

BURGEO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

WHAT'S POSSIBLE HERE?

Community priorities,
wellbeing, and climate action
pathways



The Rethinking Project
Co-Learning Report #5

©2026 Rethinking Transformation: Centring Msit No'kmaq for Just and Equitable Climate Adaptation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes community engagement work carried out in the Burgeo area through the Rethinking Project and the related Moving Together for Marine Conservation Initiative, as well as supported by Professional & Continuing Studies, Royal Roads University. It builds on earlier engagement in February 2026 and the June 2026 “What’s Possible Here?” community workshop, where results from the paired comparison study were brought back to the community for discussion, interpretation, and action planning. Grounded in Msit No’kmaq, loosely translated as “all my relations,” this work is part of a broader effort to support communities in dealing proactively with societal and climate-related change.

This work is grounded in the recognition that community-led climate adaptation depends on more than external planning, technical assessment, or one-time consultation. It requires attention to the relationships, local knowledge, everyday priorities, assets, skills, and forms of care that allow communities to organize, respond, and act from within. Building on various engagement activities through the Rethinking Project, the Burgeo work seeks to support climate action as something embedded in community life, rather than separate from it.

In this sense, the paired comparison study was not simply a data collection tool. It provided a level playing ground to structure conversation, strengthen shared understanding, and bridge community priorities with future action.



The paired comparison study aimed at gauging adults in the Burgeo area what they would like to see more, or more of, in their community, with respect to eight bundles, representing key features for viable and sustainable community. These are: Health, Food, Work, Fun, Nature, Love, Place, and People. Participants were asked to compare two bundles at a time, rather than directly ranking them. This made the study easier to complete and helped reveal relative patterns in how important these features are for the community.

The survey was completed by 136 participants. The overall results show that “Health” was considered most important, followed by Food, Work, Fun, Nature, Love, Place, and People. These rankings should not be read as a representation of what every resident wants. Rather, they helped structure the conversation. During the June workshop, participants emphasized that the bundles are deeply connected: health depends on food, work, social connection, recreation, place, and the natural environment.

The strongest message from the engagement was that The engagement demonstrated that Burgeo has both strong ideas and substantial local capacity. Residents identified many practical possibilities. The challenge is coordination: how to connect people, guide priorities, nurture local capability, and move from repeated planning into visible action.

For that reason, the report recommends a development of a “Community Champions Network,” coordinated and curated by a local community member, through an inventory of assets, identify bundle leads, coordinate small pilot actions, and continue the discussion about community priorities, climate actions, and other opportunities.

PURPOSE	METHOD	NEXT STEP
Use community priorities to guide practical climate adaptation and local action.	A paired comparison study and community workshop were used to identify priorities and discuss possibilities.	Strengthen coordination through local champions/coordinator model and small visible wins.

WHY THIS WORK WAS UNDERTAKEN

The Rethinking Project is grounded in Msit No'kmaq, loosely translated to “all my relations,” and is concerned with climate action in a broad and relational sense. Climate action is not only about responding to environmental risk, but also about establishing the conditions that help strengthen communities’ capacity, capability and organization to proactively deal proactively with societal and climate-related change.

For small coastal communities, this implies emphasizing what matters to them, like health care, food security, local work, intergenerational knowledge, relationships, place-based identity, and the capability to coordinate action across groups.

The Burgeo engagement was shaped by this way of thinking. Building on various engagement and outreach activities, the initiative looks at supporting community-embedded climate action through daily aspects of community life. The goal was not simply to ask community to express their preferences. The underlying objective was to understand what people see as necessary for a stronger community, and how those priorities could guide future action. A community that can identify its own strengths, find consensus around shared concerns, and mobilize local knowledge is better positioned to respond to climate, conservation, economic, and social change.

For this reason, the survey and the workshop were designed as connected steps. The survey enabled individual members of the community to express their view, while the workshop was an opportunity to share and discuss the results, collaboratively interpret them, and co-design practical next steps. This matters because data alone does not create action. Action becomes possible when findings are returned to the community and used to highlight their strengths and capability.

Core framing

This report treats community priorities as part of climate adaptation. Health, food, work, youth, nature, care, place, and people are not separate from climate action. They are the social and local conditions that help a community adapt, organize, and move forward.

