

Groton Climate Communication Strategy

Climate Communication

At its core, communication is simply an exchange of information between different entities. However, communication becomes more complex when we factor in its many types and consider equitable ways to share information with a mass of people. Therefore, climate communication is intended to educate and encourage the audience to actively participate in climate action, thus providing more layers to the basic communication pathway.

This climate communication strategy aims to identify the who, what, when, where, why, and how of Groton's climate communications. The strategy intends to direct Groton's future climate communication practices and will evolve as Groton continues to move toward resiliency. The subsequent sections will provide information on the best communication practices, intended/primary audiences, key messages, and how best to communicate with the community while maintaining transparency and inclusivity.

Successful communication is subjective; much of it is intangible besides written communication. We acknowledge that one communication strategy will not apply to every circumstance; no two strategies produce identical engagement. This document provides the foundation for a climate communication strategy and examples of how it could be applied in Groton.

A crucial role in the implementation of Groton's Climate Communications Strategy is the town's Sustainability and Resilience Manager: ***Megan Granato***. The Sustainability and Resilience Manager position is a newly created management position in the Groton Office of Planning and Development Services and was heavily advocated for by local Groton residents and conservation advocates. Throughout this document, Megan will be referenced and recognized for her role as a connector and bridge-builder for conservation and sustainability efforts throughout Groton and the larger community.

Priority Audiences

This section describes external audiences that we have recognized as especially critical to the success and inclusivity of Groton's climate action plan. These groups don't encapsulate the broad-reaching intentions of the plan but instead highlight those who may have been historically discriminated against and/or the most at risk of the negative effects of climate change in Groton.

- People of Color
- Low-income Residents
- Working Class
- High-Income Residents (ex. multi-homeowners)
- Work Commuters (not residents of Groton but frequent visitors)
- Retired/Older Citizens
- Youth
- Town Employees

Key Climate Change Impacts

There are four key climate change impacts that we have identified as requiring the most immediate attention. These are not the only four impacts that Groton is facing, but the core issues that, when addressed, will be significant strides in promoting resiliency and adaptation in Groton.

- Sea Level Rise

When educating the public about sea level rise, facts should be centered around present and future realities. Below is a list of significant impacts due to sea level rise and how the town of Groton could communicate them to the public.

- *Loss of homes, businesses, beaches, and land*
 - Highlight personal loss (ex. irreplaceable items, memories, etc.), economic loss (ex. small businesses, tourism, jobs, etc.). Highlight the opportunity and experience loss (ex. loss of natural aquatic life, limited recreational opportunities, loss of historical land, multi-generational legacy, etc.)
 - Emphasize that there is still time to influence this future and that it requires collective action to do so
- *Increased flooding to properties currently near the shoreline and increased risk to properties further in*
 - Illustrate how current shoreside homes are at risk. Those living inland will be more at risk if sea levels continue to rise (ex. increased insurance costs, irreparable structure damage, etc.)
 - Highlight the potential economic loss
- *Increased vulnerability from storm surges due to intense weather events*
 - This impact is most critical to human life
 - Storm surge causes damage, loss of life, injury to all sentient beings, and the economic need for repairs
 - It is of the utmost importance to remember not to scare people when discussing this, but be truthful in the danger of storm surge (find the balance)
- *Loss of wetlands - unable to be recreated artificially and critical for preventing flooding*
 - The town of Groton should emphasize how wetlands are critical ecosystems that cannot be recreated. Describe wetlands as necessary to protect people rather than a nuisance or inconvenience for building infrastructure..

- Coastal Erosion

- *Consider and educate citizens on climate resiliency structures such as sea walls, living coastlines, sand dunes, and other measures*
 - Economic loss is essential to highlight here; however, the visual impacts of coastal erosion will appeal to more people beyond those who simply

live on the coastline. Using artwork, climate remembrance, photographs, and other visual communication channels.

- Catch people's attention with the visual element and then use that engagement to educate and encourage further action.

