# LET'S TALK COMMUNITIES & CLIMATE

## COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE FOR CITY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

ecoAmerica
*building climate leadership*

Path to Positive Communities
Local Climate Leadership

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would also like to extend our thanks to the entire Path to Positive Communities Leadership Circle for their contribution to the work of engaging their peers and the public to elevate climate solutions as a priority.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*Let's Talk Communities and Climate: Communication Guidance for City and Community Leaders* is designed to help experienced and novice climate change communicators. This guide synthesizes the latest academic research and message testing on climate communications from across the social sciences into a practical guide to support communities and meaningful discussions of climate change.

To explore collaboration with Path to Positive Communities or ecoAmerica, contact Bob Perkowitz.

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## GREETINGS CITY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS,

*Cities and communities achieved significant progress on climate solutions in 2016. In Paris, hundreds of city leaders shaped the Conference of Parties 21 talks, led by groups like C40 Cities, USDN, ICLEI, National League of Cities and others that support local climate action. In the United States, communities continued to implement bold climate plans, ensuring progress toward a sustainable future.*

*Through local climate action plans, mayors can create jobs, build climate-smart transportation solutions, and spur investments in solar and wind power that slash utility bills, give residents choices about where they get their energy, and broadly increase livability.*

*Communities can now improve the environment and boost local economies, employment, and energy independence at the same time. However, to build support for local climate solutions, mayors and other leaders must more effectively engage citizens and stakeholders within their communities.*

*Local governments and the services they provide contribute a small percentage of a community's climate pollution. Because the majority comes from the private sector (homes, businesses, churches, schools, hospitals, etc.), successful community climate solutions require broad community participation.*

*A key step is to ensure that mayors are well equipped to communicate local climate solutions to leaders and residents.*

*This guide provides that support. Featuring research-proven practices for successful climate communication, this guide can play a vital role in every community leader's tool kit. From talking points to counterpoints, "dos" and "don'ts," proven steps to create your own custom message, and a model speech, the guide helps you to successfully integrate climate into conversations, speaking engagements, and other communications.*

*We wish you the greatest success on your path to positive solutions.*

Dan Barry

Director
*Path to Positive Communities*

**PARTNERS**

Path to Positive Communities builds climate leadership to advance climate solutions among American mayors and community leaders. The program empowers local and regional leaders to work within and across sectors in order to maximize the opportunities that local climate solutions bring to the American people. Leaders and organizations from American cities, counties, and states are invited to join and leverage the Path to Positive Communities program to best suit their city's needs.

City and community leaders have a duty to help residents prepare for the consequences that come with a changing climate, as well as relaying the benefits of action. By joining Path to Positive Communities, you will become part of a diverse national network committed to local and national solutions to climate change, furthering the work already under way by mayors and county leaders in communities across the country. You will gain access to resources and tools to help you communicate with inspiration and efficacy and lead citizens and community groups toward a future that is better prepared for climate impacts while also addressing the root causes of climate change.

We all need to work together to prepare, empower, and inspire climate change solutions in the United States.

*Let's Talk Communities & Climate* is just one of the suite of resources provided by ecoAmerica for civic leaders. Please visit the Path to Positive Communities website for more resources and ideas to help your city accelerate its climate leadership.

Join fellow community leaders at PathToPositive.org.

Related programs for leaders in other fields:



Faith leaders

Health leaders

Higher education leaders

Business leaders

# CLIMATE IMPACTS IN COMMUNITY SYSTEMS

*It can no longer be debated as a theoretical possibility that our climate is changing. Instead, it is our lived experience. Communities and society are moving beyond discussions about who or what is to blame and toward solutions. Elected and community leaders in cities and towns across the United States have emerged as critical leaders on the front lines of addressing the increasingly frequent and severe impacts. Today, communities across the country are crafting plans to cut the pollution that is damaging our climate while also preparing for anticipated climate impacts in three primary categories (sea level rise, weather variability, and urban heat) that occur across three community systems (human, built, and natural).*

## CLIMATE IMPACTS IN URBAN SYSTEMS

| HUMAN | BUILT | NATURAL |
|---|---|---|
| • **personal and public health and safety**<br>• **social and psychological impacts**<br>• **economic impacts, job loss, property loss** | • **public and personal property damage and loss**<br>• **damage to public and city services infrastructure**<br>• **increases in buildings' energy usage** | • **loss of food security**<br>• **reduction in air quality**<br>• **reduction in water quality and quantity**<br>• **species migration, invasion, and loss** |

*Diagram 1. For more information on the impacts of climate change, refer to the U.S. Global Change Research Program's National Climate Assessment and/or the Climate and Health Assessment.*
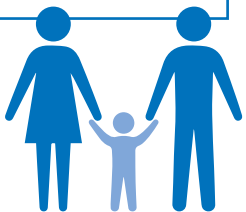
## HUMAN

### HEALTH

- High temperatures increase the range of disease-carrying insects and raise the rates of heat stroke and cardiovascular, respiratory, and kidney diseases.
- Higher levels of air pollution and allergens exacerbate respiratory diseases, such as asthma.
- Severe storms and weather events increase incidents of death and the rates and intensities of injury.
- Direct and gradual physical impacts on the environment, society, and infrastructure can lead to trauma, shock, stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.
- Strained water and food systems increase food and water-borne infections.
- Health consequences from climate change disproportionately affect children, the elderly, and low-income populations who have less access to vital resources.

