Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

Introduction

To ensure plans are properly disseminated and implemented over the span of the actioning period, clear governance and ownership is vital. This document will cover the three key areas of Step 5:

1) **Deliver:** The publication of your plan should be a chance to celebrate all the hard work you have done so far, and a solid publication plan will maximise the impact it can have both for your stakeholders, and for other organisations looking for inspiration to complete their own plan.
2) **Evaluate:** Engaging staff is crucial for evaluating a climate action plan, as it ensures that the plan is both practical and aligned with the operational realities. Staff input provides valuable insights into operational challenges, resource needs, and existing initiatives, making it easier to identify gaps, refine actions, and drive collective ownership of the plan's goals.
3) **Report:** It is vital that your organisation's data collection and reporting processes are streamlined and consistent, as they enable efficient reporting, ensure correct progress indicator capture, and reduce administrative burden. A well-structured approach also improves data quality, supports comparability across reporting periods, and enhances your organisation's ability to monitor progress and inform decision-making.

You should implement processes to ensure transparent communication and reporting of progress on climate action to relevant interested parties, with information made publicly available. You could schedule regular catchups with your core working group as you monitor and evaluate your climate action progress and look ahead to delivering the next iterations of your plan.

1. Deliver

Publishing and Publicising your Climate Action Plan

A. Clear and Accessible Publication:

- Ensure the plan is written in clear, straightforward language to be easily understood by the public. Including a strong executive summary will help readers understand the key points of your plan quickly, and a good contents page can help with targeted navigation.
- Publish the plan on your organisation's website in a dedicated, easily navigable section.
- Provide downloadable formats (PDF, HTML) for accessibility, and consider creating a summary or infographic to highlight key actions and goals.

B. Engage the Community:

- Host public meetings or webinars to introduce the plan, explain its importance, and answer questions.
- Collaborate with local media outlets to feature stories, interviews, and editorials on the plan.
- Use social media platforms to share key points, updates, and engage directly with the community.

C. Partnerships and Outreach:

- Partner with local organisations, schools, and businesses to help spread the word and engage different audiences. Environmental organisations such as Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, NI Environment Link, RSPB NI, and others have strong networks and channels which may welcome and share the publication of your plan.
- Distribute printed materials in community centres, libraries, and other public spaces.

D. Ongoing Communication:

- Regularly update the public on the progress of the plan through newsletters, press releases, and social media.
- Encourage public feedback and participation throughout the implementation phase to maintain engagement and accountability.

2. Evaluate

2.1. Annual Review

It is recommended you report qualitative and quantitative progress against the key targets and/or performance indicators developed for your monitoring framework at least annually. For example, you may choose to report in line with your organisation's

financial reporting timeframes, if this is equally or more frequent. Regular, consistent and standardised reporting will strengthen accountability and make overall monitoring more robust. It will also embed this process into the regular accounting practices of the organisation.

2.2. Evaluating your Plan

A. Establish a Review Team:

- Assemble a team that includes key stakeholders, experts, and representatives from various departments to provide diverse perspectives on the Climate Action Plan. This should go beyond the core team managing the delivery of the plan.

B. Set Clear Objectives:

- Define the goals of the annual review process of your plan. Are you: assessing the effectiveness of your plan, identifying gaps, updating for new risks, or ensuring alignment with current regulations and best practices? A comprehensive review will incorporate elements of all of these, but it may not be necessary to go into detail in all areas every year. For example, depending on your organisation you may want to complete a high-level annual review of your climate change risks and opportunities, with a more in-depth mid-term review of your climate actions (if this was a 5 year plan you could do this every 2.5 years).

C. Gather and Analyse Data:

- Collect data on the performance of current actions, including progress reports, monitoring data, and feedback from stakeholders. Analyse this data to assess the effectiveness of the existing plan in either reducing emissions or addressing risks against the indicators set in your action plan.

D. Evaluate Changes in Context:

- Consider any changes in external factors such as new legislation and/or policy, technological advancements, climate change science or shifts in environmental /market conditions that could affect the relevance and effectiveness of the mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- While some organisations may not be directly involved in developing Climate Action Plans and Carbon Budgets under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, or Climate Change Risk Assessments and Adaptation Programmes under the UK Climate Change Act 2008, it is important that all organisations remain informed about these publications. Understanding the statutory obligations placed on government can support organisational planning and action, enhance risk management, and ensure alignment with national climate objectives.

E. Identify Gaps and Weaknesses:

- Look for areas where the plan may be falling short, such as unaddressed risks, underperforming strategies, or resource constraints. Are you tracking the right indicators?

F. Consult Stakeholders:

- Engage with internal and external stakeholders, including employees, partners, and the community, to gather feedback on the plan's implementation and effectiveness.

G. Update and Revise:

- Based on the review findings, update the Climate Action Plan to address any identified gaps, incorporate new data, and align with current best practices and organisational goals. Ensure that the revised plan includes clear, actionable steps and measurable targets.
- There are two ways to approach updating the plan. You can either treat it as a living document that is updated and revised on a regular basis, or you can publish your evaluation report as a separate piece that can contribute to a brand-new Climate Action Plan on a longer basis.

Figure 1: OECD Framework for Evaluation[1]

2.3. Staff Handover

A potential pitfall over the course of delivery and review is staff turnover, as individuals or even whole teams can leave and be replaced in the 3-5 years that a plan will cover. It is therefore key that any climate action duties are accounted for and expressed to any new hires (or those new to the role) in the handover, and that they are upskilled quickly to take over the responsibilities.

3. Report

By this stage you should have set up a system where all information is centrally available from annual evaluations, to be uploaded. A system for any additional information gathering from key roles should be in place, with staff given plenty of notice about the deadline. This could extend to development of a small reporting task and finish group, for quick and effective review.

Remember that reporting on climate change action will be an iterative, developmental process. It is unlikely that you will get everything spot on the first time around, and methods and knowledge are developing and becoming more refined all the time. The important thing is to maintain momentum, and integrating climate reporting, and climate considerations more generally, into all your operations and activities is the best way to do this.

3.1. Mitigation Reporting

Under Regulation 5 of the Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, specified public bodies are required to report on climate change mitigation, including greenhouse gas emissions, on a three-yearly basis. The first reports, due by 31 October 2025, established a specified baseline year for emissions.

From the second reporting cycle onward, each report must include annual emissions data for every year within the three-year period, as part of progress reporting. This means organisations must collect and retain data for all three years leading up to each submission, supporting consistency, transparency, and a comprehensive emissions record.

Using the annual review process built into your climate plan (referred to above) can be a helpful way to gather and organise this data year by year, making the reporting process more manageable and effective.

3.2. Adaptation Reporting

Under Regulation 4 of the Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, specified public bodies must report on adaptation. The first reports are due by 31 March 2026 and must cover a four-year period. The second reports are due by 31 January 2030, with subsequent reports required every five years. Each report must assess the current and predicated impacts of climate change on the organisation's functions and outline actions to adaption to climate change.

This longer reporting cycle reflects the strategic nature of adaptation planning and action, supports long-term resilience, and aligns with national climate adaptation cycles, such as the five-yearly Climate Change Risk Assessments and Adaptation Programmes under the UK Climate Change Act 2008.

References

1. OECD. 2021. *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/applying-evaluation-criteria-thoughtfully_543e84ed-en.html