- *Negative impact on tourism*

- Loss of tourism is an economic impact; however, it is also a historical one. Though long-time residents may be adverse tourists, Groton's tourism sector plays a sizeable economic role. Highlighting the benefits of tourism will be important in getting people to care about this impact.

- **Extreme Heat**

- *Warmer ocean waters - decline in aquatic life and biodiversity (loss of income and recreation)*

- Warm waters along the coast may seem positive to those unaware of the negative impacts it is reaping; this is where education must be prioritized. You must appeal to their personal consequences to get people engaged and care about this impact. Loss of aquatic life hurts the fishing industry, thus impairing the local seafood industry, and their customers' bank accounts.
- Ecosystem education also benefits those who may be more concerned about their community than their personal loss or inconvenience.

- *Negative impact on human and animal health*

- Increased polarization between citizens; economically successful people will be able to withstand heat better than those less advantaged
 - Disabled and older citizens will also be unequally impacted
- Some consider environmental justice to be a polarizing topic. It would be counterproductive to communicate this impact in a way that makes it seem that the town of Groton is blaming more affluent individuals and only advocating for those who don't possess that characteristic. The best way to communicate this concern from a government perspective is to objectively state the facts and be transparent. Being blatant about this issue and providing evidence to corroborate the facts will help to remain objective; refrain from promoting subjective realities.
- Humanizing all those involved may encourage people to be more caring towards each other
 - It is not the "Have Nots" vs. the "Haves" but all people working collectively to increase Groton's overall quality of life.
- Animal health impact not only applies to loss of biodiversity and the impact on ecosystems, but the personal animal companions of citizens
 - Animal companions are irreplaceable

- *Decreased air quality*

- Citizens who are disabled and have medical conditions will most likely already be aware of this impact. It will be more difficult to appeal to those who are unaffected personally. Visual components, statistical references,

studies, and personal accounts will be the best communication methods. Air quality may significantly impact those with breathing-related difficulties now, but as air quality worsens, more people will suffer.

- Education surrounding air quality will also be important for appealing to those that rely on logic and science.

- **Urban Sprawl**

- This is a visual impact as well as a personal one. One path to communicating the importance of urban sprawl may be as follows: general education about urban sprawl > impacts > preparation, adaptation, mitigation > aftermath.
- As these impacts are felt on the coast, those that are able to may move inland, which may require more land to be developed.
 - Climate migration is happening globally and will continue to rise as the irreversible effects of climate change continue to wreak havoc. The important communication needed for this impact is one rooted in adaptation. Using the communication channels in this strategy to educate those on adapting and preparing will be essential for the future.
- People who need to relocate inland may not be able to do so (ex. lack of affordable housing, disability, etc.)
 - Addressing mental health is important for all of these impacts; however, climate migration is at the epicenter. Educating citizens about urban sprawl and preparing for considering the risks of where they're currently living is important for people who are not yet being forced to migrate, and education surrounding mental health resources and transitional assistance is important for those who are already on the move.

Key Messages

The messaging strategy must convey Groton's most essential points about how climate change affects the community and the role different agencies and organizations will play in response to these threats. It must also be tailored to specific audiences based on their knowledge of climate change and the actions they can and should take to build their resilience. Some messages will be cross-cutting for all audiences ('universal messages'), while others will primarily interest specific stakeholders (organized depending on community location, youth, etc.).

- **Message Framing** - refer to resources such as [Framework Institute](#) to further explore the framing of critical problems and solutions to vast audiences and how to appeal to people's values.

Channels of Communications

- **TV/Cable** - Utilize Groton's public or heavily watched channels, such as the local news channel. When using this channel of communication, it is important to use language that isn't overly reliant on scientific jargon. You should aim to pique people's interest and encourage their involvement,

For example:

- ❖ “*Save Our Coastline*” - inform people of the climate impacts on the coast and how it will affect them; finish with how they can get involved; what is the next step?
- ❖ ‘*Groton’s Future During Climate Change*’ - Introduce the town resiliency plan and intended goals for sustainability/resilience; what is the next step of involvement after this introduction? An event? An info meeting?

