



# HANDBOOK

A Toolkit for Local  
Electeds Climate Action

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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# Introduction

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This **Community Engagement Handbook** is part of [The Climate Caucus Handbook](#) - a toolkit to provide local elected leaders with inspiration, resources, and tools to support local climate action.

The Handbook is a living document, which means we will be adding your successful motions as they happen to provide an up-to-date, real-time guide to the change being driven by Climate Caucus members from coast to coast to coast.

Are we missing any key resources? [Submit it here](#) or [email us!](#)

## What is community engagement?

Meaningful community engagement is about having representation from the whole community, not just a small voice. It is about an open, two way dialogue. It gives opportunities for the community to propose ideas and come up with collective solutions. It is about offering an effective, inclusive approach to seek diverse opinions. And, it is an ongoing conversation that allows the community to help define and shape the City's future ([Mississauga Community Engagement Strategy](#)).

Community engagement that aligns with social justice principles fosters inclusive, participatory processes that empower communities, address systemic inequalities, and work toward creating fair and just societies. It recognizes the agency of individuals and communities in shaping their own destinies and advocates for policies and practices that promote equity and inclusivity. For more information on Social Justice, check out our [Climate Justice Handbook](#).

**International Association for Public participation (IAP2)** is the standard for public engagement currently.

## Foundations for effective engagement:

### Values based

IAP2 core values:

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

### **Decision oriented**

- Be aware that questions/concerns are raised by many, but often only few are addressed/answered. This does not result in meaningful engagement.
- It is imperative that the decision or outcome for the project or initiative is clearly defined from the outset.
- The community's role needs to be clearly defined and communicated to ensure a shared understanding of the level of engagement that is to be undertaken.
- Trust is built when the community sees changes to decision-making as a direct result of their participation in engagement.

### **Goal driven**

- Think about Why are you engaging? What are the decisions you want out of the engagement? and How to base engagement on common values?

## **Engaging on climate action: why, who, what, when, how**

### **1. Why engage?**

- Build understanding, trust, and support for the initiatives
- Gather input on what is needed for climate action = better decision making and outcomes
  - Having community input on what will work in the community is really important
- Encourage action and behavior change, fosters ownership
  - This will get the community's support

- Support climate justice / equity
  - This is really important for being effective - make sure the initiatives you are bringing forward advance equity and inclusion and do not cause harm!

## 2. Who engages with whom?

- Explore community and peer-led models of engagement - partner with community organizations and community members who can lead or co-lead engagement activities.

### **ICLEI 5 rules of thumb for communicating climate change**

1. Know your audience so you can target your messages to them.
2. Be aware of how people's values shape their beliefs on climate change and frame your message accordingly.
3. Engage trusted voices to help with communications and outreach efforts.
4. Emphasize the power and practicality of local climate solutions, especially climate preparedness.
5. Address climate science in simple, compelling ways, and stress the certainties of what we know and what we can do.

## 3. What are we engaging in?

- Clearly and publicly articulate the engagement process and goals.
- Frame specific issue for specific audiences
  - Timescale - immediate or long-term
  - Rationale for engagement
  - Location - local or global
  - Interconnectivity - identify other needs or concerns in the community and think about how they connect to climate, depending on the audience. Some examples of other issues include:
    - Health
    - Risk and liability - insurance, floods,
    - Housing
    - Affordability
    - Business case for taking climate action now or taking adaptation measures
    - Equity/justice of initiatives and make sure everyone can benefit from the initiatives you want to implement
    - Hope - climate action is really depressing, so talk about the positive aspects as well.