HOW WE LISTENED

Early engagement in February 2026 involved the Rethinking and Moving Together for Marine Conservation teams listening to Burgeo residents and local partners about the recent development related to the proposed National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA), and other concerns like conservation, livelihoods, and decision-making process. The discussion was about the NMCA itself. As well, the discussion also asked what mattered locally, what people feared losing, and how university researchers and partner networks could support the community in practical ways.

Through this listening process, several recurring areas of community life began to take shape. These were not treated as fixed categories or direct quotations from the residents, but as themes that emerged, reflecting local concerns and community strengths, as well as the broader questions about wellbeing, place, livelihoods, relationships, and future action. The Rethinking team drew on this understanding to refine a set of community themes that could help guide a more focused conversation about the vision of the community for the future of Burgeo.



These themes informed the design of the paired comparison study, which invited individual members of the community to reflect on what they would like to see more, or more of. The results were then brought back to the community at the June 2026 workshop, where community members were invited to interpret the findings, share concerns, identify priorities, and discuss actions that could realistically begin from within the community.

This return-to-community step was important because the survey results were never intended to be a solution. Rather, they aimed to open a grounded conversation about what Burgeo already has, what was missing, and what could be strengthened.

The report therefore focuses on Burgeo and the surrounding community context, while recognizing that the survey also included some participation from Ramea. The purpose is not to compare between communities or groups within. It aims to summarize what was learned from the paired comparison study and the June workshop, and to use those findings to guide future actions for Burgeo.

“All this is connected,
can't have one without
the other”

Survey method

Participants compared pairs of bundles rather than ranking a full list directly.

Community discussion

The results were brought back to residents as a starting point for interpretation and action.

STUDY PURPOSE AND GUIDING QUESTION

The team undertook a short, community-based pair-wise comparison study to explore local priorities across different dimensions of community life in the Burgeo area. The guiding question was simple: What would you like to see more of in your community? This question was intentionally open. It allowed residents to think about wellbeing, care, livelihoods, recreation, place, nature, relationships, and local opportunity without forcing the discussion into a narrow policy category.

The survey was designed to support later community discussion rather than to produce statistically generalizable claims about the entire population. It was descriptive and participatory. It identified patterns in the completed booklets and then used those patterns as material for community interpretation during the workshop.

The eight bundles used in the survey were Health, Food, Work, Fun, Nature, Love, Place, and People. Each bundle represented a different part of community life, but the workshop made clear that residents do not experience these areas separately. Food connects to health. Work connects to dignity and staying in place. Nature connects to recreation, tourism, education, and stewardship. People and love connect to belonging, care, and everyday support.



HOW THE PAIRED COMPARISON STUDY WORKED

The paired comparison study asked participants to compare two options at a time rather than rank all eight bundles at once. Across the full booklet, each of the eight bundles was compared with every other bundle, creating 28 unique pairs for comparisons.

This method was useful because comparing two options at a time is often easier than ranking a full list. It also encourages participants to consider choices that are close in their importance. In a community setting, this can help reveal patterns without requiring participants to complete a long interview or interpret complex survey scales.

The study was also place-based. Each bundle was represented by three photos, taken in Burgeo and Ramea. They were not intended to define each bundle in a fixed way. Instead, the images helped participants connect the theme to their own experiences, memories, values, and concerns. For example, a food image might prompt one person to think about affordability, another to think about fishing or gardening, and another to think about sharing with neighbours.



Two mirrored booklet layouts were used so that a theme did not always appear on the same side of the page. The order of comparisons was also randomized across booklets. This helped reduce position and ordering bias while ensuring that each participant responded to the full set of theme pairings. A total of 200 survey booklets were prepared: 150 for Burgeo and 50 for Ramea. Some were handed out directly, and many were made available through local businesses and public places with support from community partners. Adults aged 18 and older were invited to participate. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and most participants completed the booklet privately and returned it at their convenience. The final dataset included 136 completed responses.

