

# COMMUNITY ACTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Elegant solutions for complex issues



**we**conserve

# COMMUNITY ACTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

## Elegant Solutions for Complex Issues

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### FIRST EDITION

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The original community action model was tested in the early 1990s in Cambridge, Dunnville, Elora, Geraldton, Long Point region, Port Hope, Thunder Bay and Toronto. The results were tremendous, with three communities using the low-cost model as a stepping stone to receiving provincial funding to become a Green Community. In Cambridge, the City has maintained its networking and annual planning workshops to this day.

The updated manual owes much to the municipal governments and community leaders in Toronto, Oakville and Oshawa, where we have been able to adapt the model to reflect the greater degree of involvement and complexity in community action that has emerged over the past twenty years.

We wish to express our appreciation to The Beer Store, for their ongoing commitment to green leadership and their financial support for the We Conserve initiative.

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And finally, to all the great individuals, groups, and green businesses that are part of a growing movement, our deepest thanks. You give us hope for the future.

# THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES

**Imagine if you had to plan the migration of monarch butterflies from Canada to Mexico.** Where would you even start? And yet, every year, millions of butterflies make that trip.

Now think of the transition to a conservator or sustainable society – seemingly as far off from our present consumptive and polluting society as Mexico must seem to a butterfly. Yet somehow, as we face a troubling future full of environmental and economic uncertainty, we must orchestrate a transition to a greener and healthier future.

Why is it that a creature as small and fragile as a butterfly can be so capable of performing miracles, while we seem only to be capable of unparalleled global impact? Perhaps if we, too, were guided by instinct we would make more responsible choices. But we are not. What makes us act responsibly is a combination of laws, incentives, and cultural values that either temper or appeal to our individual goals.

In tackling environmental issues, we tend to look either at political or voluntary action. The stick, or the carrot. The critical piece that is so often overlooked is culture – creating the new social norms. Respect for nature should be second nature.

So how do we go about creating a culture of conservation? Culture is an expression of the common values of a group, community or society. A culture of conservation, then, is the expression of conservator

values through our actions and activities. It is nurtured, developed and strengthened by groups and individuals, who are working to create greener and healthier communities.

Communities are, quite simply, people who share a common bond: be it a neighbourhood, culture, faith, hobby or even a profession or a shared goal. In our communities, we find support, camaraderie, and common purpose. A sense of community is a powerful force that can shape and reshape a nation.

The beauty of it is, organizing communities is not that hard. Each community may be unique and complex, but there are common themes and tools that make the task easier. If we organize our communities, we can nurture a culture of conservation and help people create healthier communities. And suddenly, the transition to a conservator society seems achievable.

## **Chris Winter**

Executive Director

The Conservation Council of Ontario

April, 2010





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# FINDING A COMMON VISION

Why we organize is every bit  
as important as how

Finding a community vision around a culture of conservation is about finding a way to improve our quality of life while reducing the environmental stress.

## FINDING A COMMON VISION

### **BEFORE YOU BEGIN ....**

Before we describe our approach to community organizing, there are two points we need to emphasize:

1. Every community is different
2. Community organizing is a long term investment

### **EVERY COMMUNITY IS DIFFERENT**

What exactly is the community you want to organize? It could be your neighbourhood, town, county, watershed, school, business association, faith or cultural community. You define it.

Communities naturally overlap and are interconnected. A geographic community will include numerous cultural and faith communities, just as faith and cultural communities stretch across many municipalities.

Within each community, the reasons and resources for organizing will always be unique. Your challenge is to find the reasons that make sense, understand the resources available to take

action, and find a way to weave them together into a common vision and plan of action.

Although the principles of community organizing can be applied in almost any complex situation, without a doubt the top priority for community organizing is at the municipal level. We have seen two distinct approaches to community organizing at the municipal level: grassroots and via local government. The most powerful results are achieved when grassroots groups and municipalities are able to work together, and support each other.

**Grassroots Organizing:** Grassroots community organizing often starts with a few key sparks or a lead group. It often starts with a green vision for their community, or a desire to bring people together in common cause. The Transition Towns initiative is a good example of a community-led process.

The coordinator, or lead organizer, in a community led process is often a volunteer or a staff person working under a short-term project grant. They usually generate strong initial interest, but need to



*The most powerful results are achieved when grassroots groups and municipalities are able to work together, and support each other.*

find sustaining funding if they are to have a long-term impact.

**Municipal leadership:** More and more municipalities are seeing the value of engaging their community as an active partner in their green plans. The Partners for Climate Protection, under the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, is an example of a municipality-led approach to community organizing.

The coordinator for a municipality-led initiative is often a staff person within the

municipal government. Most municipal environmental coordinators have to manage a lot – the interests of their own internal organizations and those of outside individuals and groups. They need to address the priorities of governments—their own and those above. They need to deal with changing environmental priorities—sometimes solutions create new, unforeseen problems too. They need to deal with funding and with the needs and priorities of non-governmental organizations, which may differ slightly from the community's goals.

The ideal municipality has strong community support programs and an arms-length steering committee that reflects and

supports a community-led process. In other words, the strongest communities are ones where everyone works together.

Most importantly, coordinators need to know what their own community wants—its issues, its objectives and what will motivate

people to get involved. That's why it's so important to build a community network. If you are a community coordinator, you can't do it alone. In fact, you can only achieve your community's goals if you have members of the community working with you. Working together, you have the time and resources to make sure all the needs of different organizations and stakeholders are addressed.



## FINDING A COMMON VISION

### WHY ORGANIZE?

Wouldn't it be nice if every environmental issue could be solved with a single program? The world's not like that. It's complex. One size does not fit all. For a single issue and a targeted audience, a straight-forward approach will do fine. But once we start to address complex issues and entire communities, we need to organize.

The secret to orchestrating coordinated change is this: *Embrace complexity and promote simplicity.*

What this means is that we look for the common threads within countless interpretations and applications of conservation values. We all have different needs, and different ways of practicing conservation. The common thread is "we conserve".