## 4. When to engage?

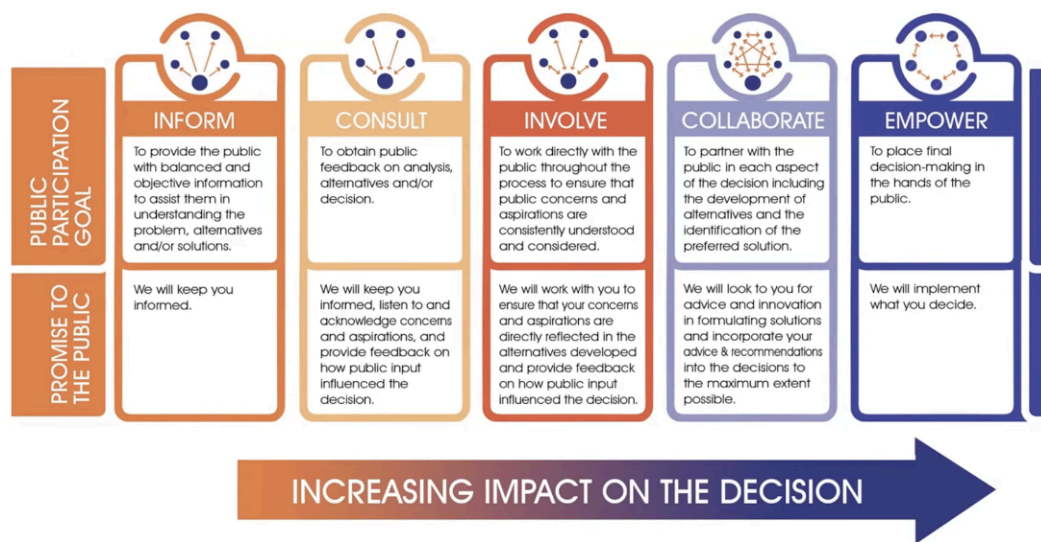
- Start early - meaningful engagement takes time to plan and implement



- Timing is really important, and good or bad timing can make or break a message
- Find teachable moments, such as timing climate messaging with climate disasters such as forest fires. This does not have to be excessive, but try to make these connections and include a few small messages where possible.
- Be patient because some folks will take a long time to accept certain messages and learnings.
- Ongoing, consistent communications are important to keep topics on the minds of community members and where possible, link climate issues between different topics.

## 5. How to engage?

- Proactively find and advertise engagement activities to groups that are crucial to hear from, rather than waiting for them to find the activities.
- Prioritize introductions
- Allow time to get to know one another
- Seek to learn about each other or find commonalities and shared values
  - decreases the likelihood of arguments and increases empathy
  - acknowledge different lived experiences and differing perspectives when they are offered
  - [All that we share video](#)
- Offer different modes of engagement (surveys, in-person, online meetings, etc.)
- Set an engagement target (i.e., number of residents) and be transparent about the process and intention
- Try spreading information and collecting feedback in different languages
- Make the process accessible - see [details here](#)



Source: [IAP2 spectrum](#)

## Techniques

Inform	Consult	Involve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-One way information</li> <li>-Fact sheets</li> <li>-Websites</li> <li>-Open houses</li> <li>-Tweets fb posts</li> <li>-Example - <a href="#">City of Calgary's climate change program</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Focus groups</li> <li>-Surveys</li> <li>-Public meetings / open houses</li> <li>-Interviews               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example - UNBC and two rivers gallery exhibit called for people to visit and provide input</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Workshops</li> <li>-Deliberative polling               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with people to craft solutions together</li> <li>• Example - Surrey's zero carbon buildings strategy hearing from the people these policies and strategies are targeted at and working with them to make those strategies better</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Collaborate		Empower
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Citizen advisory committees               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works closely with council, often report directly to council and council really considers their recommendations</li> <li>• Example Cobourg has a <a href="#">sustainability and climate change advisory committee</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>-Participatory decision making</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Shifts power into the hands of the community</li> <li>-Promising to implement their decision and completely delegating</li> <li>-Requires detaching from pre-determined policy goals and outcomes</li> <li>-Citizen juries</li> <li>-Delegated decision</li> <li>-Ballots/referenda               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most is specific participatory budgeting - gives residences aspects of the budget they can provide input on where to allocate funding</li> </ul> </li> <li>-Be careful not to offload the city's responsibility onto community partners without recognition and compensation.</li> </ul>

You can find a full list of [Detailed Initiatives for community engagement here.](#)



