

SUMMARY

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE A CRUCIAL ROLE to play in combating climate change. Their decisions impact, directly or indirectly, over half of Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.¹ This offers huge scope for meeting Canada's national climate responsibilities, with the right kind of support from federal and provincial governments.

The report is directed to ramping up climate action through local government decision making and it was prepared with the needs of elected leaders in mind. The Top Asks identified in the report are those that federal, provincial, and territorial elected governments could put in place so that local decision makers have the tools they need to maximize climate action. And the potential is substantial.

If you are an elected leader, you are likely being called upon more often to address the consequences of a changing climate — from forest fires in the west, floods in the prairies, sea level rise in the north, to ice storms in the east. Canada needs a bold plan to reduce GHG emissions. We have an enormous task ahead of us.

There are four emerging trends pushing local governments to centre stage: the localization of energy, the mainstreaming of climate change in land use planning, rapid urbanization, and the importance of place in a global economy.

Canada can and must ramp up climate action by empowering low carbon communities.

What do local governments need to unleash their climate potential? Which top asks have the most leverage for impact?

The actions set out in this report — 18 for the federal government, and 24 for the provinces and territories — are based on an extensive literature review with input from local elected leaders. They are not the only actions that could make a difference, but they are actions that could have a great impact.

These actions focus on five priority areas:

- **CAPACITY BUILDING;**
- **SMART GROWTH;**
- **HARNESSING LOCAL ENERGY;**
- Reducing carbon pollution from the **BUILDING SECTOR;** and
- Reducing carbon pollution from the **TRANSPORTATION SECTOR.**



Canada needs a bold plan to reduce GHG emissions. We have an enormous task ahead of us. Local governments have a crucial role to play.

¹ Natural Resources Canada, "Integrated Community Energy Solutions: A Roadmap for Action," (2009).



Local governments have a crucial role to play in combating climate change. Their decisions impact, directly or indirectly, over half of Canada’s GHG emissions.

TORONTO PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL MURAZ/FLICKR

Over 100 local elected officials responded to the Top Asks survey. As one respondent said: “Just about all of the offered actions need to be done, should have been done 25 or 30 years ago when some of us said they were necessary. We are so late in the game that dramatic response is required (well beyond Paris), meaning action on all fronts is needed.”

Top Asks identifies key federal, provincial, and territorial actions needed to unleash local government climate potential. They are early wins in the transition to net zero emissions in 2050.

Top Asks

Canada can and must ramp up climate action by empowering low carbon communities. Our country can’t be a climate leader without local government action.

Where to start:

FEDERAL TOP ASKS	
Capacity building	Adopt science-based greenhouse gas targets. Put a price on carbon for net-zero emissions by 2050. Address capacity shortfalls that stand in the way of local government climate action.
Funding	Line up sustainable infrastructure spending programs with local climate action. Allocate subsidies to GHG-friendly industry.
Natural capital	Fund local government baseline assessments of natural capital. Include the carbon storage value of natural capital in national GHG accounting.
Harnessing local energy	Fund community- and Indigenous-owned renewable energy capacity.
Building sector	Incentivize energy efficiency retrofits in homes and commercial buildings.
Transportation sector	Prioritize transit and active transportation infrastructure projects over auto-only infrastructure.



PROVINCIAL & TERRITORIAL TOP ASKS	
Capacity building	Adopt science-based greenhouse gas targets. Put a price on carbon for net-zero emissions by 2050. Address capacity shortfalls that stand in the way of local government climate action.
Funding	Line up sustainable infrastructure spending programs with local climate action. Allocate subsidies to GHG-friendly industry.
Smart growth	Change legislation so that energy and climate change policies are part of land use planning.
Harnessing local energy	Change the building code to make renewable-energy-powered homes and buildings.
Building sector	Fund ambitious retrofit programs. Enable property-assessed financing and on-bill financing. Support low income households to address energy poverty.
Transportation sector	Support local governments to improve public transit and active transportation in urban and rural communities.

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 — Top Asks Survey respondent

VANCOUVER PHOTO COURTESY PAUL KRUEGER/FLICKR

Are there other actions that our federal and provincial governments must take to reduce climate change? Absolutely. This report speaks to the potential of local governments.

Where to Raise Top Asks for Empowering Low Carbon Communities

You can discuss these asks with your:

- Council;
- Constituents, community groups, and staff;
- Federal, provincial, and territorial elected representatives;
- Provincial, territorial, and national local government associations; and
- Government-led climate change consultations.