

# Drivers and Barriers to Climate Action Implementation in Ontario

## Introduction

1. Over 500 Canadian municipalities have declared climate emergencies and are undertaking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Clean Air Partnership studied local climate action plans from 14 Ontario municipalities and interviewed policymakers to identify the drivers and barriers to successful climate action.

## Cross-sectoral Drivers of Climate Action Implementation

3. **Funding** - Securing funding was vital to successful climate implementation across multiple sectors. Projects that secured funding from multiple sources were more likely to get completed.
4. **Community Partnerships** - Partnering with community organizations and institutions to advance climate action reduced municipal risk and resources. Municipalities benefitted greatly from leveraging the skills and experience of their community partners.
5. **Staff Capacity** - Hiring new staff boosted municipal climate action advancement by increasing capacity to coordinate externally with stakeholders and internally within across municipal departments.
6. **Strategic Prioritization** - Strategic prioritization of climate initiatives, based on a detailed understanding of the community, made it easier to secure funding and support from both key decision-makers and community stakeholders.

## Cross-sectoral Barriers to Climate Action Implementation

7. **Low Climate Literacy** - Poor climate literacy within both the municipalities and the community was a key barrier to advancing municipal climate projects.
8. **Staff Turnover** - High staff turnover rates made it difficult for climate programs to mature from planning to implementation. High turnover also limited project evaluation experience and affected potential funding opportunities.

## Sector Specific Drivers and Barriers

9. **New Buildings** - Municipalities faced barriers in advancing green development standards (GDS) programs due to concerns regarding municipal authority to mandate metrics above Ontario Building Code requirements, pushback from the development community, consistency concerns across third-party GDS programs and lack of implementation experience across departments.
10. **Building Retrofits** - Municipalities struggled with program start-up costs and gaining community buy-in around the LIC financing mechanism. Concerns around scaling-up retrofit programs, advancing retrofit ecosystem efforts, and longer-term program administration capacity posed significant challenges in advancing retrofit programs.

- 11. Transportation** - Partnership development was a crucial driver for transportation programs. Partnering with the community helped municipalities expand their reach and host educational events at a reduced cost. Funding contributions from all levels of government, interdepartmental collaboration as well as data-driven asks for funding and action were key drivers for transportation actions.
- 12. Energy** - Engagement of energy developers, use of innovative financing mechanisms, and reductions in transaction and administrative costs were critical drivers in advancing community energy projects. Provincial energy policies were identified as areas that can be improved to support further implementation. Development of business cases to secure funding, a limited number of energy developers, staff capacity constraints and the absence of strong senior and political leadership proved to be barriers to implementation.

## Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

- 13. Securing Support** - Securing support from senior managers, municipal Councillors and other decision-makers within the municipality was key to overcoming barriers to implementation. It also strengthened external funding applications and increased the likelihood of leveraging internal funding from municipal budgets.
- 14. Mainstreaming Climate Change Considerations** - Adding a climate lens to existing municipal policies and programs helped municipalities implement climate actions. Municipalities advanced carbon budgeting and Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures to ensure municipal decision-making was included climate considerations. Municipalities also hired strategic coordinators to integrate climate considerations and strengthen interdepartmental climate communications.

- 15. Innovative Community Outreach** - Municipalities conducted targeted community engagement events and created pop-up community outreach groups to increase public awareness and participation while reducing municipal resource inputs.

## Municipal Implications

- 16.** A long-term collaborative process bringing together Ontario municipalities, provincial ministries, and federal government departments is needed to advance community climate action in Ontario municipalities.
- 17.** By working together, municipalities can reduce barriers and advance climate action in their jurisdictions with greater efficiency by maximizing resource utilization and minimizing overall costs.
- 18.** The [Clean Air Council \(CAC\)](#) is Canada's largest peer-to-peer municipal climate action network and comprises of over 35 municipalities and Public Health Units working collaboratively on climate action. Clean Air Council members have worked together for over twenty years on climate action implementation. [Learn more about CAC.](#)
- 19.** By working together, municipalities can advance climate action in their jurisdictions with greater efficiency by maximizing resource utilization and minimizing overall costs.

## Related Webinars and Further Reading

- 20.** [Assessing the state of climate action in Ontario municipalities: the drivers and barriers to implementation.](#)