## Key considerations for climate engagement design

- **Identify and build relationships with community members who are ready to act**
  - Building relationships with a small number of active community members leading local initiatives can lead to significant buy in.
  - Invest in “power mapping”, which identifies the best individuals to make social change.
- **Participatory design and execution**
  - Involve supporters in setting out policy priorities and as “active partners in reaching decision-makers, contacting media, providing representation at policy meetings, achieving behavior change, etc.”
- **Co-explore risk and responses**
  - This enables participants to explore together what the risks and potential responses are.
  - Use tools like visualizations, neighborhood impact and response scenarios, community dialogues, and more to support this as part of a participatory design process.
- **Be clear as to what the goal of engagement is** - if looking to provide info and not get feedback, be clear
  - If really collaborating make sure they understand that and be intentional about how you collaborate
  - Doesn't have to be everything - can have a defined scope
  - Inform people of how their input is being used or not and report back to them.
- **Have dedicated staff position for community engagement**
  - “Public engagement is a journey, not an action” - Julius Lindsay @ David Suzuki Foundation.
  - Needs to be an ongoing focus for municipalities.
  - Be sure to keep partners, looped in, providing an avenue for active communication. Prioritize relationship management.
- **Partner with community organizations - they have the resources and the networks**
  - Be sure to adequately compensate community partners for their time and expertise.
  - Mississauga partnered with visual arts Mississauga for an art contest “how do you imagine a low carbon, resilient city by 2050?”
  - Mississauga also partnered with Escape Room Company for an event in the mall.

- The City of Calgary partnered with CLIP (Calgary Local Immigration Partnership) to develop [a guide for newcomers to the city](#).
- **Ask questions that draw on lived experience and that community members are equipped to answer**
  - [City of Toronto Reference Panel](#) is an example of equipping a representative group of community members to engage meaningfully in a local government initiative. Community members met for three full-day meetings, and learned about the causes of climate change and what local governments can do before they examined proposed actions from the City.

## Engaging people online

### Online tools

Inform:	Moving towards consult:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Emails</li> <li>● E-newsletters</li> <li>● Websites</li> <li>● Videos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Online surveys</li> <li>● Virtual town halls</li> <li>● Social media</li> </ul>

### Thick & Thin digital participation

Thin	Thick → increasing impact on the decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Very quick and engage in a minimal way</li> <li>● Send a text, click a link,, survey or poll</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Video group discussion</li> <li>● Document collaboration</li> <li>● Online collaborative whiteboards</li> </ul>

### Key considerations for online engagement:

- Be clear on purpose and goals before you identify the techniques
- Define successful engagement and monitor/measure
- Use a diversity of techniques, ideally in-person and online
- Create urgency; communicate clearly
- Be sure to find ways to engage those who aren't online
- Make sure there is enough time for meaningful discussion and not just presenting people with information

- Keep in mind, people we interviewed for this project shared that their experience has been, **municipalities often rely too much on online survey engagement which has limited reach - residents are already concerned about the issue you are engaging them on.** Try to move engagement beyond just online methods, and if you are incorporating online methods, try to move beyond surveys.

## Addressing Climate Skeptics during Engagement

Community engagement for climate action can become hijacked by climate deniers, and conspiracy theorists. **Click here to learn [how to address climate misinformation during community engagement sessions.](#)**

## Additional Resources on Community Engagement

- [IAP2 3 pillars of public participation](#)
- [How to engage your community training - recording](#)
- [Sowing the seeds for Local Climate Leadership](#)
- [Community Engagement - Richmond Hill and Mississauga - recording](#)
- [Building a city-wide Culture of Engagement: How Calgary engaged 167,000: webinar recording](#)
  - [Engage Calgary Website](#)

**Did you know Climate Caucus offers an “Ask Us Anything” service for elected officials in the network?**

**You could ask questions like “can you help me find this resource?” “Do you know of funding for X?” “Do you have examples of X policy language?” or “can you connect me with an expert in X?”**

**Send us your questions here!**

## Climate Caucus Resources:

[Climate Caucus Municipal Grants List](#) - detailed list of relevant municipal grants

[Policies and Resources Library](#) - list of motions, bylaws, council reports and briefing notes

# Engaging Marginalized Communities

“**Marginalized** is a term used to describe groups of people who face historic and/or ongoing barriers to participating in the civic sphere due to socioeconomic inequities, lack of political rights or recognition, or other forms of oppression, discrimination or persecution.... ”

Source: [Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement](#) SFU Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Marginalization makes individuals and groups **vulnerable**. These groups can also be termed **equity-owed** communities (also called equity-seeking or equity-deserving), or in terms of climate change, **disproportionately impacted communities**.