### ECONOMIC

- Severe weather events take a toll as municipalities pay to protect and restore local infrastructure.
- Local economies suffer from weather-related expenditures, business interruption, and loss of employment.
- Droughts drive up water bills for families, cities, and businesses.
- Heat waves increase energy demands and costs for businesses and families, particularly for low-income and some communities of color.
- Changing climate patterns alter agricultural productivity, threatening the industry and farm workers' livelihoods.

## BUILT

### INFRASTRUCTURE

- Rising sea levels, coastal flooding, and storm surges threaten streets, homes, businesses, and other infrastructure.

- Urban heat-island effects mean that cities and urban areas will be especially hard hit by rising temperatures.

- Severe weather events can damage buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces and reduce or temporarily prevent access to important services, such as power, fire and police protection, emergency health services, and public transportation.

## NATURAL

### FOOD SUPPLY

- Changing growing seasons and more frequent droughts pose threats to food security and nutritional quality.

### AIR

- Air pollution impacts human health, is unsightly, and can damage trees, lakes and rivers (and aquatic life), and accelerate the decay of buildings. Emissions from vehicles and power plants can cause algae blooms, which are harmful to aquatic ecosystems.

### SPECIES MIGRATION

- Changing weather patterns impact community natural heritage. Animals and insects migrate to new areas, disrupt ecosystems and affect industries like fishing and agriculture. Trees, which cannot migrate, may succumb to drought or pests.

### WATER

- Precipitation is expected to increase in some areas, whereas droughts and dry spells will be more severe in others.

  ° In the arid West, reduced snowpack will result in less runoff, adversely affecting water supply and the infrastructure built around capturing snowmelt.

  ° In mountainous areas, warming conditions will affect the health of the watershed due to vegetation changes, increased insects, die-off of trees, and increased erosion.

- Drier winters will hamper the ability of aquifers to refill, putting stress on underground water supplies.

- More severe droughts and more intense precipitation create runoff that threatens water quality and increases pollution in lakes, rivers, and streams.

- Potable water may become scarcer as pollutants, toxins, and saltwater find their way into our reservoirs and aquifers.
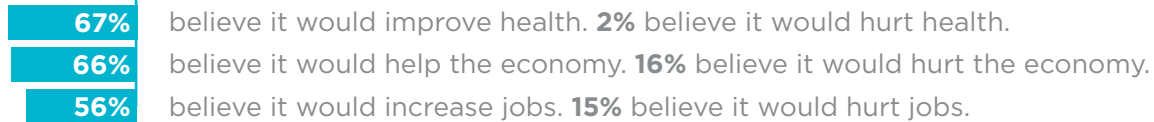
# RESEARCH ON AWARENESS & ATTITUDES

*The following information from recent polls highlights public awareness of and concern about climate change, showing that community and city leaders can focus less on convincing people and more on showing them meaningful and practical solutions.*

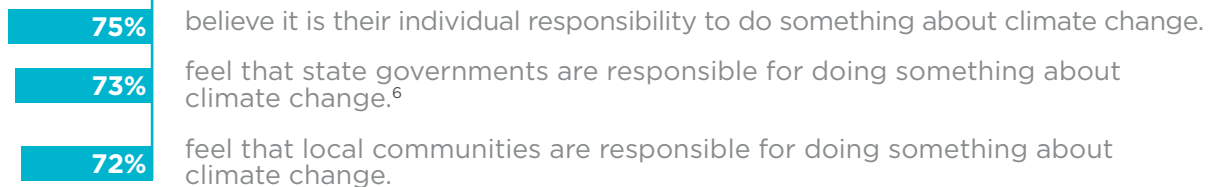## TABLE 1: AMERICAN CLIMATE AWARENESS AND CONCERN[a]

**A growing number of Americans notice and are concerned about climate change.[7]**

| Climate change | National | Chicago | Los Angeles | New York | Salt Lake City |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Believe | 83% | 84% | 87% | 88% | 83% |
| Notice | 78% | 81% | 79% | 87% | 71% |
| Concerned | 76% | 78% | 82% | 85% | 68% |
| Caused by humans or a combination of human and natural causes | 81% | 82% | 84% | 84% | 79% |
| Want their city to act | 74% | 78% | 80% | 83% | 74% |