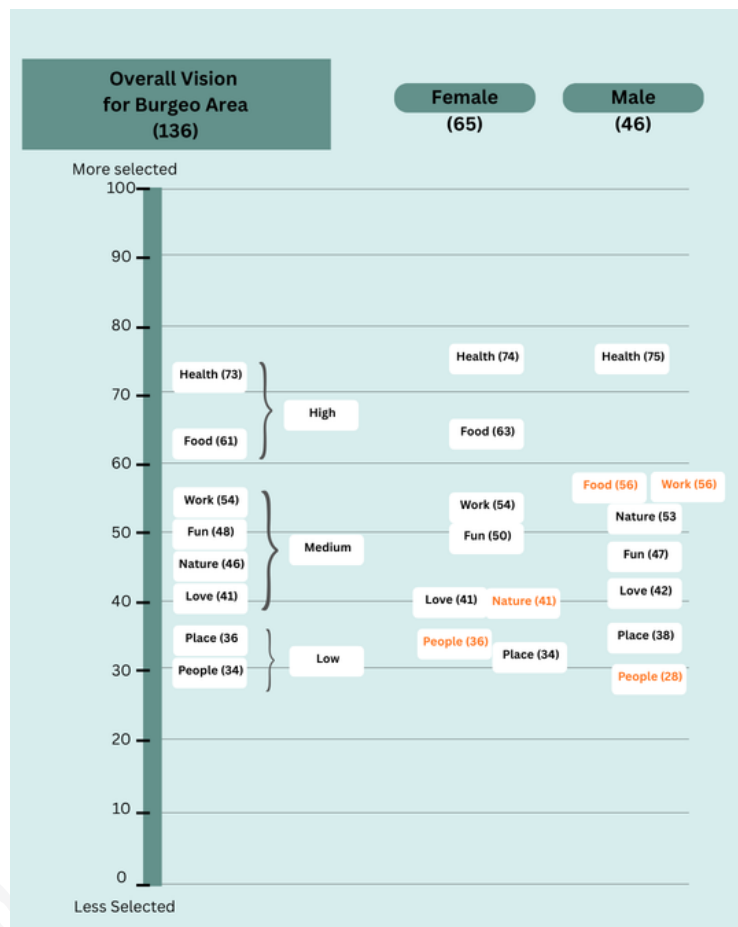


Method summary

The paired comparison study did not ask residents to decide priorities for Burgeo. It asked them to make a series of smaller choices between pairs of bundles, covering various community features. Together, they showed which themes appeared more often in the mind of the community, and opened a conversation about why they mattered.

DATA TREATMENT AND ANALYSIS

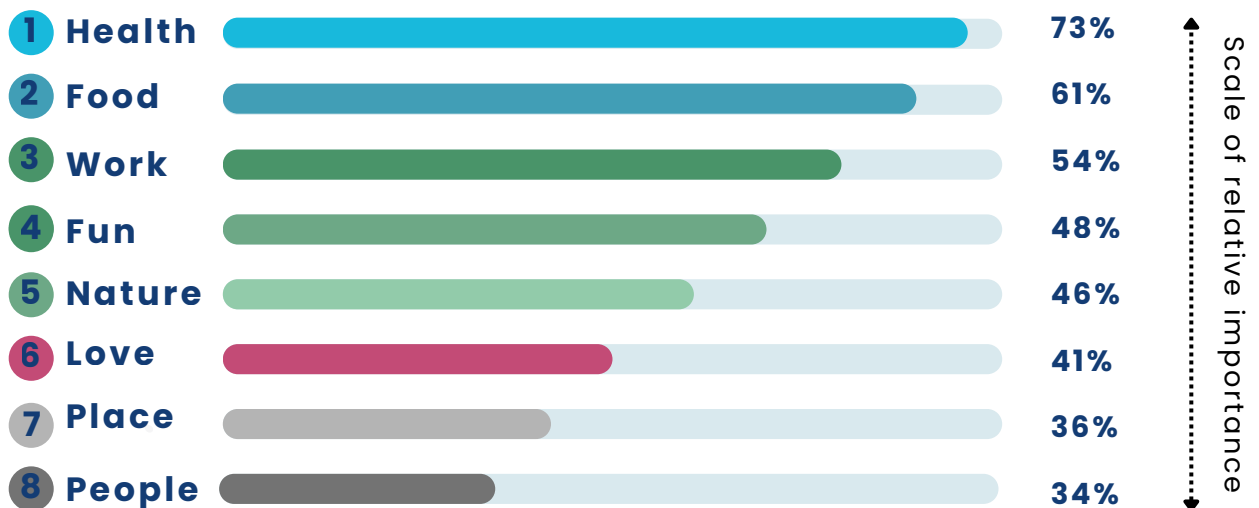
After the completed response data were entered, the results were analyzed descriptively by converting selections into 0–100 scores, developing relative rankings, and using broad high, medium, and low groupings to avoid overstating small differences between closely scored bundles. Kendall's Tau was applied as a supporting measure to compare ranking patterns across the full dataset and demographic groups, without treating the findings as statistically representative or causal.



