

# Communicating the Benefits of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency Efforts



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# About ICLEI USA

ICLEI is the leading network of local governments committed to climate action, clean energy, and sustainability



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# Communications Challenges

How do we explain why climate and energy issues matter for local governments? Why should anyone care?

How do we describe the local challenges and opportunities we face?

How do we attract people to the table for healthy dialogues?



# Communication Counts

Clear, compelling, values-driven communication is more important than ever.

Climate and energy communication is about building relationships, not winning an argument or getting people to think the same way.

4 communications guidelines can be applied to a range of scenarios (community engagement, presenting GHG inventory findings, etc.).



# 4 Communication Guidelines

#1: Know your audience so that you can target your messages to them.

#2: Speak to your audience's shared values and find common ground.

#3: Talk about climate and energy impacts in local, immediate terms.

#4: Emphasize the power and practicality of local solutions and opportunities.



# #1: Know Your Audience

- Speak your audience's language and be relevant.
- Identify the motivations of different groups for supporting local climate action.
- Find credible messengers to deliver your targeted messages.



# #2: Speak to Shared Values



What kind of community do we want to leave for our children and grandchildren? What values drive that conversation?

- Prosperity
- Protection, Security and Safety
- Balance: Environment/Economy
- Freedom/Individual Rights/Choice
- Stewardship

Values driving priority issues:

- Reducing waste (energy, recycling, etc.)
- Preserving Open Space and Parks
- Job Creation – Clean Energy Economy
- Reducing Childhood Asthma Rates



## #2: Speak to Shared Values

- Understand which climate change messages may conflict or align with your audience's core values.
- Frame climate change in ways that your audience can relate to, in ways that respect their beliefs.
- Recognize that broad support exists for climate action initiatives (bike paths, clean energy), even among those that question climate change.
- Determine your lead topic on why climate action matters locally (extreme weather impacts, energy efficiency); opens door for secondary conversation on GHG reduction





# Putting it all together: Recipe for a VALUES SANDWICH



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# Got facts or data? Make a SANDWICH

*Here's the recipe:*

1. Say why it matters to our families, our values, and our future;
2. Next give your data or present the problem and talk policy solutions;
3. Second slice of bread—Finish by saying why it matters—*again*.



# #3: Talk in Local, Immediate Terms

- People need to understand how climate change and energy uncertainty will impact them personally
- Make it real by presenting evidence of existing local climate impacts, especially in visual, human terms.
- Frame climate and energy action as about smart planning to protect your community.



# #4: Emphasize Solutions and Opportunities

- Highlight powerful, practical, low-risk, common-sense solutions: “It’s a no brainer!”
- Emphasize ROI
- Find effective frames for your messaging:
  - resilience and preparedness
  - economic prosperity/jobs
  - saving money/efficiency
  - public health and quality of life
  - stewardship
  - innovation and competition



# #4: Emphasize Solutions and Opportunities

Win on economic terms:

- Dollars saved
- Jobs created
- Waste eliminated
- Costs avoided
- Property values increased



Connect the dots: climate, energy, economy



# Sample Messages

“We can save energy, save taxpayer dollars and create more efficient government.”

“We can become more economically competitive by making our community a better place to live.”

“Conserving our resources and saving money is just good common sense.”



# Sample Messages

From San Antonio's Mission Verde Plan:

“San Antonio cannot afford to be left behind. We must invest in green technology, energy conservation, renewable energy, efficient transportation, and smarter buildings. ... We must bring venture capital to invest in new green businesses and technology. We must conserve, create, and grow.”

“We can position ourselves to compete successfully in a 21st Century global economy. We can transform our city and improve the lives of all San Antonians.”



# Responding to Attacks

Strategy #1: Find your positive message and stick with it

Strategy #2: Proactively prepare and educate

Strategy #3: Reframe the conversation to be about local solutions





# Stick to Your Message

Stand behind a strong message about your programs that you'd use no matter what

Emphasize impacts, ROI, and local benefits; tap values

Attacks are an opportunity to build support and awareness, showcase your leadership

Share your success stories in op-eds and press releases



# Proactively Educate and Prepare

Inform elected officials about both sides of the issue so they aren't blindsided

Make sure elected officials, staff, and all potential speakers understand and agree on how to respond, and what messages to use



Optional: Consider reaching out proactively to activists to have a discussion about their concerns in a private, non-confrontational setting, away from microphones and podiums.



# Reframing the Conversation

## **Pivot away from their message, back to your message:**

Respond to accusations by talking about local issues and solutions, need for local dialogues.

*“The United Nations doesn’t have anything to do with our energy program. We’re focused on ways to help homeowners in our community lower their monthly energy bills.”*



# Reframing the Conversation

## Be hyper-local:

Continually reference why an initiative or program matters, why it's important locally.



*“Planting 1,000 new trees will reduce the air pollution that has caused health problems in our most vulnerable community members.”*

*“We use ICLEI’s software to measure our carbon footprint and identify opportunities for saving energy and money in our County buildings and vehicle fleet.”*



# Reframing the Conversation

## **Emphasize consensus and local control:**

Reference community-stated priorities and local decisions that laid groundwork for programs, planning priorities, or ICLEI membership.

*“We’re talking about transportation alternatives today because in our 2011 survey, community members stated that reducing traffic was top priority.”*

*“We joined ICLEI for resources to help meet our local goal to address climate change, as directed by City Council Resolution No. 03-123.”*



# Reframing the Conversation

## **Press your frame:**

Make activists respond to your frame of local issues and solutions, not theirs, such as Agenda 21.

*“If you don’t agree with these solutions we’re proposing, then what are yours?  
Let’s talk about it.”*



# Reframing the Conversation

## Avoid their frame:

Don't respond with language that only reinforces their frame.

Don't get into a debate about conspiracies or nebulous topics.

*“Our comprehensive plan is not designed to take away your private property.”*

*“I am not a crook.” –Richard Nixon*



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# More Information

Access ICLEI's Climate Communication  
for Local Governments Guide at  
[www.iclei.org/climate\\_and\\_energy](http://www.iclei.org/climate_and_energy)

Contact me at [don.knapp@iclei.org](mailto:don.knapp@iclei.org)