### Americans are more likely to believe that climate action will have benefits rather than detriments.[7]

**67%** believe it would improve health. **2%** believe it would hurt health.

**66%** believe it would help the economy. **16%** believe it would hurt the economy.

**56%** believe it would increase jobs. **15%** believe it would hurt jobs.

### Americans expect their leaders to act on climate.[17]

**75%** believe it is their individual responsibility to do something about climate change.

**73%** feel that state governments are responsible for doing something about climate change.[6]

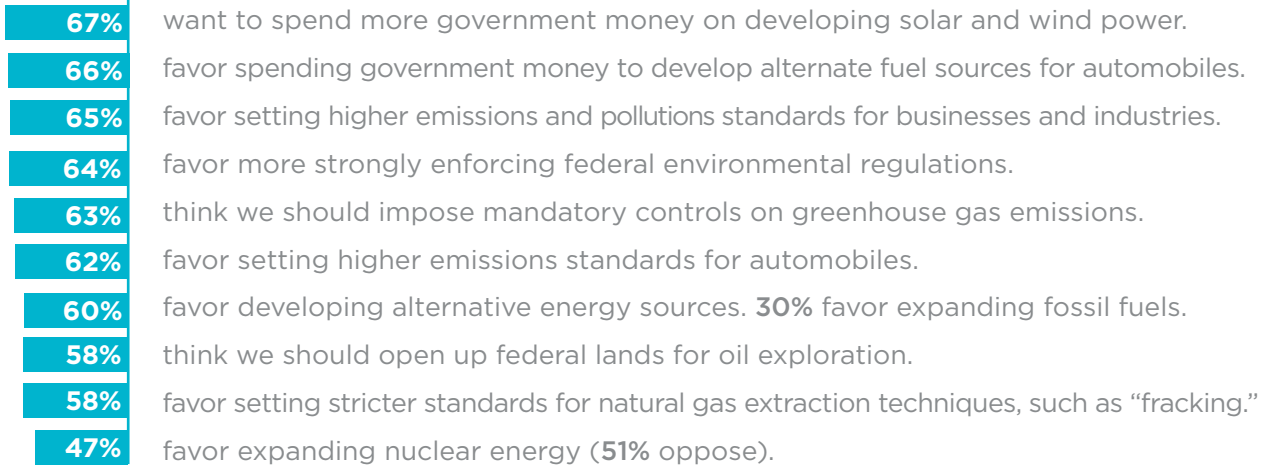**72%** feel that local communities are responsible for doing something about climate change.

### Americans support an array of real, concrete climate policies and programs that can be implemented at the local and city levels.

**88%** believe the United States should produce more wind and solar energy over other types of energy.[7]

**77%** favor charging large companies a fee for the pollution they create, and **56%** favor reinvesting this fee in the development of new clean energy sources.[7]

**72%** would support a community-wide energy savings program.

**70%** would support updating building codes to increase energy efficiency in their community.[17]

a. Chart 1. American Talk Climate Metrics 2016 National Survey of more than 800 representative American adult voters. Results by city were drawn from additional surveys with statistically representative samples in each city.
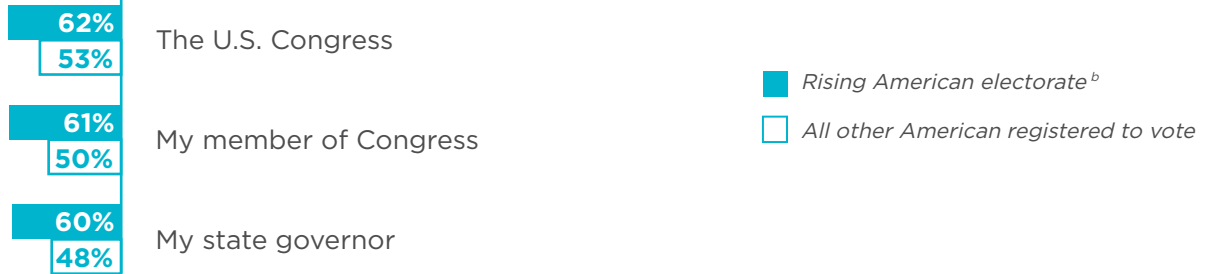
**The majority of Americans favor a variety of climate-friendly energy solutions.[16]**

**67%** want to spend more government money on developing solar and wind power.

**66%** favor spending government money to develop alternate fuel sources for automobiles.

**65%** favor setting higher emissions and pollutions standards for businesses and industries.

**64%** favor more strongly enforcing federal environmental regulations.

**63%** think we should impose mandatory controls on greenhouse gas emissions.

**62%** favor setting higher emissions standards for automobiles.

**60%** favor developing alternative energy sources. **30%** favor expanding fossil fuels.

**58%** think we should open up federal lands for oil exploration.

**58%** favor setting stricter standards for natural gas extraction techniques, such as "fracking."

**47%** favor expanding nuclear energy (**51%** oppose).

Americans increasingly want and expect climate action from their elected leaders—making solutions a political winner.

**The rising American electorate is more likely than other Americans to think their elected officals should do more on climate change.[14]**

% of registered voters who say they think elected official should do "more" or "much more" than they are currently doing

**62%**
**53%** The U.S. Congress

■ *Rising American electorate [b]*
□ *All other American registered to vote*

**61%**
**50%** My member of Congress

**60%**
**48%** My state governor

# SUCCESSFUL MESSAGES

**Why this message works:**

Appeals to the value of protecting and providing for families

**Pairs clean energy with a prosperous life**, cites examples to make the solution tangible, **uses a can-do tone**—all of which appeal highly to Americans

Invokes the **power of "we,"** a collective call to action that channels the strength of groups

Taps into concerns about jobs and national inertia but refrains from painting a villain and instead **focuses on the personal empowerment of local action**

**Why this message works:**

**Puts people first and conveys climate action as a moral responsibility to protect families' health**

Cites a trusted messenger with a key fact about pollution in the air we breathe

Addresses climate-related health impacts but **moves quickly to solutions**

Presents **solutions that are accessible, available here and now**, and part of a feasible plan for the present and the future

