

The drivers of community climate action

Guidance for communities



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Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
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Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
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Communities have an important role in meaningful climate action. Across towns, cities and rural areas, local groups are making efforts to reduce emissions, build resilience, and contribute to a sustainable future.

This guidance document explores the key and broad ranging drivers that encourage and enable communities to take climate action. Identifying what motivates and sustains action is crucial to understanding how to best support communities in their climate journey. This guide builds on the EPA research report "Identifying, reviewing and testing the factors that drive the sustainable behaviour and transition of communities, groups and individuals" and practical resources gathered through the Climate Connected platform.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Highlight some of the key drivers of community climate action.
- Help communities and other stakeholders understand how these drivers influence success in community climate action initiatives.
- Provide practical guidance and useful tools for communities to harness these drivers in their own context.

Whether embarking on a new climate initiative or seeking to scale up existing efforts, this document offers communities **practical insights, real-world examples** and **adaptable tools and resources** to empower communities to turn climate ambition into action.

#1

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Participation, social capital and localism:

Working together and being inclusive builds trust, ownership, and resilience. This gives communities power to act. Unhappiness with top-down decisions can spark initiatives rooted in local values. Direct involvement, for instance, through community energy or local planning, encourages acceptance and commitment. Governments should support ways of doing things that bring local knowledge that is supported by policy organisations.

Useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie

[>Community Energy: A
Practical Guide to
Reclaiming Power,](#)

[>The energy transition
to energy democracy
\(RESCOOPS\)](#)



Begin with what matters locally

Connect your work to what people care about: local sports team, workplaces.

Make it about local pride. Link climate actions to what makes your place special—history, tradition, unique character.

Get people involved with hands-on projects. Celebrate local heroes who are helping and use community events to get everyone interested.

Make it social. Combine climate actions with fun activities. Think bike rides to school, community fix-it days, or a barbecue in a shared garden.

Involve everyone in the planning. When people help make choices, they feel more responsible for making it a success.

Connect local problems — lack of housing, lost farmland — to climate action. Protecting resources makes you stronger and more secure for the future.

1. Talk About Real, Local Problems. Start by discussing issues everyone feels, like housing shortages, farmland loss, and rising bills. This creates common ground and a sense of urgency.

2. Protect what matters most: Identify key resources at risk in the community (e.g. green spaces, farmland, water) and show climate projects as safeguards.

3. Promote smarter land use: encourage energy-efficient housing, shared infrastructure, and highlight the impact on emissions.

4. Highlight local: food and energy as ways to reduce outside dependency.

5. Plan for the Long Term. Involve young people and families in planning.

#2

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Population pressure and land demand

Population growth and rising land demand drive sustainable behaviour by highlighting the limits of local resources as pressures on land, ecosystems and food systems intensify. Scarcity and environmental impacts make sustainability challenges more visible, motivating communities to adopt practices such as conservation, sustainable land use and sustainable forestry. This is especially the case where impacts are felt locally.

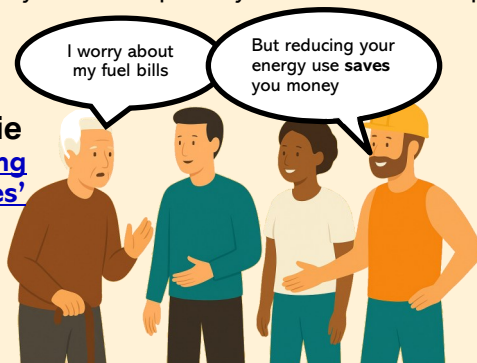
Useful tools on

ClimateConnected.ie

>>[Stakeholder Mapping](#)

>>[Foresight or 'futures' exercises](#)

>>[SCOR Method](#)



#3

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental damage and global warming:

Environmental damage and climate change motivate sustainability when their impacts are **visible and local**, motivating communities to act to prevent local harm.

Links to useful tools ClimateConnected.ie

- > Discover your carbon footprint
- > The energy transition to energy democracy (RESCOOPS)



Connect climate action to visible local impacts of environmental damage.

Highlight what is already happening:

Use clear local examples. Share how neighbours, schools, farms, or local businesses have been affected.

Teachable moments:

Use floods, storms, or heatwaves, as opportunities to bring the community together to discuss solutions.

