

# Path to Resilience

## Community Lessons and Best Practices



The NH Coastal Adaptation Workgroup (CAW) is a collaborative of over 30 organizations working to ensure coastal watershed communities are resourceful, ready, and resilient to the impacts of extreme weather and long-term climate change. CAW focuses on meeting specific community needs and has worked to support communities who are experiencing the impacts of climate change including sea-level rise, storm surge, increased precipitation, and freshwater flooding since 2009. These impacts are expected to continue and increase<sup>1</sup>, but there are other impacts from climate change such as high heat days, freshwater flooding, and others that impact our region. CAW and our partners are working to expand the work we do to support communities across the full coastal watershed from Wakefield to Chester and back towards our coast.

To learn more about CAW and the support we provide communities and partners, visit [www.nhcaw.org](http://www.nhcaw.org).

In 2021, CAW led the Path to Resilience project with funding from the National League of Cities, the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, and support from EF Design and Planning, LLC. and the Great Bay Stewards. The goals of the project were to (1) document lessons learned to help CAW and coastal communities promote their coastal resilience work (Phase I) and (2) to support expansion of climate adaptation work into headwater and western coastal watershed communities (Phase II).

Below is a summary of recommendations and considerations captured at the Path to Resilience Phase I workshop held on July 15, 2021, from one-on-one conversation with communities in the coastal watershed, and members of CAW. Whether starting a new project or building on previous momentum your community, the statements below can provide insight into how to build resilience to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather. As you'll see from the advice below, there is no single best place to start. Every community starts somewhere and getting the conversation started is the first step.

### Meet Your Community Where They Are

In some communities it might make sense to start slow. **Start by gathering information about current and future impacts** like increases in precipitation, freshwater flooding, high heat days, sea-level rise, and others. There is a lot to learn about climate change and how it will impact your community. Fortunately, there are partners – like CAW – who are here to help.

If your community has already started learning about future climate impacts, maybe you're ready to dive into what to do next. **Don't be afraid to dive in**. Every community starts somewhere and getting the conversation started in one way or another is the first step.

### Build Momentum

**Capitalize on climate events that are happening today**. Events like heat waves or flooding events provide context for future impacts. This can also help move past more reactive responses.

Setting the stage early in your community can increase confidence in the information and raising awareness can foster community support.

### Raise Awareness

After educating yourself **share what you learn with others**. Consider reaching out to other departments and land use boards in your community.

If your community has worked on climate projects, **consider sharing updates with community boards** to summarize previous work. This can inform new board members as turnover occurs and keeps those projects and plans relevant.

### Gather Community Support

Are there other members of your community interested in learning more about climate change and how it is or will impact your community? **Consider reaching out to community members and volunteers to help raise awareness**. These members may already be – or become – environmental champions!

Identify and **tap into community member strengths**.

**Fostering community support** can help you advocate for specific projects you want to complete or implement.

### Frame the Discussion

**Focus on the impacts** to provide tangible examples of how climate change will or already is impacting residents in your community.

Keep the climate impacts at the forefront of your community's mind by **reminding decision-makers and residents of past investments**, projects, policies, and recommendations to build climate resilience.

### Center Your Community

**Consider those in your community who have been historically underserved and who may be facing the first and worst impacts of climate change**. Partnering with organizations who serve these populations is another great opportunity to bring in additional capacity and to think more holistically about preparing for and adapting to climate change.

### Use a Holistic Approach

**Look at existing planning through a climate lens**. Are there ways to incorporate resilience building into existing community practices? Consider opportunities for different departments to collaborate on a regular basis instead of project by project.

*"We're all busy and sometimes climate change can feel like something added to any already long list. Consider ways to include climate considerations into the work you already do." – CAW member*

Identify opportunities to **emphasize connections** between community projects and preparing for and adapting to climate change.

**Prepare for future impacts**. Look at climate impacts systematically and catalogue areas that will face future impacts.

### Be Transparent + Honest

Communicate that this work is evolving. No one has all the answers, and the **best solutions are the ones we develop together**.

Honest communication is a key to building trust. Share with your residents that you are learning about this information too and that there **is value in learning together**.

### Don't assume perceptions.

**Include all voices in your community.** Identify historically underserved populations and work with others to bring those voices into the conversation.

### Work Together

There are no quick fixes to these wicked problems, and **we will be better prepared if we work together**.

Talk with other community departments and boards about what they are doing or can do to prepare for future impacts like flooding, high heat days, or other.

*"Talk with decision makers in your community, share your experiences with elected officials or your Planning Board or your Public Works Department, they need to hear how climate change is already impacting our communities. We all need to work together to take action now that will prepare our communities for the changes that are coming." – City Councilor*

**It takes a village.** Identify those in your community who want to work on this but also consider partners that can help.

**Look to your neighbors.** Much like other environmental issues, climate change does not stop at political borders. Consider opportunities to collaborate with neighboring communities on planning for and adapting to climate change. Partnering with others presents opportunities to learn about other efforts to address or tackle similar issues.

### Ask for Help + Look for Examples

Local organizations represented in CAW offer outreach and education opportunities to learn about the impacts your community is or will likely face. **Ask for help interpreting climate change projections** so you can understand what they might mean for your community.

**Look for models and examples from other communities.** Although our communities are unique, many are dealing with similar concerns. Look to partners for examples of ordinances and vulnerability assessments. Starting with a template offers the opportunity to tailor the language or approach to suit your community best.

**Look for grant funds to implement projects.** CAW and the member organizations can offer support in grant development and point you to resources to help implement projects.



*This NH Coastal Adaptation Workgroup project was made possible with support from the National League of Cities' 2021 Leadership in Community Grant, the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, the Great Bay Stewards, and EF Design & Planning, LLC.*

<sup>1</sup> Wake, C., Knott, J., Lippmann, T., Stampone, M., Ballesterio, T., Bjerklie, D., Burakowski, E., Glidden, S., Hosseini-Shakib, I., Jacobs, J. (2019). New Hampshire Coastal Flood Risk Summary – Part I: Science. Prepared for the New Hampshire Coastal Flood Risk Science and Technical Advisory Panel. Report published by the University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH.