So why invest time and valuable energy in organizing ourselves? We organize when we share a common vision. We organize to be more effective. We organize to get results.

Organizing complex communities presents special challenges, but, as you will see, there are several simple steps that help create the opportunity for

collaboration toward a common vision. A well-organized community will lead to:

1. community ownership and commitment to a healthy environment
2. engaged and resilient communities
3. fertile ground for innovation and collaboration
4. more efficient and effective delivery of public engagement and support programs

By organizing, you can get things done. You can overcome the doubts, the fears, and the feeling that the problems are too big, and that nothing can be done.

### FINDING A COMMON VISION

We all want to live well, and we each have a different definition of what that means.

Living well usually requires some form of environmental impact through the consumption of natural resources and environmental degradation. At the same time, nearly everyone wants a healthier environment, and most people care about their neighbours and their community. Our world faces increasingly complicated

challenges—climate change, pollution, urban pressures on green space, the eventual depletion of fossil fuels. Not everyone agrees on what to do, or even what comes first. We spend too much time arguing over words figures and not enough time on implementing solutions. Even the name of our movement varies: “conservation”, “environmentalism”, “green”, or “sustainable development”. It can be confusing for people, especially when, in the end, it all comes down to a similar set of actions aimed at reducing our environmental impact.

At the Conservation Council of Ontario, we define conservation as “the art of living lightly on this Earth”. “Living lightly” embraces both environmental responsibility and quality of life.

**Our vision is to help Ontario become a conserver society.**

**Our goal is to make conservation easy, affordable, and desirable.**

**Our strategy is to build a united conservation movement.**

To help organize a conservation movement, we have identified ten priority actions:

1. Help nature
2. Save water
3. Save energy
4. Use green power
5. Drive less
6. Live local
7. Eat smart
8. Buy green
9. Waste less
10. Prevent pollution

In the end, the precise language doesn't matter. What does matter is that we all work together. Use whichever words best express your community's desire to live better while reducing their environmental impact and resource dependency. And then link your community in with the broader networks and support services that will help you achieve your vision.

**Our advice:** be positive. Crisis and guilt may be good short-term motivators,



but your overall vision needs to be a place where people want to go. The grass must be greener on our side of the fence. And it is. We can save people money, we can create local jobs, and we help create more vibrant communities. The people we know are conservers by choice.

Chances are your community will come up with similar vision and list of priorities. You may use different terms, but it's all part of the same movement.

## FINDING A COMMON VISION

### **INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES**

When you have an engaged community network, you get results. When that network is clear in communicating what it wants, people listen. You have to build this type of network over time. It's an investment—in people. We have found that a minimum five year investment in community organizing is necessary to achieve meaningful results.

Community organizing progresses through three stages of intensity: from preliminary engagement to collaborative projects and campaigns, to an integrated community strategy.

#### **Stage One: Engagement**

Start by building your community network and supporting individual projects or events that build awareness and achieve early results. The emphasis here is on developing some initial successes and building a sense of community and a common vision.

#### **Stage Two: Collaboration**

Identify areas for focused activity, either through collaborative projects involving several groups or through community-wide campaigns. This

is where you can begin to measure results against community goals (such as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions).

#### **Stage Three: Transformation**

Eventually, you can begin to connect community action with urban planning and investments in green infrastructure to create more livable communities, transportation options, a local green economy, and protected green space. This is where we begin to see the transition to a true conserver society.

Start small and build a common sense of trust and purpose. Get the community involved, and keep an eye open for the opportunities for innovation and collaboration along the way!



# OUR COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE

Fifteen simple steps to help organize your community, plan for a greener future, and take action.

## COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE

Our approach is built around setting up and supporting a network of community organizations and other partners who are committed to taking action and helping each other.

### Fifteen Steps to Organize Your Community

Just as we can find common threads within the conservation movement, there are also a number of common elements in community organizing.

You don't have to do them in order, but at the end of the day, the strongest communities will be the ones that have at least considered each of these points.

Remember, too, that there are different stages of intensity in community organizing. As your community action process evolves, how your community organizes itself will need to adapt over time

#### ORGANIZE

- 1. Identify your mandate** – Who in your community wants to organize? Is there an issue, a goal or a public motivation to do it now? Is there a local, provincial, or national program that you want to connect your community with?
- 2. Find community sparks** – Who are key people who can make it happen?

- 3. Set up a coordinating body** – Bring together representatives from sectors of the community who are interested in helping promote and support community-based projects.
- 4. Find funding** – Throughout the community organizing process, you will need to address funding – for community planning, for core projects, and to provide ongoing support for community-based projects and services.
- 5. Designate a community coordinator** – Hire someone, or designate a volunteer or municipal staff person to be the main contact person for members of the community network, and to communicate with provincial and national community support programs.
- 6. Develop a community network** – You will thrive by your lists! Create a contact list of groups and individuals that share common aspirations and goals—including other community groups, cultural groups, schools, businesses, service clubs, and all levels of government.

**7. Engage your community** – Find some early projects and activities that will help build community interest and support – including movie nights, green cafes, local food tastings, community walks, and bike tours.

### PLAN

**8. Conduct a community scan** – Do background research on the groups, activities, issues, support programs and funding, and other resources that exist within the community. This helps you find a common wavelength. Use the scan as an opportunity to listen to the needs of the community.

**9. Draft a community action plan** – Bring your network together to prepare a community action plan, including a brief statement of the environmental priorities for the community, the lead organizations for each issue, and some of the projects that will support the community goals.

### ACT

**10. Support community projects** – Use your network to engage the community. Pick projects early on that will show some measurable success and create community spirit.

**11. Develop community campaigns** – As your network grows stronger, you can develop integrated campaigns that support an overall community goal.

### REVIEW AND IMPROVE

**12. Celebrate success** – Make sure you hold events and take opportunities to recognize groups, businesses, and individuals who make a difference.

**13. Update your plan** – What worked? What didn't? Go back over your tracks and find new ways to reach your goals, or set new goals.

