



GREEN
MUNICIPAL
FUND

FONDS
MUNICIPAL
VERT

Working with challenges and harnessing strengths for climate resilience in small municipalities

Climate-ready communities assessment tool tip sheet

Climate resilience has become a priority for communities across Canada to avoid costly damages and ensure resilient service delivery. This has prompted them to assess local climate risks, develop climate adaptation plans and find ways to integrate climate considerations into their organization's policies, plans and processes.

In these efforts small municipalities may face challenges that larger municipalities do not. For example, as a small municipality you may have:

- limited funding for new projects, plans or programs
- fewer staff members who can work on climate issues
- staff who are juggling multiple roles
- gaps in knowledge and experience related to climate, project management or other topics

However, small municipalities also have distinct strengths that can be used to support climate resilience efforts in their communities. For example, as a small municipality, you may have:

- strong community connections
- passionate local leaders
- residents and staff who know a lot about specific community needs
- quick and flexible decision-making processes

A program of/
Un programme de la



Climate adaptation is an ongoing process involving continuous learning and adjustments based on new information and changing local circumstances. Good climate adaptation is about getting started and then making improvements over time.

This tip sheet is intended to support you in that process by tailoring the work to small municipalities and making the most of your strengths. While it is designed for use alongside the [Climate-Ready Communities Assessment Tool](#), it can also serve as independent support for your climate adaptation initiatives.

HARNESSING YOUR STRENGTHS



PILLAR 1: PEOPLE, PARTNERSHIPS AND GOVERNANCE

Effective climate adaptation relies on a strong foundation of people, partnerships and governance structures to coordinate efforts and make informed decisions. As a small municipality, you may have resource restrictions, making it difficult to address climate topics and build on this foundation. However, you may also have unique advantages. Without organizational siloes, small municipalities can foster integrated and collaborative efforts across departments. Nimbleness, close-knit communities and quick decision-making processes are other strengths that can be leveraged to support efforts.

Example Pillar 1 activity:

Find a champion who can help your organization move forward with climate work.

Putting it into practice

Identify an internal champion who has a strong interest in climate adaptation and a willingness to learn. The champion starts by using free educational resources to learn about climate adaptation and then scans for grants available to further the work.

Explore educational resources listed here: [Climate resilience training from GMF Partners](#).

Search funding opportunities using [Funding opportunity finder](#).

Playing to your strengths

Staff in small communities are used to wearing many hats, being flexible to new circumstances and pitching in to get the job done. Empowering someone who has a strong interest in the topic and a desire to learn can set an organization up to make meaningful progress despite limited resources.

Example Pillar 1 activity:

Make a list of organizations or people in your community that may have shared interests in climate adaptation.

Putting it into practice

Your organization's climate adaptation champion asks around to identify others who might be interested in working together on climate adaptation, such as local school youth groups, representatives of agricultural organizations, business owners and social workers. They make a list of people to contact to see if they would like to collaborate.

Playing to your strengths

Small communities often have close-knit communities and strong volunteer networks that have a deep understanding of local issues. These networks can be an important asset in climate adaptation work, as they can share the work, bring in valuable knowledge or resources and ultimately support more effective implementation of actions identified to adapt to climate.

**Example Pillar 1
activity:**

**Engage council in a conversation about how climate change
will impact your community and the benefits of adaptation.**

**Putting it into
practice**

You organize a workshop with council. In the workshop you share information about how climate is expected to change in the area and then work together to identify how those changes will impact things that matter to council and the community, such as sustainable service, emergency response, impacts on the local economy and more. You finish the workshop by sharing some of the actions your municipality can take, as well as examples or success stories from other communities and possible sources of funding for the work.

For additional support on engaging council in a conversation about local climate impacts, read GMF's [Talking it through: Guide for local government staff on climate adaptation](#).

**Playing to your
strengths**

Councils in small communities are often “hands-on” because of small staff budgets. Such councils can be accessible to staff and well connected to issues and priorities of the community—conditions that allow small municipalities to move forward quickly.



PILLAR 2: RISK AND ADAPTATION PLANNING

Comprehensive risk and adaptation planning is crucial for identifying climate impacts and developing effective strategies to address them. Small municipalities don't have the same resources as larger ones, but the process of risk assessment and adaptation planning need not be daunting. By starting small, involving passionate locals and using relationships within the community, you can tap into local knowledge and experience of climate impacts and create plans that address your community's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Example Pillar 2 activity:

Make a plan to get started using publicly available free resources.