Descriptive priority scores for the Burgeo area, shown overall and by gender, illustrating the relative selection of each bundle and the broad high, medium, and low groupings. Of the 136 completed responses, 65 participants identified as female and 46 as male; 25 did not report gender and were therefore included in the overall results but excluded from the gender-specific comparisons.

COMMUNITY PRIORITY PATTERNS

Across the 136 completed responses, the final overall order was Health, Food, Work, Fun, Nature, Love, Place, and People. Health appeared most often in community' choices, followed by Food and Work. However, the community discussion showed that these priorities should not be read as separate issues. They repeatedly emphasized that wellbeing is connected across all areas of community life.



Main message: The overall ranking of the eight bundles, based on 136 completed survey, shows the highest priority on Health (73% on the relative importance scale). The ranking is not finite and not deterministic. Its main purpose is to help guide the discussion at the workshop, about the meaning of each bundle, what it represented in everyday community life.

BROADENING THE CONVERSATION AT THE WORKSHOP

“Health around you is
health in you”

The ranking helped guide the conversation, but the discussion gave meaning to the results. Each bundle opened up a broader set of concerns, strengths, and possible directions for action.

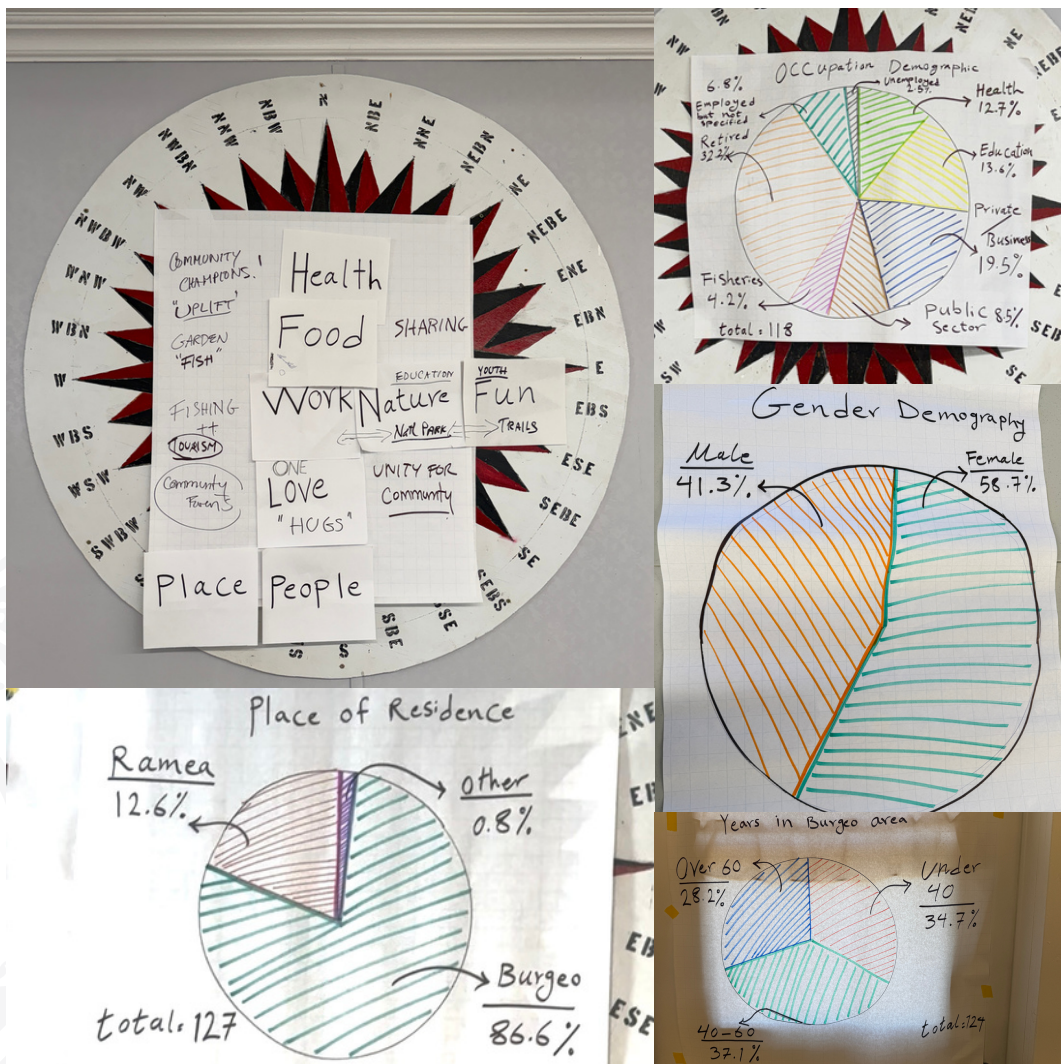
1. Health Access to care, seniors support, mental health, and everyday help.	2. Food Food security, local fish and harvesting, gardening, sharing, and affordability.
3. Work Employment, purpose, contribution, tourism, fisheries, local processing, and remote work.	4. Fun Recreation, youth activity, events, games, and confidence-building opportunities.
5. Nature Beaches, trails, islands, parks, water, sandbanks, and careful stewardship.	6. Love Care, belonging, support, relationships, and social connection.
7. Place Local identity, pride, gathering spaces, and attachment to Burgeo and the coast.	8. People Community groups, volunteers, elders, youth, newcomers, and networks of support.