Marginalized groups can include,

- people with disabilities
- people with low income
- immigrant communities
- racialized people
- 2SLGBTQ+ people
- Youth
- Seniors
- people who are experiencing homelessness

“Municipalities can play a crucial role by facilitating spaces for marginalized groups to voice their perspectives and actively contribute to policy formulation.” - Panel Discussion Participant

- Indigenous people

Non-marginalized middle and upper income, non-racialized communities will likely organize and speak up on their own. They do not need more of your limited staff resources. Focus staff outreach in the marginalized communities that need your help the most.

**Support your staff when they say No to helping those already well able to have their views heard.**

## Rationale

### Unpacking the 'why'

#### Why is it important to engage these populations?

- **Strategic**
  - We need more people taking actions that reduce GHGs and supporting climate policy
  - Climate policy and programs will be more relevant / effective if equity-owned people are engaged
- **Moral / Ethical**
  - We should centre the voices of people who contribute the least to, and are impacted the most by, climate disruption
  - Equity-owned people should have equitable access to climate decision-making processes and resources



Source: [Toronto Environmental Alliance](#)

It is important for local governments and other institutions and organizations to be clear about their motivation and reasons for engaging particular communities, which can include both strategic and moral/ethical.

Significant imbalances in power and equity lead to marginalized groups being excluded from decision-making including climate planning.

**Failing to engage effectively with marginalized populations can:**

- reinforce power imbalances,
- exacerbate climate impacts on these groups,
- decrease their trust in local government, and
- lead to climate solutions that harm these groups, for example:
  - A focus on EVs over transit benefits those with higher incomes.
  - Retrofit policies geared to homeowners does not help renters.
  - Increasing density via costly laneway homes is more accessible in wealthier neighborhoods, while multi-family residential homes are restricted by zoning to far-away suburbs.
  - Expansion of urban canopies/green spaces that neglect denser low income and racialized areas
  - Retrofits without measures to protect tenants can lead to renovictions

“The first barrier that has to be addressed is the discrimination and stigma that face the newcomers’ community....Despite our contributions during the [climate planning] meetings, we have observed that none of our concerns we expressed are in the summary or minutes of the meetings.” - Panel Discussion Participant

Hearing from people with diverse, lived experiences leads to better climate planning and greater support of climate initiatives.

## What is your Theory of Change?

**A typical approach used by local government:**



## Why the 'why' matters

### Example 1: Theory of Change

#### *If we..*

Raise awareness among equity-owed communities about climate change and climate action(s)

#### *We expect..*

More people will:

- Use less energy and make their homes more energy efficient
- Take public transit and cycle more often
- Encourage other people in their communities to adopt these actions

#### *So that..*

Over time community GHG emissions decline and the municipality achieves its climate targets



Source: [Toronto Environmental Alliance](#)

Although commonly used, this approach has not been very effective in engaging marginalized populations.

## What if we took a different approach?

## New Theory of Change

### Example 2: Theory of Change

#### *If we..*

Work with members of equity-owed communities to develop a program to engage more residents in the municipality's climate strategy

#### *We expect..*

Engagement programming will:

- Be more relevant to equity owed-communities and reach more residents
- Promote effective communication between equity-owed communities and local government

#### *So that..*

- More residents from equity-owed communities feel a sense of ownership over the climate strategy
- Climate action programs address the experiences and priorities of equity-owed communities, and more residents access programs and resources
- Over time community GHG emissions decline and the municipality achieves its climate targets

Source: [Toronto Environmental Alliance](#)

Doing this right can be time consuming and resource intensive. If resources are tight, focus on priority questions, key barriers and groups who will be most impacted. However, taking too many shortcuts can cause harm to marginalized groups, and significantly impact the effectiveness of climate initiatives.

## Key principles

In addition to the general principles behind effective community engagement for any population, there are some additional considerations when engaging marginalized groups.