**14. Intensify your efforts** – Over time, as your community is ready, identify

some longer term collaborative efforts that will connect community action with proactive government policy and infrastructure investments.

**15. Plan for the future** – An organized community is resilient and adaptive. Use your network and action plan to help address emerging issues and crises, and to help with the long-term transition to a more sustainable conservator society.

There are many ways to organize, and each community is different. We encourage you to adapt this model to your community and get creative! After all, creativity is what makes community action fun.

Be sure to join the Conservation Council of Ontario to make sure you are tapped into all the resources and support Ontario's conservation community can offer.



## COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	STRENGTH
<b>ORGANIZE</b>		
<b>1 Community Mandate</b> What's driving the call to organize?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Key issue(s)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Government strategy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Community organizing program		
<b>2 Community Sparks</b> Who can make things happen in your community?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Individuals		
<input type="checkbox"/> Groups		
<input type="checkbox"/> Municipal government		
<input type="checkbox"/> Business		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsors		
<b>3 Coordinating Committee</b> Who can guide the process and approve community plans?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Ad hoc or interim committee		
<input type="checkbox"/> Formal committee		
<input type="checkbox"/> Subcommittees or work groups		
<b>4 Funding and Support</b> Who will support organizing your community?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Community planning		
<input type="checkbox"/> Core projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Community projects and services		
<b>5 Community Coordinator(s)</b> Who can convene and support a community network?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer basis		
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff or contract		

## COMMUNITY ACTION CHECKLIST

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	STRENGTH
<b>ORGANIZE</b>		
<b>6 Community Network</b> Who are your friends and allies?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> A contact list of all interested groups		
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular information flow to the members		
<input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing interaction and spontaneous collaboration		
<b>7 Building Community</b> Are there activities that help engage your community?		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Community events		
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Preliminary meetings and work groups		

How well organized are you?  
This worksheet will help you assess your community's ability to take action and work together to achieve common goals. Use it as a guide to review your strengths and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Community: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>PLAN</b>		
<b>8 Community Scan</b> A review of existing players and activities, strengths and opportunities		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> An initial inventory		
<input type="checkbox"/> A detailed scan		
<b>9 Community Action Plan</b> Your vision, priorities, goals, existing and proposed projects and campaigns		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Community-wide workshops to develop community priorities and proposed projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> An initial list of projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> A detailed plan		

Assessed by:

Individual

Group

\_\_\_\_\_

## 15 STEPS TO ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

### ORGANIZE

1. Community mandate
2. Community sparks
3. Coordinating body
4. Funding & support
5. Community coordinator
6. Community network
7. Building community

### PLAN

8. Community scan
9. Community action plan

### ACT

10. Community projects
11. Community campaigns

### REVIEW AND IMPROVE

12. Celebrate success
13. Revise your plan
14. Intensify your efforts
15. Plan for the future

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	STRENGTH
<b>ACT</b>		
<b>10 Community Projects</b> Everything from public outreach to hands-on community enhancement		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Simple projects to encourage participation		
<input type="checkbox"/> Flagship projects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Partnership projects		
<b>11 Community Campaigns</b> Collaborate to achieve better results		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinated community outreach		
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinated campaigns to promote solutions or community goals		
<input type="checkbox"/> Integrated campaigns to link community action with municipal provincial and national programs		

<b>REVIEW AND IMPROVE</b>		
<b>12 Celebrate Success</b> Follow-up events and publications		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate results and community leaders		
<b>13 Revise Your Community Plan</b> Improve as you go		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Maintain commitment		
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify new priorities		
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased collaboration		
<b>14 Intensify Efforts</b> Identify areas for a concentrated effort		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Priorities for intensive efforts identified		
<input type="checkbox"/> Working groups or issue networks set up to address priorities		
<b>15 Plan for the Future</b> Link community action to community resiliency and transition to a conservator society		1 2 3 4 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Build capacity to for crisis response		
<input type="checkbox"/> Support the transition to a conservator society		



# FIELD NOTES

ideas and thoughts, based  
on our experience with  
community action

Since there are so many different ways to approach community organizing, we've collated some of the advice and interpretations of this model to help you see some of the creative ways municipalities and community leaders have applied the community network approach.

For more case studies and information on Ontario's organized communities, funding sources, and other community organizing programs, please visit our website:

[www.weconserve.ca/  
communityaction/](http://www.weconserve.ca/communityaction/)

## FIELD NOTES

### 1. Organize

*Laying the foundation for community action*

#### **Step 1. Identify your community mandate**

Your mandate defines the scope of your community, who will be involved, the issues, and what you hope to achieve.

What exactly is the community you want to organize?

It could be your neighbourhood, town, county, watershed, or even a school or a business. If you are organizing at the grassroots level, start small—you can always expand the community when things get rolling.

Who will be involved? Even though you will build an extensive community network, it is useful to know who the early supporters are. Can you get the support of your neighbours, your local stores and your councillor?

What are the priority issues? Look to your neighbourhood. Are there issues that can be addressed through a concerted community effort?

What do you want to achieve? Are you looking to support local groups, create a healthier community,

or contribute to solving global concerns like climate change or economic resiliency? All are valid goals.

Sometimes, a national or international program can help shape your mandate. The Partners for Climate Protection program of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, for example, focuses on climate change, and the international Transition Towns movement uses peak oil as their motivation.

Many municipalities now have environmental or sustainability plans which include a community engagement component. Check to see if the municipal plan includes a mandate for community organizing and engagement (as opposed to just public education or consultation).

One of the challenges you may find is to match a program mandate with the aspirations of your community. Addressing climate change and peak oil may be a high level priority for the municipality or lead organizations. It will require promoting ways to significantly reduce our energy use in homes and transportation, but your community network may be more interested in community gardens and green space. Remember that community action is a long-term investment. Design your program to build a strong foundation of community engagement that will,

in turn, allow for the development of programs and campaigns to address the more challenging issues of creating a conservator society.