Health rose to the top of the ranking, but the workshop participants explained health in a broad way. It was not only about clinical services. It was also about mental health, seniors support, recreation, food, social connection, and the ability to stay well in place. Food was also described as more than food access. It was connected to affordability, harvesting, fishing, gardening, sharing, and dignity. Work was connected to income, but also to purpose, contribution, and the ability for people to remain in the community.

FROM RANKING TO MEANING

The June workshop helped move the study findings from ranking into meaning. Rather than treating the priority order as a final result, participants were invited to work collaboratively with the themes and consider what each bundle represented in everyday community life. Participants focused on specific bundles and wrote down their thoughts, comments, and ideas about what they would like to see strengthened in relation to that area.

This process helped translate the paired comparison results into a more grounded community conversation. The notes and discussions generated at the tables highlighted concerns, strengths, gaps, and possible directions for action. The table on the next page summarizes these reflections, organized by priority area.



WHAT'S POSSIBLE FOR BURGEO

Priority area	What residents emphasized
Health & support	Health was described as the foundation for other forms of wellbeing. Residents pointed to the need to strengthen local access to physiotherapy, social work, home care, mental health support, and everyday help for seniors who want to remain in their homes.
Food & sharing	Food was linked to health, affordability, harvesting, gardening, fishing, preservation, and sharing. Residents discussed gardens, greenhouses, soil improvement with local materials, a community freezer, and stigma-free food sharing.
Work & opportunity	Work was discussed as employment, purpose, contribution, and dignity. Participants identified opportunities in tourism, fisheries, local seafood processing, park-related work, healthcare, and remote employment supported by reliable internet.
People, love, and belonging	Residents described the need to rebuild social connection after COVID-19 disrupted gatherings and everyday interaction. Ideas included welcoming events, kitchen parties, music, community cleanups, coffee-shop or hub spaces, and activities across age groups.
Nature, place, & stewardship	Burgeo's beaches, trails, islands, parks, sandbanks, water, and coastal landscapes were described as major community assets. Residents supported careful development that protects place while strengthening recreation, education, pride, and tourism.
Youth, fun, and knowledge	Youth engagement was linked to recreation, confidence, health, outdoor activity, and pride in place. Older residents hold knowledge about fishing, gardening, harvesting, food preservation, local history, and outdoor skills.



“As you get older you think about health, when you’re younger you think you’ll live forever”

A cross-cutting theme was intergenerational knowledge. Older residents hold knowledge about fishing, gardening, harvesting, food preservation, local history, weather, trails, and outdoor skills. Participants saw this knowledge as essential for strengthening youth connection to Burgeo and for keeping practical community capabilities alive.

Another cross-cutting message was the need to reduce social fragmentation. COVID-19 disrupted gatherings and everyday interaction, and residents described the need to nurture connection again through events, music, informal gathering spaces, community cleanups, activities for youth, and opportunities that bring people together across age groups.