Utilizing a catchy title and a visual message for this channel may be the best way to reach viewers. Images, videos, and information should not scare or blame the viewers. The message should be kept uplifting but serious. The goal is to get people talking and involved with a sense of urgency, not panic.

- **Art** - This channel can be used in various ways, and the theme of the art is just as important as where it is showcased. Art should be kept appropriate and relatable. All artwork should inspire conversation and action rather than panic and fear. The artwork could be designed as an event or contest to get people involved and thinking about climate change in Groton. It can also ignite interest in the communities in which it is displayed.

For example:

- ❖ “Climate Change Art Contest and Showcase” - an event involving art would be a great avenue to get those in the older generation and youth engaged in climate action. The showcase is a way to get those who don’t have time to create artwork involved as well. The art can be showcased all over town and in common buildings frequented by commuters, the working class, and other citizens.
- ❖ Climate Change Mural - This is a great way to get a group of individuals together. While people are working on the mural, this could also be a good time for Megan to introduce herself, her intentions, and plans for Groton and how they could get involved further.

- **Newspaper** - This channel is the best way to reach older/retired citizens who likely have the most time to read the paper. Like TV, all messages must be interesting and have a visual component. The articles should be short and informative without jargon. The article should be followed by a list of simple ways to get involved and any future events being hosted. Other than articles, small ads for events could also be placed for people to see. Perhaps even an addition in the form of a comic strip may be beneficial. The article’s tone should always be informative, serious, and inviting. Blame, fear, and panic should always be avoided.

For example:

- ❖ Is It Heating up in your house? - Possible title for an article regarding rising temperatures in Groton. This informational article about a real consequence facing Groton citizens could be used to personalize the issue, educate people on climate change, and encourage involvement.
- ❖ “Have You Seen the Beach Lately?” - An article like this could be used to talk about pollution, rising sea levels, or the loss of beach/coastline.

Similar to the above example, this would be informational, interesting, and encouraging engagement.

- **Radio** - This is a challenging channel because people from all target audiences could be listening. This is the perfect place to talk about how Groton plans to adjust and prepare for climate change and its impacts. Announcing events and sharing simple ways to get involved are also important. There is no visual component to this channel, so being aware of your verbal communication is absolutely essential (consider not only what the message is saying but also how the message is being said).

For example:

- ❖ Bring the newspaper articles to life. Use animated language to get initial engagement while continuing to be informative and positive.
- ❖ Establish a weekly segment for updates on Groton's climate strategy and upcoming events.
- ❖ Establish a segment about personal involvement in climate impacts in Groton.

- **Meetings/Events** - This channel could mean a few different things. This could be tabling at a local hot spot, hosting an event in town, hosting an informational meeting with concerned and interested citizens, or simply being present at town functions such as the farmer's market or other expos. When scheduling a meeting or event, it is important to schedule them at different times and consider the best time for different groups. Each meeting/event should have a single goal in mind. As the host, the most important aspect of this channel is to keep it focused. This is also the only channel that allows for all types of communication, this is the best place to relay information about future events and programs.

For example:

- ❖ A meeting could be scheduled to talk and introduce Groton's resilience plan
- ❖ A tabling event at the local beach could be centered around rising sea levels and potential impacts
- ❖ Tabling at school events such as a career day. (Introduce Megan's role and what she does; why is it important? How can the citizens help her?)

- **Surveys** - This channel is important for gathering feedback. However, it may be difficult to ensure equal survey demographic distribution (unless demographic information is requested). Surveys can assist in determining how other forms of communication are being heard and understood. However, it's important not to overutilize surveys as they may cause burnout in the audience. Surveys should be as accessible as possible. Tailor the length and complexity of surveys to the target audience and topics in which feedback is sought.

