



Community Engagement, City of Toronto, March 2nd 2015
2-5 minutes

My name is Alice Casselman. I am representing ACER – the Association for Canadian Educational Resources, a charity founded in 1987 to help communities monitor climate change impacts and take ecological action.

Our website is www.acer-acre.ca or www.climatesake.ca

I am here to share 2 successful concepts that we, as educators, have developed with communities over the last 20 years. The 2 concepts involve Programs and Processes that result in community commitment for the long-term.

1st Concept: Programs These programs are hands-on data collection to provide the community with scientific information about climate change impacts. Projections for future climate are then understood so that community members can take scientifically sound ecological actions. E.g. ACER forest data since 1997.

2nd Concept: Processes that use workshops with maps of local areas and national experts to provide support with scientific information and bring communities members together to address their local issues are successful. Citizens prioritize their recommendations for strategic measures to adapt to and to mitigate the effects of climate change. E.g. Niagara Region – ACER working with Greening Niagara

PROGRAMS:

We have developed 6 programs that include training, equipping, and supporting citizen scientist volunteers to work locally to collect data that is real, relevant, cumulative, compatible, audited and shared with everyone – especially decision makers.

ACER programs collect data that is needed to make decisions about our future trees and forests. Our trained volunteers – from students to seniors- plant, measure, mulch, maintain. 10% of the plantings are tagged to track the success of the species chosen. The audited data from the tagged trees is stored and posted on our website for sharing.

Since 1997, data has been collected in different school yards, different community plantings and different 1 hectare forest plots by trained volunteers in central Ontario. This year, we will plant in 8 new schoolyards and establish new TreeCaching Trails in the Golden Horseshoe. One trail is being planned as part of the BruleWyandot September 2015 celebration along the length of the Humber River.

We will also conduct our audit annual data on 36 schoolyards, 2 experimental planting sites and visit 3 forest plots -all with citizen scientist volunteers – from grade 6 to seniors.

BENEFITS:

1. Community commitment for the long term. Understanding the need to work together to collect and share long-term data is a way to be proactive about climate change impacts and reduce disaster event costs while increasing the benefits of ecosystems.
2. These programs build community teams and provide networking opportunities to build social capital. It is the first and KEY piece in developing long-term community engagement. From Hands to Heads to Hearts!

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Support neighbourhood pilot projects to collect long-term data about their established and newly planted trees.
2. Support those working with community groups and ENGO'S that plant new trees, maintain them and share data.
3. Hold an annual a city-wide MEASURE UP DAY – “ Trees on my Street Party” so that data is updated annually and the community has a fun day while sharing, learning and celebrating the latest about their trees.

2. PROCESSES:

Community Mapping Workshops, based on local maps with the appropriate GIS layers, and Community Risk Assessment Workshops based on the HIRA process are tools that empower communities. HIRA – Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment process allows citizens to add their local knowledge and experience to their maps and discuss changes – past, present and future. The HIRA process trains citizens to rate the probability and consequences of risks and set priorities for action in their community.

The workshop process empowers these citizens to develop strategies so they may take action on their priorities in a changing climate. These priorities and strategies are based on community local knowledge with scientifically sound information. These informed citizens may then work with their elected representatives - local councilors and local politicians to implement recommended actions.

These priorities will change over time due to many stresses – including increasing population, increasing development and, especially, climate change impacts. The HIRA community process should be revisited every 3-5 years. An evaluation of actions taken regarding process and effectiveness should be made every year.

Being involved as a member of the community brings understanding and commitment for the long-term and motivates individuals to examine their level of preparedness for extreme events.

Social responsibility also increases as residents become aware of need for themselves to be prepared. Preparing for community response to extreme events also builds community resilience. After surviving and responding to an extreme event, the community is motivated to revisit their hazard preparedness measures and improve on them. This is how they bounce back quicker – They build a **resilience dividend** so the community is better able to take more thorough and strategic actions and reduce response times.

cf NY after 9 / 11 then Hurricane Sandy – bounced back – more effectively and efficiently because they had worked together to review and update their extreme event strategies

cf. in Canada the complicated communication set ups allowed the incident to increase to the extreme on parliament hill. Community first responders were all on different frequencies so they could not speak to each other! When different and distance locations are used for specialist 1st responders and their specialized equipment the incident or extreme event takes on fatal proportions.

BENEFITS:

Communities have access to up to date information and data to respond to extreme events as individuals and as a community. By working together and knowing their resources, they can build community **resilience dividends** for all to enjoy.

Cf. The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong: Judith Rodin

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City of Toronto support communities to hold workshops in their area with risk assessment HIRA experts present.

That the City of Toronto welcome community recommendations of prioritized, strategic actions to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change in their community.

cf. Community reports by ACER with Greening Niagara to provide workshops Niagara Region. www.acer-acre.ca/resources/resources-for-communities

Thank you!

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