FROM COMMUNITY PRIORITIES TO CLIMATE ACTION

The Burgeo results matter for climate adaptation because they show the social and local foundations that make action possible. Climate action is often presented as a technical or environmental issue. In practice, communities also need relationships, trust, shared knowledge, local coordination, and the ability to mobilize what they already have. A community with stronger food systems, care networks, youth engagement, intergenerational learning, and place-based stewardship is better positioned to respond to uncertainty and change.

This is why the report does not treat Health, Food, Work, Fun, Nature, Love, Place, and People as separate themes. These bundles are parts of a wider community adaptation pathway. Each can help establish a practical area of work, strengthen local capability, and guide future programming. Together, they can bridge community priorities with future Rethinking Project activities and broader climate action.



FROM CAPACITY TO CAPABILITY

The concept of capability is useful here. Capacity refers to the people, skills, assets, spaces, and resources that may already exist. Capability is about whether those assets can actually be used, connected, and mobilized. A community may have knowledge, equipment, volunteers, elders, youth, local groups, and places to gather, but still need coordination to make those assets work together. The proposed next step is therefore not only to build more capacity. It is to strengthen the capability to act.

In this framing, a Community Champion Network is not just an administrative recommendation. It is a way to curate community knowledge, convene people around the bundles, mobilize existing strengths, co-develop small actions, and refine priorities over time. This kind of local coordination can make climate adaptation more grounded, trusted, and actionable.



Climate-action connection

By building a stronger community, Burgeo also builds the conditions for climate action. The work starts with local knowledge and organizes it into practical pathways for care, food, work, youth, nature, place, and belonging.

BUILDING FORWARD

One recommended next step is to establish a coordinated Community Champion Network, supported by a clear local action pathway. The engagement process surfaced many strong ideas, while also highlighted familiar challenges like volunteer fatigue, repeated planning processes that do not always lead to visible action, and the need for dedicated coordination to help move priorities forward. The central challenge is not a lack of ideas or commitment within the community, but how to translate those ideas into action, in an organized and realistic manner – one that does not place additional pressure on the same residents and organizations.

A part-time local coordinator could play an important role in supporting this process. The coordinator would not be expected to lead every priority area or serve as the sole champion for community action. Rather, the role would focus on identifying, connecting, and supporting a wider network of community champions. These include residents, elders, youth, organizations, and informal leaders, who serve as connectors to different areas of community life, such as food, nature, youth engagement, health, music, trails, seniors support, or community events.

A local coordinator would be designated to strengthen community participation, not replace it. This person could help establish clear communication pathways, support small and manageable actions, connect volunteers and community groups, and report back in plain language so that community members can see how their input is being carried forward. In this way, the coordinator role could help turn community priorities into practical steps while maintaining local ownership, accountability, and momentum.

“Unity for Community: bringing people together, reducing division, and rebuilding a stronger sense of belonging”

COMING TOGETHER AROUND WHAT MATTERS

Following the workshop, the day continued with a World Oceans Day Community Dinner at the Burgeo Community Centre. Community members and the research team gathered for an evening of food, performance, and celebration. The gathering included a Water Song offered by the Burgeo Sweetgrass Ladies Drumming Group, food from the land and sea, and a kitchen party that created a warm ambience and welcoming space for connection.

The significance of the day was both in the findings that were shared, and in the kind of space that was created. The workshop and the dinner offered a respectful and inclusive setting where people could come together across different perspectives, experiences, and responsibilities. This is an important reminder for communities, researchers, partners, and government decision-makers alike: community-embedded climate action requires spaces where people feel welcomed, heard, and connected to one another.



FROM PRIORITIES TO POSSIBILITIES

Visual Summary

The most important message from the workshop was not that Burgeo needs more ideas. Rather, what Burgeo needs is a structure to move existing ideas into action.



BURGEO ALREADY HAS STRENGTHS

The community holds ideas, knowledge, relationships, skills, care, and local assets that can support future action.



EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

Community priorities overlap and reinforce one another. Health, food, work, belonging, place, and wellbeing cannot happen in isolation.



COORDINATION CAN MOVE PRIORITIES FORWARD

A clear local structure can connect people, support small visible actions, and maintain momentum without overburdening the same volunteers.



A COMMUNITY-LED PATHWAY FORWARD

Connect strengths → support champions → begin with small actions → learn and report back



Community-embedded climate action begins by strengthening the relationships and capabilities that allow people to act together.