Frame action as protection:

Present projects as defences against local harm.

Highlight the costs of not acting:

Compare costs of repair to the savings from prevention.

#4

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Mistrust and scepticism:

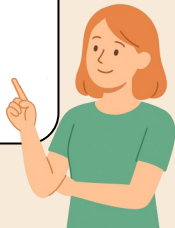
Did you know that **mistrust and scepticism** can actually drive community climate action? When institutions like governments or corporations are viewed as unreliable, this can get people to organise themselves. However, while mistrust and scepticism can motivate local action and get them to solve their problems independently, both can also get in the way of co-operation if they are not directed in a positive way.

Useful tools on ClimateConnected: [Diversity Map](#), [The 5 Why's Technique](#), [History Map](#), [Foresight or 'futures' exercises](#)



But sure nobody's doing anything useful about climate change

There's **loads** you can offer this community—if you join our team



Instead of being doubtful and against things, use that energy to get powerful and make things happen together by working as part of a team.

1. Take charge locally. Talk about your community projects as a way of you taking control of your own future.

2. Show what you know and what you already have. Gather local knowledge, use simple surveys, photos, or stories to prove your point and show why your work matters.

3. Team up with the right people. Work with groups you already trust, like local charities or colleges. They can help you get money, expert advice, and a voice in **important decisions**.

Create spaces for open, ongoing dialogue so climate action reflects community voices.

1.Listen: Have open conversations, conduct surveys, or host local forums.

2.Link climate to everyday priorities: Show how they solve immediate problems.

3.Make voices count: Show how feedback shapes real projects.

4.Include everyone: young people, older residents, farmers, businesses, under-represented groups.

5.Keep dialogue ongoing: Hold regular community check-ins, workshops, or community hall updates.

Useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie

[>Cleveland Facilitator's Guide](#)

[>Mind Mapping](#)

[>Listen to Carol's Podcast on Using what's in your community to develop it sustainably](#)

#5

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Public opinion and dialogue

Public opinion and dialogue drive climate action by making it relevant, legitimate, and community owned. When people help shape solutions, they are more likely to support and sustain them. Diverse motivations within communities make dialogue-based approaches more effective. **Trust and ownership grow when citizens are actively involved in decisions.**



#6

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Social Expectations and Responsibilities

People want to act consistently with behaviour that seems normal and expected in their community. Making sustainable actions **visible, measurable and socially reinforced**, strengthens their role as drivers of sustainable actions.

Links to useful tools on [ClimateConnected.ie](https://climateconnected.ie)

[>>Discover your carbon footprint](#) see how your behaviours and choices impact the environment through carbon emissions

[>>Community Level Carbon Footprint Map](#) highlights the carbon emissions across Decarbonisation Zones across Ireland, to allow comparisons to the behaviours of others

I always cycle to work



I reckon we could all do the same...how about we try set up a community bike day?



Increase the visibility of sustainable behaviours, so that they become the 'expected thing to do.'

1. **Set the norm:** Highlight what is already being done.
2. **Highlight local role models:** Share stories of locals that have acted.
3. **Celebrate effort:** Positive recognition builds peer pressure in a supportive way.
4. **Make it social:** Pair actions with group activities (community clean-ups, retrofit open homes, car-free day challenges).
5. **Embed it in community identity:** Frame messages on climate action around belonging and being in the community.

Design climate action that solves local problems and uses local assets.

1. Identify local pressures and opportunities
2. Frame climate action as a local solution
3. Leverage local assets: Ask what the community already does well and ground sustainability in familiar skills or traditions.
4. Tangible and visible: Prioritise projects that have clear local benefits and quick wins.
5. Local 'storytelling': Encourage place-based messaging.

Useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie
[>>Climate Action in Cleveland](#)
[>>Listen to Carol's Podcast on Using what's in your community to develop it sustainably: and 'the day of the dots'](#)

#7

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Local circumstances

Drive climate action by linking solutions to everyday community challenges, whether that be economic, social or cultural.

Climate action can start from non-environmental concerns that evolve into tailored solutions like transport, energy savings or community enterprises.

Effective sustainability planning begins with local priorities.