- Multiple choice questions are a great way to get quick feedback from those who may not have the time to complete an intensive survey. Surveys should also not be sent to the same people repeatedly. For example, people who sign up for the

email list have already demonstrated interest, so they may not be the target audience for every survey.

- Utilizing Google Forms may be optimal for these surveys, especially when sent out to youth since most students can access school-provided devices if they are without a personal one.

For example:

- ❖ Sample questions -

- Have you heard of Groton's climate resiliency plan?
- Would you be interested in learning more?
- Are you looking for ways to get involved in climate action?
- How much do you know about climate change?

- **Posters/Info Boards** - Similar to the Art channel, this channel can be a double-edged sword. Posters placed in busy buildings advertising events, email lists, meetings, etc., will catch people's attention. The town (or some smaller demographic such as students) could be challenged to a poster design contest that engages participants in climate communication. Since the library is an important hub for communication posters related to Megan's job, general climate information and ways to get involved may generate much interest.

For example:

- ❖ Posters about a specific climate change impact Groton is facing and how it will affect citizens
- ❖ Posters advertising an event or meeting
- ❖ Posters with simple ways of engagement
- ❖ Posters with QR codes to Groton's climate action plan, Megan's subpage, or other helpful documents

- **Email/Texting List** - At every event/meeting and on every poster and survey, there should be an option for signing up to be on an email or text list. Surveys, emails, and texts shouldn't be overutilized (an email or text daily) as this may cause people to tune it out or simply unsubscribe. Email/text lists should be used for sending out surveys, reminders for upcoming events and deadlines, and any big updates in Groton's climate strategy.

- The language used should be free of intense jargon and follow the theme of good communication, where it doesn't promote fear or place blame on anyone.

For example:

- ❖ Reminders for art, poster, and tabling events
- ❖ Reminders for informational meetings
- ❖ Monthly summaries on the progress of the movement and big takeaways

- **Social Media** - This may be the most important of all the channels. Megan should have a presence on all common social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and her own website. This channel should be utilized to make Megan approachable and known

to the community, promote other forms of communication (events, updates, etc.), and genuinely attempt to get to know the people of Groton. All posts should intend to be inclusive, transparent, and natural to the algorithms already in place in Groton’s social media. The pages should have similar designs to Megan’s subpage so that they can be recognized. Posting links to each page in other platforms’ bios will also be helpful so people can see all information that has been posted. All captions should also be in the most common languages spoken in Groton.

- In addition to Megan’s social media pages, the Task Force should also have its own page. This page should follow the same guidelines for communication.

For example:

- ❖ Weekly posts about climate updates in Groton
- ❖ Pictures from events and meetings
- ❖ Pictures of posters for upcoming events
- ❖ Updates on specific goals
- ❖ Helpful links (surveys, email/text lists, etc.)

Connecting Messages, Audiences, and Channels

Critical to the success of the communication strategy is drawing lines to connect specific objectives, messages, audiences, and channels. We recognize that Groton is composed of diverse people. In planning this strategy to tailor culturally-relevant messages, we have considered diversities such as age, socio-economic demographics, and divergent community resources. The Table below shows potential channels of communication that may work best for that specific audience and the information regarding climate action that would be most beneficial.

Message	Audience	Channel
Groton cares about ALL its citizens’ opinions and wants everyone to be involved in making a resilient Groton. General/ introductory climate change education, easy ways to get involved, and how climate change will affect them personally.	People of Color	TV, social media, posters/info boards, art, and events Making communication materials in all spoken languages present in Groton is very important.
The goal is to show that Groton cares by making events and information accessible to those who work long hours, and have limited resources for attending events (time and money).	Low-Income	TV, social media, <i>accessible</i> events (pop-up), email/texting lists