Once you know your mandate and have strong community support, a vision statement will help explain and promote your efforts to organize your community.

## Step 2. Find community sparks

Community sparks are people within the community who get it. They have the passion, drive, and energy to make things happen. And they are willing to share. You will find them in community groups, as volunteers, in business, or agencies, within the municipality or they could be elected officials.

Community sparks are important at all stages of the process. We mention it at an early stage because you need a few sparks to get a community network and action plan off the ground. But you will find that local leaders are just as important in getting your first projects rolling, and in building support for community-based solutions.



Anyone can initiate a Community Action Plan. All it takes is one person who hears about the process and asks “Can it work here?” It could be the mayor, a local activist, a student, or a store owner. If you’re reading this manual, it may be you. The first step is to take this paper to a few people in your community and ask if they are interested in working on a community action plan.

Next, make a list of some of the people who could help. Start with the people you know, then cast the net wide – try to include representatives from all areas of the community,

including diverse local groups, schools, government, business, and any other major organizations. If you have been approached by members of your community, offer to help them contact other organizations. Keep it informal at first, but be ready to ask for a letter of support from each organization when looking for funding or municipal endorsement.

Once your program is up and running, remember to keep a list of community sparks that can help organize projects, engage the community, or bring in new partners and supporters. It’s the community sparks who will help move your community action plan to the next level of activity and collaboration.

## A COMMUNITY NETWORK — WHO TO INCLUDE

*These individuals or groups can help draft and implement a Community Action Plan:*

- conservation and environmental groups
- cultural groups
- service clubs
- religious organizations
- schools
- school environment clubs
- individual classes
- individual students
- ratepayers groups
- local foundations
- local industries
- individual citizens
- the Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade
- business associations
- major employers
- labour unions or councils
- small businesses (e.g. corner store, local factory, video store)
- green businesses

*These individuals and organizations should be included as supporting partners:*

- municipal politicians
- municipal departments
- local government agencies
- local MPs and MPPs
- local foundations or funding agencies

## FIELD NOTES

### Step 3. Set up a Coordinating Body

The role of a coordinating body or committee is to find ways to help engage and support community-based action, and can also oversee the development of a community action plan. A coordinating body does not have to be a formal committee, but in larger communities formality can create clarity as groups join the network.

The committee should seek to ensure that all community groups, especially those not represented on the committee, are part of the community network and have an opportunity to contribute to the plan. The committee should also encourage other groups to submit ongoing or potential projects for inclusion in the plan.

A natural coordinating body may be a municipal advisory committee. Many municipalities have an Environmental Advisory Committee that is responsible for monitoring environmental issues and advising the municipal council. Others municipalities have set up Local Round Tables, adding in the responsibility to prepare a sustainable development strategy for the community. There may be an existing body that can be mandated to coordinate the network and develop a community action plan.

If you are in the beginning stage of building your community network, and there is not a relevant

existing body, you can take a page from the Transition Towns model. They recommend setting up an initial committee with a mandate to dissolve itself within six months. The initial committee is then replaced by representatives from each of the working groups that have been set up to tackle key issues and tasks.

Whether you are building on an existing committee or starting from scratch, make sure the coordinating committee has the mandate to engage and consult with the public, draft the plan, involve others and manage community-wide campaigns.

### How do you choose committee members?

Members of your coordinating committee should be selected for their ability to work with and understand the priorities of the community groups and community leaders. You should also look for people with particular expertise in areas that the committee will be dealing with. For example, someone or more than one member of the committee should have the expertise to advise the municipal council and answer public questions.

The qualifications for committee members will vary with the size and type of community. The types of coordinating committees can include hands-on (active community



leaders), arms-length (independent individuals who can represent the needs of the community) sponsor (funders and supporters of the project), or any mix of the above.

The coordinating committee should be large enough to adequately represent the community, but small enough to be manageable (somewhere between six and 15 members).

The process by which committee members are

selected is very important to the credibility of the committee. If groups feel like they have been shut out by an opaque, arbitrary or preferential process, the activities of the coordinating body could have trouble finding traction with those groups down the road.

#### Step 4. Find Funding

Funding is, of course, the big thing. Finding funds for organizing is the first step, but as your community becomes better organized you will need to find new sources of funds to support an ever-increasing list of projects and campaigns.

If you need to raise start-up funds here are some things to consider:

- A government mandate, such as a local sustainability plan, or a municipal energy conservation plan (under the Green Energy Act), can open the door to municipal funding under established programs, such as the Partners for Climate Protection.
- A local non-profit group or charity can seek foundation funding, such as the Ontario

Trillium Foundation for the overall project or your local chapter of the TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation for events and short-term projects.

- National and provincial priorities (such as peak oil, development pressures, climate change, electricity conservation, air quality and health or healthy communities) may have established granting programs from foundations and the provincial and federal government.
- Local priorities (including issues of concern, local economic development, community greening, cultural diversity, health, and recreation) provide excellent opportunities for linking a conserver lifestyle with other local goals. It opens the door to unique partnerships that can lead to new avenues for funding.
- Be sure to make note of the in-kind and volunteer contributions to your project. They are a vital asset when seeking matching funds.

## JANE'S WALK

[www.janeswalk.net](http://www.janeswalk.net)

If you are looking for a project that can help connect and engage your community, look no further than Jane's Walk, held the first weekend of every May.

Jane's Walk is an annual series of free walking tours led by community volunteers. Inspired by urban activist Jane Jacobs and her grassroots approach to city-building, the walks put people in touch with their environment and with each other, bridging social and geographic gaps and creating a space for cities to discover themselves. From a simple concept in 2007, Jane's Walk quickly grew into an international event hosted by lead organizations in over 50 towns and cities across North America and other countries.

Jane's Walks are led by community leaders, a great way to profile people and groups in your network.

## FIELD NOTES

Look first for sponsors within your community. Try to find one or several lead agencies who will agree to oversee the project and underwrite the cost of preparing, publishing, and promoting the plan. In many cases a municipal government will agree to this, although the main sponsor agency could be a native band council, conservation authority, service club, community foundation, major employer, or a neighbourhood ratepayers group.