Uses **visual language** so that the audience can see itself in the solutions

Introduces the health benefits of solutions, including support for healthy lifestyles

*The following messages have been rigorously tested to ensure affinity, resonance, and motivation with persuadable Americans.[c] These messages offer examples of effective ways to communicate about climate within your community. You can use phrases, whole sentences, or the message in its entirety for success.*

*The values-based messages tap into people's personal interests and affiliations—communities, health, faith, business, and young adults. For additional guidance with these themes and audiences, please see our specific Let's Talk Climate guides for health professionals and faith leaders. Of note: the faith message is best delivered by a person of faith.*

## Our Community

We all want to live in the best place for our families. And communities across America are learning that smart investments in sustainable energy like wind and solar provide a healthier environment, attract new business, create jobs, and build stronger communities. We see the effects of climate change, and we can't just wait for politicians in Washington to solve our problems. Right now, in our own communities, we can reduce pollution, improve our health, and create new jobs that can't be outsourced, by producing and using clean energy. We can protect our cities by leaving dirty fuels behind. A community with sustainable solutions is the place I want to call home.

## Our Health

Our families' health matters. When the American Lung Association tells us that toxic pollution in the air we breathe is affecting the health of nearly half of all Americans, we need new solutions. Kids seem to carry inhalers as often as lunch boxes. Seniors are stuck inside when the weather shifts dramatically to extreme heat or freezing cold. Thankfully, we have a plan for a healthier future….

**Ending Option A**

We can use safe, clean energy, like wind and solar, that helps make every breath we take a healthy one. We can walk or bike more often to improve our fitness while cutting down on pollution. And we can make our cities more sustainable so that we can live our best lives. We can care for our climate to care for our health.

**Ending Option B**

We can move away from the dirty fuels that make us sick, and shift toward safe, clean energy, like wind and solar. Each breath we take should be a healthy one. Let's address this problem now, because caring for ourselves means caring for our climate.

## Our Faith[d]

### *Stewards of God's creation*

We have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. God so loved us that He created for us a pure, clean home here on Earth, vibrant with healthy nature to provide for our needs. He also gave us the free will to choose how we care for that Earth. Let's follow the Golden Rule and do unto others and our Earth as we would have done unto ourselves and our children. For too long, the priorities of a greedy few have forced our climate out of balance, degrading God's creation, damaging our land, water, and air and harming us all—especially the least among us. We must care more fully for creation and walk more gently upon His Earth.

### *Papal-inspired language*

We have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. As Pope Francis said, "The Earth was here before us [and entrusted to us as a gift]. What kind of world do we want to leave for those who come after us, to the children who are now growing up? Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above [ourselves]." Climate change is a message that something is wrong. You and I can choose "good"; we can choose a more worthy and moral path. Opting for safe and clean energy solutions such as wind and solar is evidence of the best in human beings and is an example of how we can act in the image of our Creator to preserve what He has bestowed.

## Our Businesses

Smart companies face challenges head-on and turn them into opportunities—and our changing climate is no exception. From Apple to Google, American businesses are planning ahead for severe weather events and other risks of climate change, and turning what could be problems into innovations that are profit-making opportunities. Clean energy is a profitable investment worth making, and American businesses know it. Adopting sustainable practices and switching to clean energy saves money and improves the bottom line. The more companies and small businesses that follow these proven approaches, the more we'll see a triple win for our wealth, our well-being, and our world.

**Why this message works:**

Presents climate as a **moral responsibility to God**, our children, our neighbors, future generations, the "least of us," and all of creation

Talks about creation care first (a **familiar term** in faith) and then moves on to climate change

Uses familiar and **resonant faith language and metaphors**, such as the Golden Rule

Employs a story arc that encompasses a **challenge, an action, and a resolution**, similar to story arcs found in religious teachings

**Why this message works:**

Positions risk in the context of planning ahead, thus **emphasizing hope instead of blame**

Taps into pride—**turning challenges into opportunities** and innovations for smart companies

Positions clean energy as **profitable rather than costly**

Discusses existing and accessible solutions, so the audience can feel like they are "hopping on a moving train"

Uses **familiar business and visual language** for resonance

c. Definition of "persuadable" are Americans who believe that climate change is due to a combination of human and natural causes, as well as are unsure if we can do anything to address climate change. Persuadables make up about 77% of the U.S. populations; see ecoAmerica's report *Let's Talk Climate: Messages to Motivate Americans*, for more information.

d. Most traditions have an official statement on climate change (see resources from GreenFaith and Interfaith Power & Light).

**Why this message works:**

**Promotes generational pride** and confidence in the path to achieve a goal

Connects with the desire for the new and differentiates it from the outdated and ineffective past

**Taps into can-do attitudes** and motivations for a better life by **keying into relevant interests** that are connected to climate (transit, food, self-sufficiency, and protection)

## For Young Adults

Millennials are not just up-and-coming. When it comes to inventing and adopting what works, we're already here. We know that getting things done means leaving behind the failed ways of the past and making up new ones. It's up to us to demand solutions to protect us from our changing climate. To us, "business as usual" is already obsolete, so we want new energy, better transit, local food, and an end to the big oil monopolies that block our progress. We're ready to bring America up to date with sustainable solutions to our climate challenges, and we want to act to preserve the places in which we live for our own generation and those that follow.

