

How to develop a Local Climate Action Plan

In order to keep the climate safe each one of us will have to be involved in changing how we do ordinary things – individually and collectively. Individual action – riding our bikes, driving less, changing our lightbulbs, growing our own food – is worth doing, but the sum of all these individual actions will never be enough. Climate change is bigger and more urgent than that. Working together is much more powerful, and more fun.

We can also inspire others, and perhaps most importantly, demonstrate to governments that people are ready to make the needed changes. Government action can then help make it even easier for all of us to work together for a safe climate.

Many of us have already done things on our own. Now is the time to up our game and work with others in one of the many groups we all belong to – at work; in sports clubs; in schools; in a health centre; in a group of farming neighbours; in our places of worship, our social clubs, etc.

Your “community” can be any group you feel at home in and work with regularly, where you know people and are known. Ideally it is a community that works together and has shared energy use, like a shared building or vehicles; but even a loose collection of friends can choose some actions everyone does and support each other to make the best decisions; or set up a car pool; or share tools and equipment; or develop a community garden together. Even just a few concerned and like-minded people in such a community can provide the stimulus for a much larger group to get behind a climate action plan.

We give an example here of how you might go about it for a school, where you might be a parent, a teacher, or a trustee. You can adapt this to any kind of community. There are many possible approaches – take from this whatever will work best for you. The key steps are:

- understand how your organisation impacts on climate
- review the opportunities to change this
- set some easy goals
- take action
- monitor your success
- adapt what hasn't worked to improve what you can achieve.

It is important to prepare the ground well so that the ideas are familiar to people when you first propose doing a plan.

1. Get people talking about the ideas. Take copies of the Declaration to a meeting of your board, PPTA, PTA, staff room, whichever you are part of, and talk about why it matters and why you have personally signed the Declaration. See how much interest there is in others signing too.

2. Find a support group. Who will enthusiastically back you in trying to improve the school's climate footprint? (If this is one of New Zealand's 1000 Enviroschools, you'll have a natural group of supporters.) Discuss with supporters who your allies will be, who will oppose your idea, and whose permission you need to take action. Decide who is the best person to approach each of those, leaving the opponents until you have gathered considerable support from others. By the time you hold a general meeting you want a number of key people to have heard about it already and be supportive.

3. With your supporters, think about how climate change will affect the school – is it within the coastal area? Does it do winter sports needing snow? Has it had bad damage from storms and floods in the recent past? Also think about how the school contributes to climate change. Does the boiler use coal? How recently has it had an energy efficiency audit? Does it own vehicles which could be used more efficiently? How do students and staff travel to school and to sports fixtures? Are there school gardens? Form a picture yourselves of the impacts the school has and how they might be reduced.

4. When the time is right, call a general meeting to discuss the issue. Invite the Principal, if supportive or at least not hostile, or the chair of the Board, to chair the meeting so they feel respected and involved. Don't forget to involve the janitor or grounds person who will be crucial.

5. Have someone who is generally respected and admired at the school present the Declaration and say why they signed it. Have another speaker talk about local action plans and who else is doing them. Don't present them with all the information you have collected about the school's energy use but open up to general discussion about reasons for taking action, and opportunities. Record all ideas about what could be done.

6. Take a show of hands – who is in favour of doing our own action plan? Then volunteers for a committee to drive the project.

7. After the meeting, the committee prepares an analysis of the school's climate emissions – transport, electricity, heating fuels, land use in grounds, plantings, gardens, waste management etc. Put numbers on them as far as you can. What help do you need from outside experts?

8. Call another meeting where you present this work and invite suggestions of how to reduce emissions without limiting the educational outcomes for the students. (A favourite anecdote: a school in NZ wanted to switch its boiler fuel from coal to waste wood. At the same time it had an energy efficiency audit done. They found much of the heat from the boiler was wasted as the pipes were uninsulated and traveled a long distance through swampy ground. Insulating the pipes and taking a shorter route with them enabled two coal boilers to be replaced with one wood boiler. The audit found 12 hot water cylinders which were never switched off – but had no taps so the water could never be used! Turning these off significantly reduced the power bill. The school saved money as well as greenhouse gases.)

9. Refine the suggestions into an action plan to reduce emissions. Don't try to cover everything – start with a few easier ones that are still significant and you can always expand. Get the support of the board and staff and parent body for the action plan.

10 How can you involve the students so this becomes an educational project as well?
Research? Surveys of student population or parents? Preparing material for website?
Presentations?

11. Enter your action plan on the website www.ourclimatedeclaration.org.nz where it may inspire another organisation to take action. Consider talking to friends at other schools about doing something similar. Suggest to a local paper an article on the project.

12. Plan for the long term of this project. The committee should continue to meet at intervals to monitor the project, to reinspire people if implementation is flagging, to write progress notes for the school newsletter, to add new components to the plan.

A school is quite a big, ambitious community. You can start with just your street, or a society or club.

To get professional help with an energy audit, or advice on energy use and reduction in emissions go to www.eeeca.govt.nz