If a municipal government is going to sponsor a Community Action Plan, it should pass a resolution supporting the project and allocating staff and financial resources. The request should come from community representatives, with the backing of as many organizations and individuals as possible. It's important to line up this support. Talk to your local councillors beforehand and make sure they will support the resolution.

Eventually, you may need to develop a more active fundraising campaign to support the increased level of activity and services being provided by your community network. In part this is a reflection of the overall shift in the environmental movement from advocacy to implementation. The green movement is becoming much more oriented to delivering services, and with that increased demand for solutions comes the need to develop a more coordinated community-oriented approach to fundraising.

## Step 5. Designate a Community Coordinator

A community coordinator could be a municipal staff person, a professional consultant, a community group representative (supported by a foundation grant), and volunteers from the coordinating committee. With a small community, you can often get by with a volunteer or contract person. The larger the community, the greater the need for a fully-funded position.

The responsibilities of the coordinator can include any or all of the following:

- ❑ supporting the coordinating committee
- ❑ ensuring that meetings are held regularly and that minutes are kept up to date and distributed
- ❑ developing and supporting the community network
- ❑ coordinating the research and writing of a community scan
- ❑ coordinating public consultation and publicity for the Community Action Plan (CAP)
- ❑ drafting the CAP, integrating ideas from the community
- ❑ developing a list of resources and support programs within the community, and within the public and private sectors
- ❑ assisting in the development of projects and community-wide campaigns

- ❑ keeping accurate files and records on all aspects of the CAP
- ❑ maintaining communications within the coordinating committee, with the public, and with the media
- ❑ measuring the progress of the CAP against the stated objectives.

Be strategic! A community coordinator can get pulled in a hundred different directions, or get drawn into one or two large projects. The coordinator's role is to be an "animator", a facilitator who can help others but not do it for them. In working with the community network, the coordinator will need to find a balance between cultivating involvement, nurturing new initiatives, and maintaining relationships. Working with groups to develop new initiatives is the most exciting and rewarding part of the job, so make sure you budget enough time to help your community sparks turn ideas in reality.

## Step 6. Identify or Establish a Community Group Network

The coordinator should develop a comprehensive list of community groups and community leaders. Be sure to include all types of commu-

nity groups and private sector partners: environmental, ratepayers, religious, social, cultural, youth and seniors, schools, and service clubs, along with local industries and small businesses. You may find that there is already an environmental or issue-based network in your community. If an existing network can be used and enhanced through this project, so much the better. The fit is rarely perfect, so if the mandate or role of an existing network is different from the goals of a community action network, see if there is an opportunity to adapt and collaborate.

Some potential partners may not be located within the community but will have a relevant role (e.g., regional Conservation Authorities or district government agencies). These groups and individuals should be contacted early on. The coordinator should work with the coordinating committee to develop the list.

A network will start out as a simple contact list, but over time as you send out e-newsletters and host meetings your network will grow to become a source of new ideas and collaboration. Use your community network as a starting



point for building relationships that can evolve into new partnerships between groups, working groups on issues of common interest, and collaborative projects and campaigns.

Larger municipalities may wish to set up two levels of community networks, or identify a lead organization that will assume the responsibility for involving each of the smaller groups within its network.



## FIELD NOTES

For example, in Toronto, approximately 100 city-wide groups are identified, and over 1,000 groups and individuals are included in a community contact list. Under the Live Green Toronto program, community animators are working in the four regions, and their regional networks are being developed to include neighbourhood and ward level networks and lead organizations.

### Step 7. Engage Your Community

Above all, community action should be something people want to do, if not outright fun. This is a social movement, so remember to include a social element, especially in your initial community engagement activities.

Find out who in your community network can host events including movie nights, green cafes, local food tastings, tree plantings, community walks, and bike tours. If you want to organize a community-wide event, you can also tap into provincial and national programs, such as Pitch-In Canada (the 20 Minute Makeover), Earth Day, Earth Hour, and Jane's Walk.

If there is strong interest in organizing for community action, you can host preliminary workshops to build your network, share ideas, and find opportunities for new projects.

## 2. Plan

*Planning for success.*

### Step 8. Conduct a Community Scan

Every community is different. The first task of making your action plan fit your community rests mainly with the Coordinating Committee and the Coordinator: do your homework!

Before moving into a planning workshop, we have found it is helpful to do some preliminary research to develop a “community scan”. A scan is simply a listing of the issues, resources, and activities that are currently underway in your community. This is the foundation upon which you can build collaboration, a common vision, and a coordinated action plan.

The information you want to gather will be framed in part by your mandate and goals. Under the Partners for Climate Protection program, for example, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities requires that the participating communities create a greenhouse gas emissions inventory and forecast as a first step in their process. This inventory can become part of a community scan.

Ideally, your community scan will identify priority issues,

who is working on them, what resources are available to support community action, and the potential for engaging the community in projects and individual action. Your task will be to fit them together into sections that show the potential for community action to provide solutions and to create a healthier, greener community.

Before starting, decide on whether your scan will be an internal or public document. We recommend that at least a portion of the research become a public document that will help raise awareness and support for community-based action. When conducting your research, be sure to be clear what information will be made public so that groups can decide how they wish to participate.

Here are a number of useful ways to conduct a scan:

- Talk to lead organizations and community leaders. Make them aware of the project and find out how they are already helping green your community.
- Survey your network. Send a brief questionnaire around to the members of your community network
- Host an initial workshop where groups in your network can meet and find areas of common interest. “Icebreaker” workshops are especially useful if your network is new and full of people and groups who haven’t worked together in the past.
- Attend community meetings. Begin to spread the word around the community and solicit ideas.

## A Community Questionnaire

*Keep it simple. We suggest three questions:*

### **i) What are the priority issues for our community?**

Have groups list the major issues they feel need to be addressed in the community. They will probably be local issues, but may also include global, national, and regional concerns.