# EMBRACE & REPLACE: WORDS + PHRASES

*Creating your own message has powerful benefits, but so does having access to words and phrases that have been proven effective. When messaging is reduced to 140 characters, when sound bites drive the news, when policies are sold by catch phrases—it is essential that words be chosen with care. So many words now have loaded connotations or act as stand-ins for entire ideologies that your arguments should be well-structured and carefully phrased. The choice of the right words can be the difference between being heard and being shut down. The following tips should help you successfully build a climate change message that is best suited to your community.*

| Embrace | Replace | Because... |
|---|---|---|
| **Damage to the climate** | Climate change, climate crisis, climate risk, global warming | "Damage" implies human causation, which can be prevented or protected against. Other terms are too politically polarizing. |
| **Local/locally made clean energy, home-grown energy, clean energy, made right at home** | Renewable energy, green energy, domestic energy | "Local" folds in community empowerment without directly stating it. "Homegrown" implies accessible wind and solar energy. "Clean" reinforces health benefits and positions fossil fuels as "dirty." |
| **Better for families, our children, and future generations** | Better for us, better for you | Referencing future generations and families has high emotional resonance, moves thinking beyond oneself, builds inclusiveness (not everyone has children), and activates collective agency. |
| **Good for [city or state], good for the people** | Good for the country | Americans are more personally attuned to their local communities and personal well-being these days. They are less satisfied with how things are going in our country and thus do not respond as strongly to "good for the country" messages. |
| **Dirty fuels, out-of-date fuels, outdated fuels** | Dirty energy, fossil fuel energy | Pairing "dirty" with "fuel" ties together oil, coal, and gas, which need to be burned to create energy, and helps emphasize clean, healthy alternatives. References to the old versus the new work with those who can be persuaded. |
| **Today, we can use/We have used dirty fuels** | Today, we rely on fossil fuels/We have relied on dirty energy | "Use" empowers choice—to use clean energy. Americans want choice and reject the need to "rely" on fuels. Cities, communities, and citizens can opt to transition away from dirty fuels. |
| **We need to create rules that curb pollution and to impose fines on businesses that pollute** | Government taking steps to curb pollution | "Rules" and "fines" are concrete and thus seem more plausible and effective. Creating rules empowers people to make positive change. Taking "steps" is interpreted as unspecific and non-committal. |
| **We can** | We should | "We can" is positive, it empowers, and it has multiple meanings, such as a can-do attitude, collective action, and choice. "We should" is punitive and implies a lack of choice or conviction. |
| **Attract new business** | Good for the economy | Attracting new businesses implies the promise of new jobs and opportunities, as well as of putting more dollars in the pockets of residents in your community. |
| **Build stronger communities** | Build resilient communities | The term "resilient" is not a readily understood term for many Americans, feels defensive, and creates mixed feelings. Americans prefer to live in "stronger communities," a phrase that feels more empowered and inspired. |
| **Home** | Country | Home is where the heart is (more than the country). |
| **Best place for our families** | Protects the environment | It makes the solution more about the audience. "Family" is an inclusive term regardless of whether the audience has children. |

# KEY TALKING POINTS...

*You can make a difference in your community regarding climate. The following talking points provide a starting point. Tailor and use them in your conversations, speeches, and writing to build support for climate solutions.*

1.  **I care about climate change because acting for the well-being of everyone in our community is my responsibility.** I serve our citizens, and I work to make our community a better place to live in.

2.  **Climate change is already affecting our community.** Severe weather events, droughts, community health impacts, and increased energy bills threaten our community. This is why we must act. (This statement can be specifically tailored to climate impacts seen locally.)

3.  **The greatest action on climate begins with us.** We have the power to make a difference that will benefit our environment, our economy, and our community.

4.  **It is up to me and my fellow respected community leaders to lead on climate.** We need to ensure that the families, residents, and businesses in our communities are prepared for and understand our need to act on climate.

5.  **Some groups in our city are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including children, the elderly, the sick and poor, and disadvantaged communities.** Our efforts to stop climate-related pollution help all of these groups live better, healthier lives.

6.  **When we reduce fossil-fuel pollution, it improves the health and security of our community.** We can slow the rising temperatures that are changing weather patterns and causing more intense storms and heat waves, which in turn affect food and energy prices, as well as threaten our city infrastructure and the health and safety of our families.

7.  **Our community is blessed with determined and qualified leaders who want to lead on climate.** Faith, higher education, business, health, and community leaders must and have begun to collaborate on community-based climate solutions.

8.  **Investing in climate solutions means investing in our community.** By taking action, we can be prepared for climate impacts, enhance our community, create good local jobs, and make our neighborhoods more attractive places to live in.

# & COUNTERPOINTS ON COMMUNITIES & CLIMATE

1. **"Climate change does not affect me."**
   Climate change affects us all. Changing temperatures make heating and cooling our homes more expensive, and they make a bigger dent in our budgets. Rising sea levels threaten our coastlines. Severe weather events pose a risk to our homes, our community's infrastructure, and our mass transit and energy systems. Changing climate patterns affect our health in many ways, including increasing respiratory problems, such as asthma and the severity of allergies. (This statement can be specifically tailored to climate impacts seen locally.)