Putting it into practice

You develop a workplan that outlines the basic steps your municipality will take to do a climate risk assessment and develop an adaptation plan. Your approach is to use existing data and community knowledge to inform the climate risk assessment and adaptation planning, build some momentum and improve over time.

Explore more tips on developing a climate adaptation work plan in the [Tip sheet: Start preparing for climate risk assessment and adaptation plan](#).

Playing to your strengths

Small municipalities often have a more streamlined structure, which can support quick decision making and enable an efficient and focused scoping process for a climate risk assessment. This can help get planning efforts underway without needing lengthy approvals or consultations.

Example Pillar 2 activity:

Make use of deep community knowledge to identify climate impacts.

Putting it into practice

You host a workshop with staff, community leaders, youth and community organizations to identify how climate change will impact your community. You enable broad community resident participation by having childcare available at the workshop. During the workshop, you encourage participants to learn from each other and build relationships that will help with implementing adaptation actions in the future.

Playing to your strengths

Small municipalities have socially dynamic networks that can bring diverse partners together in a workshop to discuss climate impacts in a way that isn't always possible for larger municipalities. These workshops provide valuable insight into different perspectives on climate impacts and potential solutions.

Example Pillar 2 activity:

Work as a community to develop a climate adaptation plan that uses everyone's strengths.

Putting it into practice

You see the role of your municipal government as initiating discussions and supporting community-wide adaptation action, rather than needing to be directly responsible for implementing all actions. As part of your adaptation planning, you host a series of "Building Climate Resilience" community events. Each event is organized around one of the themes from the adaptation plan. Community members and organizations are invited to share their work and ideas and learn from others. You arrange for a translator to attend so that newcomers to the community can participate in their preferred language. These events create opportunities to match people, ideas and resources with the organizations that need them most.

Playing to your strengths

Teams in small municipalities often wear multiple hats and collaborate closely across departments. This more integrated structure can help identify cross-cutting risks and opportunities during adaptation planning, leading to more coordinated and effective actions. At the same time, ongoing engagement with community members helps ensure that actions reflect local needs and build on community strengths.



PILLAR 3: IMPLEMENTATION AND INTEGRATION

Acting on what you learn through climate risk assessments and adaptation plans is a critical part of strengthening community climate resilience. However, as a small municipality, impactful implementation and integration can be difficult if financial resources are limited or if staff cannot devote their time to climate adaptation efforts. To help make sure your adaptation plan gets actioned, leverage close community connections as well as your ability to make quick and flexible decisions.

Example Pillar 3 activity:

Implement actions from your climate adaptation plan.

Putting it into practice

You work with operational staff to make small adjustments to operations and maintenance activities in ways that improve climate adaptation, such as proactively inspecting and clearing culverts before big rain events.

See GMF's [Tools: Operations and maintenance for climate resilience](#) for more examples of ways to build climate resilience.

Playing to your strengths

Staff in small municipalities regularly work together across functions, which allows shared learning and ensures that adaptation actions are realistic and can be implemented.

Example Pillar 3 activity:

Identify opportunities to integrate climate adaptation action into other initiatives.

Putting it into practice

You make a list of the initiatives your organization wants to undertake over the next five years. For example, this list could include updating your official community plan, reviewing levels of service for core infrastructure or developing a long-term financial plan. For each initiative, you identify connections to climate impacts and how climate adaptation could be integrated into the work. For example, you may decide to update your asset management plan to assess how levels of service could be maintained under future conditions, such as more intense rainstorms. Then you explore the financial implications of replacing your existing culverts with larger ones to accommodate more intense rainstorms.

Playing to your strengths

Small municipalities have straightforward organizational structures, making it easy to have conversations with the right people about integrating climate adaptation into future initiatives.

Example Pillar 3 activity:

Monitor progress over time and update actions.

Putting it into practice

You bring together key staff and community partners in a quarterly meeting. Your standing agenda is:

- What adaptation actions have we taken?
- What's working? How can we tell?
- What have we learned?
- What's next?

These meetings serve as a system for keeping up momentum as well as ongoing monitoring and action planning. The notes from the meeting can be used to create reports for audiences as needed.

Playing to your strengths

Small communities are uniquely positioned to rely on strong relationships between staff and community members to carry out climate adaptation work. Monitoring efforts can build on these connections, strengthening collaboration while tracking progress and challenges—all of which helps maintain momentum.



FURTHER YOUR LEARNING

As a small municipality, you have unique strengths that can help you make meaningful progress on climate adaptation. For more examples on how to apply your strengths in climate adaptation efforts, visit GMF's [Adaptation resource library](#).