1. **Climate plans must be centered in equity** to be fair and effective and should support the work these communities are already doing, and not add extra burdens.
2. **Targeted universalism**: Limited staff capacity for engagement should be focused on marginalized communities and engagement should have **a clear goal of maximizing inclusion of marginalized groups**.
3. The needs and priorities of the marginalized group need to be understood and centred in the engagement and in the climate plan as these groups bear a disproportionate burden of climate impacts.
4. It is crucial to **avoid tokenism** / transactional engagement. If people feel they are only being engaged for a 'quota', it can perpetuate distrust and apathy in these groups. Consulting third-party facilitators who have experience working with these communities can be a workaround if not able to properly train staff.
5. The engagement process should enhance the capacity and power of marginalized groups to influence climate plans over the **long term**, and help individuals to develop a community of support.
6. Identities are **intersectional** as are experiences of marginalization.
7. Effective engagement may look different for each marginalized group, and this work is best done in partnership with **local community organizations** trusted by residents.
8. A 'Twin-track' Approach, which promotes both 'specialist initiatives' designed to include and empower marginalized groups and the 'mainstreaming' of inclusion into all policies, strategies and activities.
9. The time and energy that engagement requires from marginalized groups needs to be **honoured and compensated**.
10. When appropriate, use a [trauma-informed approach](#).

"We are expected to fit into other people's ideals as opposed to we are actually the experts. We know what is best for us. We know what the impacts of climate change are on the ground." - Panel Discussion Participant

## Overarching barriers

### For municipal staff and councils

- Lack of time and capacity - councils and staff need to recognize that more funding is required for engaging marginalized populations.
- Staff turnover hindering long term relationship building.
- Fear of making mistakes, or insulting people.
- Damaged relationships from previous interactions, e.g. policing, encampments, housing shortages, or how another department in the municipality deals with engagement. There needs to be a cohesive, respectful, and meaningful engagement plan across all departments who conduct public engagement.
- Lack of awareness of how many of these marginalized communities already contribute through, for example, food sharing, transit use, higher densities.
- Lack of awareness of barriers facing marginalized populations.
- Onerous internal metrics and reporting requirements.

### For marginalized groups

- Limited personal time and capacity
- Lack of financial resources - it is expensive to be climate conscious
- Consultation fatigue - investing time without seeing results
- Lack of trust based on past and current injustices, unmet expectations
- Language and literacy barriers
- Accessibility issues
- Eco-anxiety
- Lack of transparency
- Not up to date on local climate impacts / local initiatives and their implications
- Climate being low on the list of priorities, when marginalized communities are just trying to survive - a focus on climate and environment often comes from a place of privilege.
- Made to feel that they don't have the expert knowledge to engage.
  - People still have knowledge to offer based on their lived experience regardless of differences in systems and practices.

“The language barrier has been the most challenging...You have something that you want to say. You have something that can help. You have to be included.” - Panel Discussion Participant

**Barriers specific to each group are highlighted in sections below.** Don't assume you know how to fix barriers - ask the individuals.

## Evaluation/Reporting Template

There are several [standard templates](#) for reporting on general community engagement, but for marginalized populations evaluation is more challenging as this is usually a long term relationship building exercise. Try to **avoid using up too much staff time because of detailed reporting expectations.**

### Suggested metrics

- List key partner organizations engaged and how these connect to marginalized groups. Indicators of success are trusted relationships built.
- Identify projects co-designed by, and funded for these groups
- Number of engagement events/outreach work for marginalized groups or communities, total number people engaged, and the nature of their participation (qualitative description)
- Anecdotal evidence of effective engagement - stories, quotes - this could be the most valuable part of the report
- Identify changes to climate plans made to better meet the needs of marginalized populations

## Engaging Marginalized Communities Panel Discussion

The Climate Caucus Network had the opportunity to listen to individuals with lived experience of marginalization (newcomers, BIPOC folks etc.) from diverse backgrounds to discuss and address the challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing community engagement. The panel includes four speakers with lived experience of marginalization and is facilitated by Sharmarke Dubow, former Victoria City Councillor. Hearing from people with diverse, lived experiences leads to better climate planning and stronger support for climate initiatives.

Additionally, Megan MacLean, Program Manager of the Climate Action Team at the City of Toronto, and Danielle Johnston, Manager of Democratic Engagement at the

City of Vancouver share their insights and experiences in engaging marginalized communities in climate-related initiatives. Through engaging discussions, we explore innovative strategies and best practices to ensure inclusivity and equal representation in climate planning processes.