2. **"There is nothing I can do to stop climate change."**
   Taking action on climate is something that we can all do together. No one expects any one person to solve this—it is a community problem that requires a collective, community-wide response. In our communities, we can push for clean energy, such as wind and solar power. We can implement energy-efficiency standards, enhance mass transit systems, reduce waste, and optimize water use. We can even make landscaping choices to help reverse the damage to the climate. We can all act at home. Walking to work, changing thermostat settings, recycling, and being conscious about reducing energy consumption and emissions can go a long way. Together and as individuals, we can make a significant difference and be a part of the solution.

3. **"I am more concerned about my (family, health, job) right now."**
   We all have multiple pressing concerns that compete for our attention. Family, health, and work are all reasons why we must be concerned about a changing climate. We must address climate change because we care about clean air, clean water, and safe communities to live in. Caring for our climate is caring for ourselves, our family, and our community.

4. **"Why should we lead when other (cities, states, countries) are not?"**
   The United States has always been a yes-we-can kind of place. We have skilled workers, cutting-edge innovators, and an unparalleled work ethic. Other cities and countries are already investing in clean technologies, but we can and must lead the way. The next gold standard will be clean energy—affordable, local wind and solar power made here in our communities. In fact, cities and states across the nation—from California to Texas, Iowa, Tennessee, and beyond—have significantly increased their clean-power production. The United States has more than doubled its supply of solar energy. Our country has solved great challenges before, and we can lead again with innovations that fuel cleaner, safer, and healthier communities for our families, as well as stable, well-paying jobs for us all.

5. **"How do we know that humans are causing climate change?"**
   Although some Americans are unsure about the extent to which the climate is changing, and others doubt how much humans are to blame, we can all agree that we can do something to make our community stronger and more prosperous. Solutions are available right here, right now, and they strengthen our community, create jobs, and help reduce our climate impact at the same time. Investments in wind and solar energy, mass transit, and building efficiency can create jobs, improve living conditions for our families, and boost our economy. Humans may or may not be the sole cause of changes to our climate, but they can certainly be the solution.

# 15 STEPS: HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN MESSAGE

*The following steps offer a sequential process to create and deliver effective climate change communications that resonate with your audience.*

**1**

## Start with people, stay with people
If you want your community to care about climate change, then show that you care about them. Start from the perspective of residents in your city, not from your own. Infuse your entire communication with tangible, human concerns—real issues that affect families. Move from people to climate, not the other way around, and keep going back to people.

**2**

## Connect on common values
You truly understand the priorities, concerns, and values of residents in your community, so you can open their hearts and minds by talking about such values and showing you honor and share them. Common values, such as family, community, choice/freedom, opportunity, health, and fairness, are powerful motivators and connectors. Speak to the "tribal" connectors shared by fellow citizens, business leaders, organization members, neighbors, and friends.

**3**

## Acknowledge ambivalence
People approach climate from different perspectives and have varying levels of concern. We all have competing priorities, as well. Do not be self-righteous. Respect the perspectives of your audience, and allow them their own points of view. A simple line, such as "Some of us are more worried about climate change than others are," allows people to be comfortable and listen with an open mind.

**4**

## Make it real
Many Americans are latently concerned about global climate change but can relate to their local conditions better. By focusing on local realities that affect families and communities and that residents can see with their own eyes (simple, irrefutable facts about changing seasons, local fauna, or record weather), you can make it real and relevant for them. Discuss the realities—do not argue the science. Use a light hand with one or two examples, and then pivot quickly to your community's best solutions.

**5**

## Emphasize solutions
Many people do not realize that we have developed solar and wind energy systems that produce power even more cheaply than natural gas. Major advances in transportation and innovations in energy storage are just around the corner. We also have proven policies that reduce carbon pollution while accelerating economic growth. A suite of health, nature, and security and community co-benefits accompany energy solutions. To inspire your audience, make a powerful case with tangible examples showing that real solutions are here, now.

**6**

## Inspire and empower
Although ordinary Americans think that they do not and cannot make a difference regarding climate change, the exact opposite is true. Every day, with almost everything we do, from the way we drive to how we power our homes and businesses, from where we shop to what we eat, and especially how we talk about climate change impacts, we can contribute to solving the problem and inspire the people around us. Your audience should understand that the United States can lead on climate, and so can our states, towns, families, and us!

**7**

## Focus on personal benefit
As they burn good money on fossil fuels that could be used on vacations, education, healthier food, or a bigger savings account, most Americans think that action on climate change comes with too high a cost and a strain on their wallets. Let them know that, in fact, we save money by saving energy, are healthier with active transportation and more nutritious food, and can protect the well-being of our families and communities. When people believe they will accrue benefits from solutions, they will participate.

## 8   End with your "ask"

Encourage residents in your community to turn the information and understanding they have gained into action. Give them a clear call to action or sets of actions that link to the solutions you promoted. Remind and show them how behavior change is easier and more affordable than they think.

## 9   Sequence matters

Research reveals that you can take the same set of six facts, arrange them in different ways, and end up with very different results. Connect on common values, acknowledge ambivalence, be positive, and scale from personal to the planet. If you start negative and impersonal, getting back to the positive, personal, and relevant will be difficult. Follow the first eight steps in order.

