



Step 01 - Understand Your Context

Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

Introduction

Climate NI has developed two planning Toolkits; one for mitigation planning (Net Zero NI) and one for adaptation planning (NI Adapts). This is because, while a good quality organisational climate action plan must contain both mitigation and adaptation, the processes of developing those actions differ slightly. Where possible, Climate NI has linked activities across the Toolkits so that one action can be used across mitigation and adaptation planning.

The Climate NI Toolkits provide guidance for developing a climate action plan, however they are not prescriptive and can be changed according to the levels of staff resource, deadlines, complexity of assets or policies etc. of your organisation. You will have the opportunity to assess your organisational characteristics in Step 1 of both Toolkits.

You must decide on the best fit for your context, given your current level of governance or capability around climate action, and the level of stakeholder engagement you think is required to create an ambitious plan.

This document details three key areas for consideration in establishing governance for your climate action plan;

- Developing Your Plan: How to Engage
- Principles for Internal and External Buy-In
- Lessons from elsewhere in the UK

Climate NI has also created a template agenda for your first stakeholder engagement meeting, available to download in the following section.

1. Developing Your Plan: How to Engage

1.1 Desk-based vs Workshops

Typically there are two methods for developing your plan, influencing how you engage with stakeholders and seek validation:

- Draft the plan as a **desk-based** piece of work, either yourself or with a small team. Then validate with colleagues as required.
- Begin drafting in a small team, using **cross-organisational workshops** to sense-check and gain additional understanding of key topics.

The first option will be faster but runs the risk of missing key information. It may also result in lesser buy-in from colleagues. Conversely, the second option is good practice, ensuring much greater organisational buy-in, but will likely take longer.

There are alternatives available, including using an existing organisational structure (e.g. a sustainability committee) to act as a core group to develop the work, solicit feedback from key sectors, and approach the wider organisation on your behalf. In this format, senior staff inclusion will be key, however remember that operational officers are equally important to get a holistic picture of what is happening on the ground.

1.1.a Meeting Agenda Template for your first Stakeholder Engagement Meeting

Climate NI has developed a draft meeting agenda for the first group meeting of stakeholders. This document provides you with some suggested topics that you could cover in this meeting:

- Explaining why your organisation is developing a climate action plan;
- Agreeing your Terms of Reference;
- Discussing the initial desk-based review and scoping work you have developed (ideally for both cycles)
- Agreeing an invite list for any future workshops to other departments.

You can [download the draft agenda here](#)¹

2. Principles for Internal and External Buy-in

2.1 Mitigation vs Adaptation Expertise

While it is unlikely that you will have two separate groups working on climate action, certain individuals in the team may be better placed to work on either Mitigation or Adaptation. Make use of knowledge sets in your organisation, and ask them to support in presentations, or with more frequent one-to-one meetings. Energy managers, emergency planners or risk managers, and finance officers can all be highly valuable.

2.2 Senior Buy-In

For any organisation that is developing a Climate Action Plan it is important to have senior level buy-in from the start. Senior buy-in will benefit the process by ensuring staff involved have adequate resources in terms of time and financial backing to undertake this work. Ensure that the goals, outcomes, and rationale for the project is communicated clearly and effectively. To support overall governance of the plan we suggest having a senior member of staff involved throughout the process. For example, a senior member of staff could be involved by chairing working groups you may hold.

2.3 Staff Awareness

It is important that not only the staff directly involved in the development of your plan, but all staff that could potentially play a part, are made aware of the responsibilities and risks of climate change within the organisation. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Hold an information session open to staff at all levels of the organisation.
- Produce and share guidance documents for staff, making clear the legal obligations of the organisation (if you are a listed body required to report).
- Incorporate this information into the induction programme for any new staff.
- Make Carbon Literacy or equivalent training available for staff. Consider making this mandatory for staff of a certain level/responsibility.

2.4 Engaging External Stakeholders:

[The EU manual on Stakeholder Engagement in Climate Adaptation](#)² proposes a simple and effective set of four key elements for success to mobilise and engage stakeholders and citizens effectively and collaboratively:

- **Communicate** to/with a broad range of stakeholders and citizens who may be overwhelmed by the extent of information that they receive on a regular basis.
- **Engage** with an inclusive spectrum of organisations and individuals.
- **Connect** stakeholders and citizens with decision-makers in ways that facilitate deliberation about policies and measures.
- **Enable** stakeholders and citizens to act collectively and individually.

Despite this guide being designed specifically for adaptation planning, many of its principles will apply across to mitigation. The bulk of the work in engaging external stakeholders will come later when you have a concrete plan in hand, however it will be beneficial to start developing a communications strategy in parallel with the plan, and you may even wish to establish vehicles of engagement early, such as a citizen's assembly if you are a local authority, or an external steering committee.

The key to engaging stakeholders on climate action is to make it relevant to them – as an example, for residents in a council area this will mean focusing engagement on the issues that are already impacting them in their day-to-day lives, such as flooding. This will show how both adaptation to respond to those impacts, and mitigation to prevent them worsening in the future, are key priorities for your organisation to address.

3. Lessons from the UK

Integrated governance

In the UK's [Resilience Lessons Digest](#)³ one of the key themes is integrated governance. This theme highlights how important it is to have coordinated governance when dealing with climate change. It found that effective climate laws, local and decentralized governance, and including climate adaptation in various policies, all helped to drive real progress. However, many places struggled to achieve the level of coordinated

governance needed to address the climate crisis effectively. Countries with national adaptation plans included as part of their governance systems generally made more progress than those without. Bringing key stakeholders together at the local level for adaptation projects was found to be highly effective.

References

1. Climate NI - *Step 1: Understand Your Context, Governance and Stakeholder Engagement Meeting 1 Template* available online at <https://climatenorthernireland.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Step-1-Governance-and-Stakeholder-Engagement-24.11.25.pdf>
2. European Commission: *DIY Manual on Engaging Stakeholders and Citizens in Climate Adaptation: Tools, Good Practices and Experiences* available online at: https://mission-adaptation-portal.ec.europa.eu/diy-manual-engaging-stakeholders-and-citizens-climate-adaptation-tools-good-practices-and_en
3. UK Resilience Academy: *Lessons Digest* Available online at: <https://ukresilienceacademy.org/share/lessons-digest/>