### **ii) What can your group do to help?**

Have groups give a short summary (one or two paragraphs) of any existing or planned projects, activities, or resources that will help to address the priority issues.

Ask for:

- their location (especially for larger communities)
- the number of staff and volunteers in the group
- their direct membership
- the size of the community they serve or reach
- a description of their projects or ongoing programs
- its status (e.g. planned, or third year of operation).
- anticipated benefits.

Ask for as much information as possible on each project, but be sure to gather raw data that can become part of a community-wide report on priorities, resources and activities.

### **iii) What support do you need?**

For each activity/project, ask groups to provide a summary of the resources, support, staff, training, materials, equipment, etc., that would improve their ability to carry out projects. This will give the coordinating committee a sense of what groups need and where partnerships with other groups, businesses, or funders can be arranged.

## FIELD NOTES

Is there a quicker way to do a scan? Sure. The purpose of a scan is to start out with a clear and common sense of the existing players, activities, and issues within your community. If you already have a good handle on who's who and what they are doing, you can pull together a quick summary paper without a survey of the groups.

When you've finished your scan, circulate the public results to the network for additions and approval prior to releasing it to the public or media.

### **Step 9. Draft a Community Action Plan**

With the community scan in hand, everyone in your network will have a better understanding of the potential for community-based networking, collaboration, and action. The next logical step is to develop a community action plan (CAP) to tackle common goals and priorities.

The key question to ask at the outset of drafting a community action plan is, "how can we support community action?", and let the answers guide the content and format for your plan.

What does a CAP cover? It depends on what your community and your coordinating committee sets as

its priorities. You can focus on issues of concern, or promote a greener lifestyle. You can highlight projects and campaigns, or you could tackle the need to build capacity and funding. You can focus on community projects, or on policy initiatives that could support voluntary action.

How long is a CAP? A community plan can be a long paper that is published by the municipality; it can be an insert in the local newspaper; it can be a broadsheet handed out at libraries and community centres, or it can be an online list of goals and projects. A community plan can link together a long list of projects; it can identify collaborative campaigns; it can identify common priorities (such as the need for improved funding); it can challenge the public to take action or identify where more support is needed. The only criteria are that it provides a vision and a road map for getting there.

How ambitious should we be? If you are just starting out on the community organizing path, your plan should focus on building capacity and on engaging the community in green events. As you progress, the plan may become more detailed, or it may identify special areas of focus (such as youth and culture, or transportation and food).

Be prepared for your plan to evolve over time.

Here are some of the things to consider including in your CAP:

### **a) A community vision**

Is there a vision statement that best sums up what your community wants to see? Often, the vision statement combines both the environmental, social, and economic aspects of a green community. It can focus on the community role in promoting a healthy environment, or it can describe the type of community you want to live in. Where there is a municipal vision statement, you can try connecting a community vision with the municipal vision.

### **b) Community engagement projects and programs**

Are there key projects or events that are helping build a sense of community around going green? Include annual events, fairs, and community outreach projects that help build a common commitment to going green. In general, these are the types of activities that help build up the cultural commitment to change and lays a strong foundation for promoting individual solutions.

### **c) Community action projects and programs**

Are there key existing or proposed projects and ongoing programs that address environmental priorities or promote conservation solutions?

### **d) Community-wide campaigns**

For those issues that have a large degree of support, the committee may wish to consider proposing a community-wide campaign. Look for lead and supporting organizations, government and business partners, as well as funders and other community leaders who can support the campaign.

### **e) Capacity building projects**

Are you prepared to take on, or support, projects that can improve the ability of community groups to take action? Include initiatives to provide training for groups in issues or management skills, or to help generate new funds for community projects.

### **f) Supportive policy recommendations**

Voluntary action needs good policy leadership. If your community is showing strong commitment and leadership, you can include recommendations for government initiatives that will further support voluntary action.

### **SOLICIT INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY**

*There are many ways to canvass community groups and the public for ideas that can become part of your action plan. Here are some suggestions:*

- ❑ Issue a press release to announce the project, introduce the members of the coordinating committee, and request public involvement
- ❑ Advertise through local newspapers
- ❑ Contact local businesses to solicit their involvement. The local Chamber of Commerce can play a lead role in coordinating the involvement of the business community in the action plan
- ❑ Contact groups directly. Distribute a questionnaire to community groups to solicit their suggestions for community-based projects.
- ❑ Host a public meeting.
- ❑ Use the Internet and social media – set up a Facebook page and Twitter accounts; get members of your committee to Tweet and send e-mails.



## FIELD NOTES

### REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The community coordinator should compile a draft of the community action plan for review by the coordinating committee. The committee can then review the overall plan and suggest other activities and recommendations that could be included in the action plan.

Once your plan is approved, issue a media release or hold a launch party to kick off your implementation phase. Your launch is a great opportunity to celebrate the contributions of local groups and community leaders and to issue a call for participation and support by the community at large.

## 3. Act

*Make change happen*

### Step 10. Support Community Projects

There is no shortage of ideas and energy within a community. However, there may be many difficulties to overcome before a good idea is turned into a successful project.

Larger municipalities can hire community animators to work with local groups and community sparks to help them turn their ideas into projects and their volunteer

groups into viable organizations. If you don't have the funding to hire animators, then the community coordinator and the members of the coordinating committee should help connect groups with the resources and skills they need

Here's where the Coordinator and Coordinating Committee can help:

- review and strengthen individual project ideas
- find partnerships within the community
- research funding, in-kind donations, and technical support within the community
- maintain an up-to-date list of support programs (financial and otherwise) that are available from the provincial and federal governments and agencies, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and foundations
- write letters of support for key projects that have been reviewed and approved by the Coordinating Committee
- help promote projects through a media strategy
- initiate a volunteer program

With a little help from the Coordinating Committee and other members of the community network, local groups can develop projects that will implement elements of the overall action plan. Creating partnerships allows diverse groups to contribute different skills and resources to a common project.

## Step 11. Developing Community Campaigns

Here's where things really begin to happen!