## 10   Describe, don't label

Jargon and labels confuse people and can bring up negative associations. Avoid terms such as "mitigation" or "adaptation." Statements such as "We need to slow and stop the pollution that is changing our climate, and prepare for those changes we cannot prevent" are clearer and less divisive. Rather than mention "alternative energy," say we need clean, inexpensive, local energy from the wind and sun. The most persuasive language is vivid, familiar, and descriptive.

## 11   Have at least one powerful fact from a trusted messenger

One or two facts with emotional power add significant weight to a message. Highly trusted messengers in your community, local business leaders, and well-respected organizations lend credibility and importance. Use at least one memorable and relevant quote or fact from someone your audience trusts and perceives as unbiased, such as a respected local leader.

## 12   Ditch doom and gloom

We have all heard advocates try to spur climate action by portraying it in dire or fatalistic terms. Of course the dangers exist, and you can accept and acknowledge them in your comments, but do not emphasize them at the expense of common values, reality, solutions, benefits, and personal empowerment. Doom and gloom actually promote fatalism and emotional numbing, causing people to turn away and disengage.

## 13   Use stories to strengthen engagement

Stories help make your message relevant and vivid. Incorporate anecdotes about local families and community businesses that residents can relate to. When you connect your audience to real, tangible examples, you can enhance empathy and open people up to new perspectives. By weaving in the personal stories of climate solutions benefiting families that your audience knows and can relate to, you will be more effective. Be careful to focus on the opportunities of action and not get bogged down in examples that are scary or depressing.

## 14   Stay above the fray

Focus on the big picture, on what is important. Do not get caught in a trap of arguing or preaching about details or be sidetracked by an individual in the audience who tries to poke holes in your thesis. Avoid demonizing opponents, blaming, and arguing, which distract from your message and cause you to lose your audience. Be prepared to pivot back to your positive message.

## 15   Message discipline is critical

Stay on your talking points. Repeat key points and solutions that you want your community to remember. Refrain from explaining the same thing in different ways, which can confuse your audience. Be consistent across all messaging platforms, but be sure to tailor your message to your audience.

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: A SAMPLE SPEECH

*A hypothetical example using the 15 steps: Mayor Danvers of Pecos, Texas is speaking before residents and members of the city council.*

**Step 1: Start with people, stay with people**
The speech began by showing an understanding of and appreciation for the audience, and Mayor Danvers connected with the people's values throughout the speech.

**Step 2: Connect on common values**
Mayor Danvers built rapport by connecting with the community's shared values of family and a healthy place to live.

**Step 11: Have at least one powerful fact from a trusted messenger**
Mayor Danvers did not weigh the speech down with numbers, which cause people to tune out. Instead, he used one powerful source to inspire the audience.

**Step 3: Acknowledge ambivalence**
Mayor Danvers carefully introduced climate change, respected the potential spectrum of audience attitudes, and allowed people in the room to hold differing beliefs.

**Step 4: Make it real**
Mayor Danvers made climate change personally relevant by pointing to local impacts and connecting them to the real, lived experiences of the community.

**Step 10: Describe, don't label**
Mayor Danvers used concrete and descriptive language to illustrate how climate is personally affecting the financial stability of the Jones family.

Good evening.

Tonight, we come together as a community with shared values that are important to us all. Family, health, and a safe place to spend our lives are all of the utmost importance, which is why I am here to speak before you.

We are here to start the discussion on a new plan designed to make Pecos the best possible place to live in, raise a family, and work.

As you are aware, our city has been experiencing record temperatures. The National Academy of Sciences indicates that they will be magnified in the years to come. We may have different opinions about the causes and the degree to which our changing climate is to blame, but we all want to find real solutions to protect and benefit our community.

Over the last several weeks, I have met with families, homeowners, and small businesses to identify some of the major concerns that we all have. One family, in particular, stands out. Nick and Alice Jones have lived in Pecos for more than a decade. However, in recent years, they have seen huge increases in health problems and in how much they spend on their electric bills. These increases have forced the Jones family to miss several days of work and school and divert dollars away from family vacations, both of which have put stress on the family and a large dent in their wallet. Their experience is echoed by many Pecos families who need to choose between putting dinner on the table or spending their hard-earned dollars on energy bills and doctor visits.

Fortunately, there are solutions here and now, which we can put in place to help our families and our community. We can start by supporting and implementing a new climate action plan.

Leaders in the community are already stepping up and taking action to reduce climate impacts. For example, our local schools have implemented energy-efficiency and school garden programs that teach our children about the environmental, ecological, and educational values of saving energy and growing our own food. The local Chamber of Commerce has launched a new campaign to encourage businesses to be more energy conscious and provide carpool and public transit incentives to their employees; it has also been offering member discounts on sustainable office supplies. Actions like these inspire healthier lifestyles and help our families and businesses thrive, but we need to do more at the community level.

Today, I encourage each of you to be a part of the solution. We all want to live in the best place for our families, and we can't wait for politicians in Washington to solve our problems. Right now, we can work to build a stronger community by embracing climate solutions. I'm asking you to consider adopting this three-point climate action plan: First, commit to reducing city operations consumption of energy, water, and materials by 80% over the next five years; second, plant 1,000 new trees throughout the community to provide more shade and healthier air for our residents; and third, create and communicate climate-preparedness and impact-reduction plans for citizens and local emergency and human services workers.