#8

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Infrastructure and organizational systems:

Infrastructure enables norms and habits. Access to facilities such as curbside recycling, cycling lanes, or renewable energy systems makes sustainable behaviour easier. See how can things in your community could be made more sustainable using **flagship obvious** interventions. Like [>>PV](#) or [>>Waste](#)



Seems like it's getting to be pretty simple to get PV— maybe we should too



Links to useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie

[>>Engagement and Dialogue](#)

[>>Build your community organisation](#)

[>>Identify Barriers](#)

Build or adapt local infrastructure and systems so the sustainable option is the most convenient, affordable, and visible one.

1. [Identify the everyday barriers to acting sustainably >>](#)
2. Provide necessary tools to make sustainable choices easier.
3. Use systems to create habits
4. Encourage development of cooperatives, community trusts or social enterprises to run sustainability projects, build trust, accountability, and resilience.
5. Highlight success: Showcase infrastructure as symbols of change (e.g. [PV panels >>](#), EV chargers, [new bike paths >>](#)).

Build individuals' confidence and skills so they know they can make change.

1.Start with small, visible projects: Early success builds confidence.

2.Share knowledge and skills: Run workshops, peer-to-peer learnings, or citizen science projects, to provide practical tools for change.

3.Identify and highlight local expertise: Show how these skills can contribute to climate action.

4.Measure and highlight impacts: Track results, such as energy or money saved and emissions reduced, and share this publicly.

5.Scale together: Use the early wins to build momentum for larger projects, such as community energy projects. Find out how the Aran Islands co-op did this in our podcast series >>

#9

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Agency and capability

Agency and capability drive climate action by giving communities the confidence, skills, and means to act. People are more likely to engage when they believe their actions matter and have access to practical, affordable options. Experiential learning and community projects build empowerment through hands-on success and mutual support.

Useful tools on
ClimateConnected.ie
>>[The Climate
Connected Dialogue
and Engagement hub](#)
provides a useful set of
resources to help
communities build
confidence and use their
voices to shape climate
action



Frame climate action as a shared responsibility and the right thing to do.

1. Appeal to Shared Responsibility

2. Highlight the importance of climate action for protecting future generations

3. Show care for the vulnerable: Highlight that climate action helps those most at risk

4. Use trusted moral voices: Use respected individuals to communicate the duty to act

5. Celebrate moral leadership: Publicly recognise those who act out of principle

Useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie

>Cleveland Neighbourhood Climate Action Toolkit

>Listen to Carol's Podcast on Using what's in your community to develop it sustainably

#10

**ClimateConnected.ie:
DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY**

Moral obligation

This drives climate action when people feel a duty to protect their community, the planet, or future generations. It is often rooted in values like intergenerational justice, care for others, or faith-based ethics.

While moral motivation can inspire action, it is most effective when supported by practical benefits, visible results and enabling conditions. Alone, it rarely sustains widespread change, but combined with other drivers, it can translate into lasting impact.

Trust and ownership grow when citizens are actively involved in decisions.



#11

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Emotive and affective

Emotions drive climate action by making it personal and meaningful. Fear can trigger action, but hope, pride and belonging are more effective for sustaining it. People respond not just to data, but to experiences and feelings tied to place, identity and community. Effective climate efforts tap into emotional bonds through storytelling, symbols and shared experiences, rather than relying on fear or abstract facts alone.



Harness positive emotions to inspire action and use negative emotions to spark urgency.

1. **Celebrate love of place:** Frame projects around pride in local landscapes, traditions and heritage
2. **Create hope:** Share positive images of sustainable futures
3. **Manage fear:** Provide achievable solutions.
4. **Use personal stories:** Emotion connects more than statistics
5. **Leverage the feel-good factor:** Pair climate projects with enjoyable community activities

Links to useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie

[>>The Compile Stakeholder Engagement Guide](#)

[>>Listen to Séan's podcast](#) on how to get deep community engagement

Use the strengths of faith to motivate through moral duty, trusted leadership and collective belonging.

1. Frame climate action using faith language

2. Empower trusted voices: Encourage faith leaders to speak about climate

3. Make faith spaces climate exemplars.

4. Link action into rituals: Link climate messages with services, festivals and prayer groups

5. Connect local efforts to global solidarity: Frame local action as an expression of compassion and justice for the most vulnerable people based messaging.