[WATCH HERE](#)

## Detailed Strategies for Engaging Marginalized Populations

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In this document you will find [key strategies, barriers and areas of engagement](#) that are common across various marginalized populations.

1. [Work to build trust](#)
2. [Start early and slow down](#)
3. [Leverage Content and Context Experts](#)
4. [Codesign](#)
5. [Improve accessibility](#)

## Strategies for Specific Marginalized Groups

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Principles for engagement that are unique to specific marginalized groups can be found in the documents below! Items that relate to most groups can be found in the strategies for engaging marginalized populations.

Category	Description
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<b><u>Engaging People Experiencing Homelessness</u></b>	People who are experiencing homelessness can be easily missed in any type of civic engagement. As well, climate plans that neglect the needs of people experiencing homelessness can easily worsen their situation.
<b><u>Engaging Low Income groups</u></b>	Climate change will disproportionately impact the 2.8 million Canadians living below the poverty line. Consultation with low income communities is necessary to learn how local governments can help them adapt to our changing climate, and finance associated health, housing, and livelihood costs.
<b><u>Engaging People with Disabilities</u></b>	Persons with disabilities constitute 15% of the world's population, and experience disproportionate impacts from climate change, yet they are often excluded from climate planning. People with disabilities have often not been considered as much as other vulnerable populations when it comes to climate impacts.
<b><u>Engaging Racialized individuals</u></b>	Engaging racialized communities is crucial to create robust and equitable climate policies that account for how climate impacts, environmental racism, and discrimination impact the well-being of racialized communities. Racialized individuals have systematically been excluded from decision-making bodies, which has allowed environmental racism to occur.
<b><u>Beyond Consultation with Indigenous Nations, Peoples, and Communities</u></b>	Collaboration on climate action ensures that Indigenous perspectives, values, and interests are considered in decision-making processes that affect their lands and resources. Working collaboratively enables a combining Indigenous knowledge with scientific expertise that can yield more effective strategies for addressing climate challenges.
<b><u>Engaging Youth</u></b>	By empowering young individuals as active participants and decision-makers, we can foster



	innovative solutions, and build a resilient and environmentally conscious society. Youth are the next generation, and the decisions made today will directly impact their future. They are also educated and concerned about the impacts of climate change, so youth are a critical group to engage in local government decisions.
<b><u>Engaging Immigrant Communities</u></b>	Engaging with immigrant communities will ensure that climate plans better meet the needs, concerns, and goals of what for many local governments is an increasingly diverse constituency. Note that within this group there will be widely varying degrees of language skills and familiarity with Canadian systems of government, as well as diverse experiences with climate impacts in their communities of origin.
<b><u>Engaging 2SLGBTQ+ communities</u></b>	In Canada, the 2SLGBTQ+ community is likely to be harder hit by climate change, as they are more likely to experience homelessness, economic instability, and health risks. When climate adaptation planning and emergency plans don't consider the experiences of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, their services can be inaccessible or unsafe. This community experiences continued violence and discrimination which requires consideration to ensure their safety.

## Additional Resources for Engaging Marginalized Populations

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- [Climate Caucus Panel Discussion on Engaging Marginalized Communities Inclusive Community Engagement](#)
- [SFU: Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement](#)
- [Tamarack: The Context Experts](#)
- [Tamarack: Turf, Trust, Co-creation and Collective Impact](#)

- [Engaging Marginalized and Vulnerable Populations for Climate Action:](#)  
Training for Climate Caucus staff and board from Toronto Environmental Alliance
- [Partners for Climate Protection - Integrating Equity, Diversity and Inclusion into Municipal Climate Action](#)
- [ICLEI - Equitable Climate Adaptation](#)
- [USDN: Guide to Equitable, Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning](#)
- USDN - [Equity in Sustainability: An Equity Scan of Local Government Sustainability Programs](#)

### **Climate Caucus Resources:**

[Climate Caucus Municipal Grants List](#) - detailed list of relevant municipal grants

[Policies and Resources Library](#) - list of motions, bylaws, council reports and briefing notes