A community campaign brings all the interested groups in the community network together to tackle one common goal. It's when the community decides to make change happen.

A campaign builds on the existing assets within your community network: the lead organizations, the community sparks, and your friends and allies. It can be organized through your coordinating committee, or by an ad hoc committee.

A well organized community campaign will take advantage of the combined ability of your community network to reach and engage everyone in the community. Look for these features:

- a clear goal
- a common and positive message
- flexible marketing, with the ability for participating groups to adapt the core message
- community, business and government participation
- lead organizations with interconnected projects
- supporting organizations to help promote the campaign to their members

### ADVICE FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

Even the smallest of groups is important to a Community Action Plan. The goal is to reach as many people as possible, and every school class, neighbourhood group, local business, and cultural and social group can play a role.

There are two basic ways that community groups can help: member and community outreach, or a community project.

Every group with a membership can help promote the community vision and encourage their members to be active conservers. Taken together, all the groups in the community network become a powerful resource that can interpret and tailor a core message to a wide range of target audiences. For example, if the overall campaign is to reduce energy consumption then the residents associations can pitch investing in energy audits, insulation, and solar panels, while the seniors association and school clubs might prefer to target conservation habits. This combined and adaptive approach to social marketing is what we call “movement-based social marketing”, and it is a unique feature of the community network model.

Community projects offer the opportunity for each group to make a special contribution to greening their community. Take a moment to review your collective strengths and try to design a project that will build on them.

## FIELD NOTES

Each participating organization can design and carries out its own project consistent with its interests, expertise, and resources. For example, a “Drive Less” campaign can include cycling education, car-sharing promotions, car-free day celebrations, a business commuter challenge, ride-to-school programs, and much more, with each project being promoted by a different organization or business.

**We cannot overstate the importance of involving as many community groups as possible in the campaign.** Most people belong to at least one group, whether through work, home, or community. The community group network provides an unequalled opportunity to reach the entire community through personal contact.

The campaign will vary depending on the size of the community and the complexity of the issue. For example, smaller communities can reach every citizen more easily than larger municipalities. In addition, some issues lend themselves more easily to community based projects and activities. Try to select a campaign and a goal that are both challenging and have a high chance for success.

Are campaigns effective? Absolutely, although the results

may come over time. The Toxic Free in '93 campaign in Toronto brought over 35 groups, businesses and governments together to promote alternatives to household hazardous waste. One of the lead groups, the Toronto Environmental Alliance, signed up 2,600 homeowners on a Pesticide Free pledge as its part of the campaign, which was one of the first actions on the path to the current provincial ban on cosmetic pesticides.

## 4. Review and Improve

*Build on your successes*

### Step 12. Celebrate and Measure Success

Have at least one party a year, even if it is part of an existing annual event. Community action is hard work, and all your network members, community sparks and volunteers deserve a little recognition and fun.

If there are a lot of projects and activity in the community, consider hosting an annual awards event and reception.

If you held a community campaign, hold a workshop at the end to review the results. If you ran into problems, or you discovered limits to what could be achieved, use

the workshop as an opportunity to develop new recommendations.

Measuring success often presents challenges, especially if your community action program is driven by a specific mandate (such as reducing climate gas emissions, or conserving electricity).

Here's our advice:

1. Separate cultural development activities from measurable results, recognizing that a culture of conservation leads to increased interest in practical conservation solutions
2. Assign values to various activities and projects where possible.
3. Ensure that measurable benefits are fairly divided among the project sponsors (and avoid double-counting).

Another way to measure success is through a standard community survey or scorecard or survey that can be used to measure changes in attitudes and behaviours over time.

Over time, you will find that the ability to measure success becomes easier as your community network becomes more active and you gain experience with different types of projects.



### Step 13. Update Your Plan

The Action Plan should be reviewed at regular intervals to keep it current. As your community moves ahead with its CAP activities, its priorities will change. Government policies or programs may also change, or new information may become available. New programs may be developed in the private sector too, which will impact your community's priorities. It's important to keep sight of your goals and strategies.

Plan to hold additional public workshops at regular intervals to go over your plan's achievements and identify new priorities.

With a simple plan, an annual workshop and survey will allow you to keep your plan current. For a more detailed plan, or a plan that focuses on capacity building and long-term investment in community action, you may prefer to update the plan once every three to five years.

### Step 14. Intensify Your Efforts

Community action is a strong foundation for achieving change. Every year you should take a look at how you can build on what you have achieved, or if there are issues that merit a focused effort.

In general, a good community action process will start with simple projects to engage your community, and then move into coordinated campaigns



## FIELD NOTES

that take full advantage of the partnerships and community spirit that has been built up over time.

For those communities that are working through the Partners for Climate Protection or Transition Towns, it is likely that only after building a strong rapport and demonstrating initial successes with the your community network, that you can begin to look at coordinated campaigns to achieve measurable results in behavioural change and energy conservation.

As you begin to tackle more significant challenges, you will need to find ways to connect voluntary action with policy initiatives, incentives, and the need for green community infrastructure (such as bike lanes and transit, district heating, and community power and other cooperatives). You will also want to address the convergence of green goals with the social, health and local economy goals that are also a part of a healthy community approach.

### **Step 15. Plan for The Future**

One issue that often comes up at public meetings is the fear of an uncertain future. What kind of planet are we going to pass on to the next generation? Will our children be able to live as we have? It's a very real concern and a

strong motive for many people to make a personal and completely voluntary commitment to conserve.

We've always said that one of the strongest reasons for organizing communities is to be prepared for future crises. By organizing for voluntary change now, we will soften the impact of future environmental crises and resource scarcity, if not avoid some of them altogether. If we can build up the capacity of communities to work together, and of community groups to provide solutions, then we will be better prepared to face the challenges of peak oil, climate change, food supply, or global economic downturns. By focusing now on the voluntary transition to a conserver society we are able to emphasize the positive social and economic benefits of living lightly, while at the same time we are building up the skills and services that will provide local jobs and increase our independence and resiliency.