#12

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Faith and spirituality

Faith and spirituality can be meaningful, though sometimes direct, drivers of climate action. Many traditions promote stewardship, fairness and care for creation, providing a moral foundation for sustainability. Trusted leaders mobilise participation, while religious institutions offer networks and spaces that support local projects.

Useful tools on ClimateConnected.ie

>>See the Lixnaw Bog Project

>>Hinterland West

>>Hear Sean Carolan's podcast on respectful engagement

#13

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Health

Health is a powerful driver of climate action because it makes the benefits immediate and personal. Issues like air pollution, poor housing and fuel poverty, directly impact wellbeing, motivating communities to act. Climate measures improve health. Unlike abstract global risks, health is felt daily. Framing climate action as a way to protect personal and family health is more effective than relying on environmental arguments.

Promote climate action as the key to healthier lives

- 1. Connect climate to everyday health:** Show how climate actions can impact health concerns, such as asthma, fuel poverty, stress among others.
- 2. Use trusted messengers:** Health providers could be encouraged to promote health-climate links
- 3. Emphasise vulnerable groups:** Show how climate action protects children, the elderly and those chronically ill.
- 4. Emphasise prevention over cure:** Tackling emissions now avoids costly health crises.

Links to useful tools
ClimateConnected.ie

- [>>Closing the nature gap](#)
- [>>Cycling Schemes Ireland](#)
- [>>Warmer and Healthier Homes](#)



Information should be clear, local and actionable

1. Localise the message: Use local maps, photos, or stories.
2. Keep it clear and simple: Avoid jargon and long reports.
3. Choose trusted messengers: Share information through neighbours, schools, clubs, or respected community leaders.
4. Pair facts with actions.
5. Repeat and reinforce: Share the

Useful tools on
ClimateConnected.ie
>>The Community

Case Studies show how communities can take climate action in many different ways.

#14

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Information

Information supports climate action when it is local, trusted, practical and linked to feedback. However, it rarely works alone.

People engage more when information is relevant to their lives, like energy bills, carbon footprints or health

impacts. Tools like energy meters and carbon audits make impacts visible and foster responsibility.

I'm trying to find out how to get involved in sustainability –where do I start?

I'm in a sustainability group in Sligo—I can show you how we did it



#15

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Participatory and Inclusive Local Governance:

This drives community climate action by involving everyone in the community in decisions. This empowers communities, uses local knowledge, promotes fairness, strengthens social cohesion, and gets resources for projects. Communities should create inclusive decision-making platforms, add local knowledge to experts' advice, keep open communication, grow collaborative projects, and involve residents in monitoring and adapting strategies.



[>>Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making](#) This gives a comprehensive framework for inclusive community engagement in planning and development.

Inclusive participatory governance turns communities into active climate leaders - solutions are locally owned, fair, and effective

1. Engage diverse voices: Make sure all community members, including marginalised people, are included in making decisions.
2. Use local knowledge: Use the insights and experiences locally to inform climate actions that are relevant to your community
3. Grow partnerships: Build partnerships with local organisations and businesses, the council and residents to co-create and implement solutions.
4. Get funding and resources: Apply for grants and support through programs (e.g. CCAF) to fund community-led climate initiatives.
5. Monitor and adapt: Regularly look at your impact and be open to change based on feedback and circumstances.

Feedback fuels momentum.

1.Track what matters locally: Measure impacts such as energy bills, waste reduction, trees planted, flood risks reduced, using simple measures.

2.Make results visible: Share progress on noticeboards, social media, parish newsletters, or local radio.

3.Celebrate achievements publicly: Combine feedback with pride.

4.Use real-time tools: Smart meters, online dashboards, or public counters help people see instant impact.

5.Always explain the real-world benefit of actions.

>>Energy meters and smart monitors

>>Carbon Footprint App

>>Community reporting and recognition (e.g., awards, results-sharing) provide collective feedback loops.

#16

ClimateConnected.ie: DRIVE COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Feedback

This drives climate action by making impacts visible, measurable and personal. People are more likely to sustain behaviour when they see clear results, **like lower energy use or bills**. Progress tracking and peer comparisons reinforce habits through motivation and social norms. Effective climate programmes embed ongoing feedback to maintain engagement and momentum.

