected communities,** and that such communities receive a share of the revenues, green jobs, or other benefits, as is common in other countries (Elliott, 2003). This could avoid barriers of public opposition to green energy projects.
10. **Reintroduce climate change to the High School curriculum,** with particular reference to the targets and actions in place in BC, and clear linkage to projected conditions and solutions that the youth of today will see in their own lives. Such interventions, mediated by our children, could have a ripple effect on parents, possibly helping to re-shape social norms and voting behaviour about action on climate change. The current absence of a

required climate change curriculum in schools is morally questionable, contributing to lack of knowledge and capacity in our youth in facing known future threats (and solutions) in their own lifetime.

Local and regional governments have some unique opportunities to implement their own social mobilization measures through planning processes and symbolic / practical construction projects (e.g. Community Energy and Emission Plan implementation). Formal community engagement as part of planning processes provides an ongoing, already-budgeted opportunity not only to get public input to decision-making and policies, but also to inform and encourage community action. As such, local/regional governments should:

11. **Prioritize building public literacy on energy and climate change issues**, and the benefits and methods of reducing carbon emissions, especially at the small neighbourhood level where people are more likely to know each other and could act collectively.
12. **Implement richer and more engaging participatory planning methods** as developed and validated in the PICS studies; these should use social media and visual learning tools in structured processes with future scenarios, following procedures that have been shown to work in applied research. Specific recommendations within such processes include:
 - Follow **best practice in engaging people through open, inclusive, collaborative and transparent planning processes** (Beierle and Cayford, 2002). For example, participants should comprise a broadly representative sample of the population affected by the policy decision, and stakeholders should be involved as early as possible in the process to maximize buy-in (Haas-Lyons, 2012).
 - Use **alternative mediated social media exercises**, to draw in user types not typically represented in planning meetings.
 - Use **tools to augment participants' abilities to visualize, remember, analyze, measure, compare, and communicate with each other** (Girling and Kellett, 2000). The tools used should be adaptable to each situation, and present adequate information in ways that are clear, credible, engaging, and meaningful to the user group (Girling and Kellett, 2000; Sheppard, 2012). There are increasing online resources that provide clear and compelling graphics for staff to use, e.g. Community Energy Explorer – www.energyexplorer.ca.
 - **Use interactive workshops**: rapid feedback from participants enables a more iterative process in which scenarios are improved with each successive cycle. Iteration typically elevates participants' satisfaction and confidence in the results (Kwartler and Longo, 2008).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CLIMATE SCIENTISTS, RESEARCHERS & PRACTITIONERS OF VARIOUS DISCIPLINES (DRAFT)

As potential 3rd party intervenors, usually charged with dissemination of important scientific or technical information to the public and information users, scientists and practitioners can play an important role in building capacity of citizens and organizations to plan for and act upon climate change solutions. In order for scientific messages to reach the intended audience, the primary lessons from the literature and PICS social mobilization findings are:

1. Go beyond one-way communications with lectures to invited audiences of 'the converted' (the information deficit model), by **taking the discussions to target groups on their turf, using their language and media channels, and opening up an interactive two-way emergent dialogue which is driven in part by their concerns, values, questions, and ideas.**
2. Organizations like PICS could expand the unique role of local coordinators at universities within regional communities, and **promote highly visible demonstration projects and**

active educational outreach with regional organizations, as has been done by UNBC's Campus coordinator with demonstrations of electric vehicles, carbon footprint calculations, etc.



Fig 3 – Exploring Neighbourhood Energy Futures Workshops as a part of the Greenest City Conversations project (Source: <http://gcc.sites.olt.ubc.ca/2012/05/17/exploring-neighbourhood-energy-futures/>)

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMMUNITY GROUPS (DRAFT)

Organizers or participants in grass roots climate change initiatives have considerable agency if they work together with neighbours at the local level, within stakeholder groups, or within communities of practice, as demonstrated by the Eagle Island and T'Sou-ke experiences, as well as similar initiatives such as Cool Neighbourhoods (Northshore), Green Bloc (Vancouver), Project Neutral (eastern Canada) and Transition Streets (UK). Key recommendations include:

1. **Identify and support champions and 'lieutenants'** who can motivate and organize others
2. In place-based initiatives (e.g. establishing community gardens or local climate change action groups), **work in small discrete areas with concentrations of interested neighbours, where any activities or changes are highly visible.** Workshops or activities should tap into people's 'sense of community', recruiting a diversity of people who share their interest in the same neighbourhood.
3. **Seek partners** among NGOs and allies in local government who are able to provide resources, information, and advice on technical issues.
4. **Investigate grants** that may be available to support community initiatives from foundations and government, and seek sponsors from local businesses, e.g. providing discounts on energy retrofit supplies (as in the Eagle Island buyer's club).
5. Experiment with **do-it-yourself visual media** to help spread ideas and attract attention of other participants.
6. **Explore possibilities for citizen science and engagement** (contributing information to municipalities or other organizations on things like bird habitat, street tree monitoring and maintenance, etc.).

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Comments are welcomed on this summary as well as the full draft report, which is available online at <http://pics.uvic.ca/pics-special-report-social-mobilization-draft>. For more information, please contact:

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