Fear and external crises (like the blackout of 2003) may be great motivators for conservation, but the shift to a true conserver lifestyle depends on promoting a positive vision and a deep rooted culture of conservation. So get going. Keep one eye on building a strong community network, and the other on supporting innovation and the transition to a more sustainable future.



# FINDING HELP

**You are not alone! Here's  
how the Conservation Council  
and others can help you.**

You are not alone.

Every other community is going through the same process, and has similar goals and aspirations

There are many support programs and sources of funding available to help you.

And it's getting better all the time.

## FINDING HELP

### How we can help

Our Community Action Program

When we started our community action program, back in 1990, the green movement was in its infancy. Our simple approach to community organizing offered a low-cost approach to bringing communities together with governments and the private sector.

Now, life is much more complex:

- everyone is going green
- there are many more active community groups ,
- there are numerous community-oriented projects and campaigns

All this energy is good, but it can also be confusing. We've adapted our Community Action program to provide a common framework for connecting a wide range of activities and to help create new opportunities to support community-based action.

### Provincial Issue Networks and Leaders

One of the ways the Conservation Council helps improve the development of community resources is to support the development of issue networks at the provincial level.

Starting with the ten priorities for a conservator society, we identify and support the role of lead organizations and networks to develop programs and provincial campaigns to promote conservation solutions. For details, see [www.weconserve.ca](http://www.weconserve.ca).

### Issue Factsheets

We maintain a series of factsheets on our website that will connect you with lead organizations, project ideas, and actions for the public and community groups alike.

### **ECOScore**

Based on the ten conservation priorities, the ECOScore is a simple way to get the public thinking about where they want to improve.

The scorecard asks people to rate their efforts on a scale of one to ten, and then set their own personal goals. You can then connect them to the programs and resources within your community and our provincial network that will help them take action.

### **Great Green Directory**

[www.greatgreendirectory.ca](http://www.greatgreendirectory.ca)

We've developed a single directory to track green products, services, programs, incentives, funding, and resources.

This is a great way to show your community network and local scan online, and to tap into provincial and national resources to help you on any issue.

You can adapt the Great Green Directory and integrate it into your own community action program. Contact us to find out about developing your own version of a community green directory.

### **We Conserve TV**

[www.weconservetv.ca](http://www.weconservetv.ca)

Videos are a tremendous way to showcase successes and to demonstrate neat ideas to a community audience. Make sure your community successes are promoted on WCTV!



## FINDING HELP

### Community Support Programs in Ontario

In addition to the many programs and services offered by provincial and national organizations, there are several great models for community organizing that you can use or adapt to your circumstances. These are the community-based environmental programs that we are tracking at the Conservation Council of Ontario. For details and a map of participating communities, please see our website.

#### **COMMUNITY ACTION PLANS**

**Host:** Conservation Council of Ontario

**Program started:** 1992

**Website:** [www.weconserve.ca/communityaction/](http://www.weconserve.ca/communityaction/)

**Environmental Focus:** multi-issue, integrated approach

**Details:** promotes the development of community networks and action plans to engage local groups as partners in achieving a community vision

**Advantages:** low cost and flexible, the program encourages local branding and integration with other community programs, and helps connect communities to provincial support programs and campaigns

#### **PARTNERS FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION**

**Host:** Federation of Canadian Municipalities

**Program started:** 2006

**Website:** <http://www.sustainablecommunities.fcm.ca/Partners-for-Climate-Protection/>

**Environmental Focus:** climate change

**Details:** promotes local action plans as part of a municipal commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions; participating municipalities are required to conduct a greenhouse gas inventory and an action plan, which includes a community component

**Advantages:** it's the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and it's supported by their Green Municipal Fund

#### **GREEN COMMUNITIES**

**Host:** Green Communities Association

**Program started:** 1995, incorporated 1996

**Website:** <http://greencommunitiescanada.org>

**Environmental Focus:** multiple issues, including energy conservation, climate change, water conservation, transportation alternatives

**Details:** promotes the development of lead organizations at the community level that are capable of delivering core programs and being a community hub

**Advantages:** great off-the-shelf programs, including the EcoEnergy home audit, and excellent networking opportunities and information sharing for member organizations

## HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**Host:** Ontario Health Communities Association

**Program started:** 1992

**Website:** [www.ohcc-ccso.ca](http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca)

**Environmental Focus:** environment is integrated into a healthy community approach

**Details:** OHCC provides bilingual services and educational resources to communities that are pursuing local Healthy Community goals; services are provided to community organizations, coalitions and networks through the central office and regional consultants

**Advantages:** OHCC is experienced and adaptive, and can help with individual projects as part of a broader community plan

## TRANSITION TOWNS

**Host:** Transition Towns Network

**Program started:** 2005

**Website:** [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org)

**Environmental Focus:** peak oil, from which they connect into an integrated solutions approach

**Details:** a vibrant, community-led initiative that embraces a sense of hope that an engaged and proactive community will be more resilient and able to withstand the peak oil crisis

**Advantages:** an infectious, positive community approach that has rapidly expanded from a single town to a global movement

## THE NATURAL STEP

**Host:** The Natural Step Canada

**Program started:** 1989

**Website:** [www.thenaturalstep.org/en/canada](http://www.thenaturalstep.org/en/canada)

**Environmental Focus:** sustainable development

**Details:** a proven, science based model that helps communities and businesses better understand and integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations

**Advantages:** now in 11 countries, the Natural Step is backed up by strong science and economics

## FINDING HELP

### Join In

By whatever name you choose to call it, the movement towards a conserver society and a green economy is growing.

The Conservation Council of Ontario is a provincial association of organization, business and municipal conservation leaders, working together to help make Ontario a conserver society. “We Conserve” is our flagship campaign.

Joining the Conservation Council of Ontario will help build a united conservation movement, provide better services to connect people with solutions, and promote supportive policy.

See [www.weconserve.ca/cco](http://www.weconserve.ca/cco) for membership details.



**weconserve**  
Think like a movement