A community with climate solutions such as these is the place I, the city council, and our citizens want to call home.

**Step 5: Emphasize solutions**
Mayor Danvers showed that solutions are accessible and meaningful. Notice that he avoided asking the audience to sacrifice.

**Step 12: Ditch doom and gloom**
Mayor Danvers chose only one climate impact to focus on and moved quickly to discuss positive solutions.

**Step 6: Inspire and empower**
Mayor Danvers motivated the audience by conveying hope, potential, and ability.

**Step 13: Use stories to strengthen engagement**
Mayor Danvers highlighted specific examples of schools and businesses making positive steps.

**Step 7: Focus on personal benefit**
Mayor Danvers showed the audience that they can accrue benefits by taking action.

**Step 8: End with your ask**
Mayor Danvers encouraged the audience to take the information they gained and turn it into action.

**Step 9: Sequence matters [e]**
Mayor Danvers followed steps 1–8 in order, connected with his audience, illustrated shared values and reality, acknowledged ambivalence, presented a compelling case for solutions, and made a clear and actionable "ask."

**Step 14: Stay above the fray**
Mayor Danvers talked big picture and focused on the common good.

**Step 15: Message discipline is critical**
Mayor Danvers stayed on topic and was clear and consistent with the message, which made it easy for the city council to understand, remember, and share.

e. Steps 10-15 reinforce the messages and can be used anywhere in the remarks/article as long as the first 8 steps are used in order.

# HOW COMMUNITY LEADERS CAN ENGAGE

## WAYS YOU CAN LEAD ON CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS

Mayors and other community leaders play a vital role in dealing with the causes and consequences of climate change. Community leadership can implement mitigation and adaptation plans, promote awareness and understanding in home communities, and help guide businesses, schools, churches, hospitals, and even families and residents toward effective climate solutions. With these tips and resources, you can play a vital role in dealing with the causes and consequences of climate change.

### 1 Become climate literate.

- Use this guide to elevate connections between climate solutions and thriving communities.
- Deepen constituent knowledge of, and participation in, climate solutions, including the areas of sustainable transportation, green jobs, resilient economies, public health and wellness, green spaces, and clean energy.

### 2 Lead by example within your community.

- Reduce emissions through effective implementation of local climate action plans with local government agencies.
- Incorporate climate-preparedness measures in anticipation of extreme weather and other climate-related impacts.
- Define and describe local climate priorities, as well as report on the progress of your community's climate plans and the benefits of local climate solutions.

### 3 Engage the whole community.

- Promote local solutions throughout the community (climate impacts affect us all).
- Share opportunities for the community to participate in climate solutions.
- Support engagement efforts and boost public awareness.
- Utilize the tools offered through Path to Positive Communities to support your engagement efforts.

### 4 Learn and share from other communities.

- Share successes, ideas, and best practices with other communities throughout the country, and encourage them to join in taking a stand on climate.
- Facilitate regional or national collaboration, ranging from a regional coalition of mayors, such as the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative, to national coalitions, such as C40 and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. This initiative will enhance local impact and magnify it.

### 5 Advocate beyond communities.

- Boost policy across multiple levels of government.
- Put pressure on governors and state governments to act.
- Call upon Congress and the president to pass legislation that will expand existing climate action efforts with fellow big-city mayors and mayoral coalitions.
- Promote international climate solutions.

# SEE OUR OTHER *LET'S TALK* RESOURCES

This guide for city and community leaders is part of ecoAmerica's climate messaging project, which develops and shares market-tested messages designed to engage Americans across political and demographic groups on climate solutions. The project also tests narratives [about climate] that are specifically tailored to connect with mainstream Americans, people in the faith and health communities, and Latino Americans. To download our guides, please click here.
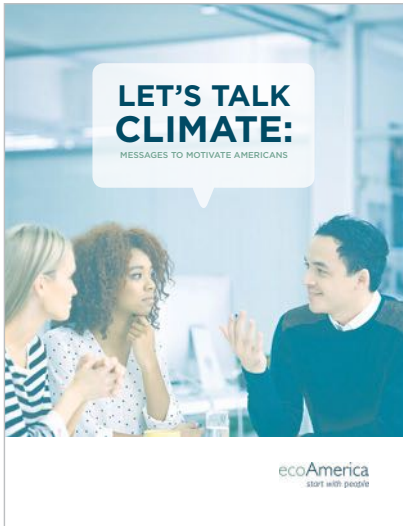


For Leaders Across America



For Latino Leaders
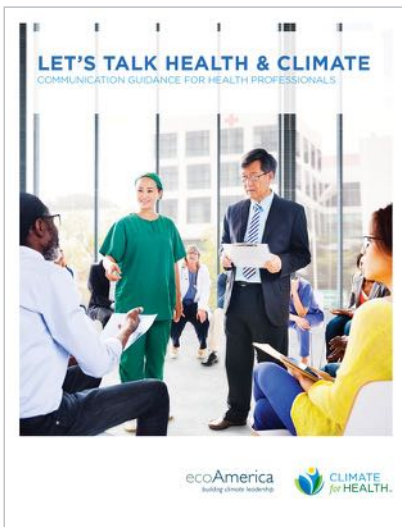


For Health Leaders



For Faith Leaders

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