<p>The goal is to appeal to those who may not always reside in Groton but benefit from Groton. The key takeaway from communicating with this group is educating them on how these impacts will affect them and their vacation homes. The action that needs to be communicated in this category is philanthropic in nature and time.</p>	<p>High-Income</p>	<p>TV, events, social media, town meetings, art, philanthropic engagement/events</p> <p>*Remembrance of Climate Futures Plaques</p>
<p>The goal is to provide basic climate knowledge that doesn't require too much learning time. (fast facts) All communication should be a quick and interesting snapshot of the larger issue to get people thinking and discussing. People who have to work often don't have much time to dedicate to other things. Rather than being a hindrance, use this characteristic to make specific fast communication efforts.</p>	<p>Working Class</p>	<p>TV, social media, posters/info boards, email/text lists, radio, tabling</p> <p>*Remembrance of Climate Futures Plaques</p>
<p>The goal for this group is to have quick yet thought-provoking communication attempts. Utilize communication channels that can be used on the go or during times of transition. (people listen to the radio while they drive to work, walk past a poster, scroll through social media, etc.)</p>	<p>Commuters</p>	<p>Radio, social media, pop-up events, tabling, posters/info boards, email/text lists</p> <p>*Remembrance of Climate Futures Plaques</p>
<p>The goal of this communication channel is for it to be hands-on and to provide a broader and more in-depth education and discussion. This would be a great group to give projects</p>	<p>Retired/Older Citizens</p>	<p>Radio, TV (movie showings), social media/online community groups (strong Facebook presence), events at community centers and other town events, town meetings, and art</p>

to, such as creating informational materials and climate remembrance plaques.		
This intended audience category will be discussed further in the strategy. However, the goal is to start the conversation with climate change and action. Once a basic understanding has been established, getting youth involved (climate remembrance, events, eco competitions, camps/programs) will help to reach other groups of people and spread the word of a resilient Groton.	Youth	Social media, events, camps/programs, eco-competitions, TV, posters/info boards, meetings with Megan/guest speakers *Remembrance of Climate Futures Plaques
The goal is to start breaking down the silo effect seen in the town structure. This communication is so that people can start to get to know you and what you do.	Town Employees, Boards, and Commissions	Events hosted by Megan, Presentations by Megan at specific meetings, email

*[*Remembrance of Climate Futures*](#) is a project that allows people to visualize what their favorite places in town may look like if no change to our current climate change trajectory is made. Designing these projects is a great way to get people involved. We encourage the Town of Groton to pursue such projects as the townspeople become increasingly more aware and educated about climate change.

Strengthen Groton Climate Coordination

Communication regarding climate action has been controversial in the town government structure. From our meetings and online discussions, it has been described as being a “silo effect.” We suggest organized communication between the Task Force and the Conservation Commission to improve this. Through this communication, similar groups with similar wants can get on the same page or, at the very least, be aware of each other. This initial connection can be a potential site for collaboration.

This communication could be a moderated lunch/dinner, a joint watching of an environmental film with subsequent discussion, dual attendance to a speaker/presentation, or even a service bonding activity. The key to making this communication successful in any form is for Megan to keep the event focused. Center the discussion on a specific topic, establish specific tangible goals for the event and keep everyone on track for the task.

Consolidate and Strengthen Educational Programs for Youth

Youth involvement has been recognized as crucial for the longevity of Groton's climate action plan. We suggest that youth are encouraged and provided opportunities to be involved in various phases, aspects, and projects that comprise the climate action plan and suggest some avenues for collaboration below. The goal of connecting multiple organizations and entities with local youth is to eventually conduct a Youth Climate Summit, which utilizes all the connections in the devised relational network.

- ***Organizational Community Partnerships***

Connect with and collaborate with organizations via partnerships and coalitions such as:

- ***UConn NRCA*** - Promote NRCA's [Conservation Ambassador Program](#) at local schools. CAP is a 9-month program for high school students (grades 9-11) interested in exploring the environment or making a difference in their community. The program includes a one-week field experience at UConn and a community environmental action project.
 - Compile a list of potential projects in Groton that students can pursue. Highlight various sites/projects different town entities have identified a need to resolve and promote those ideas to students. Provide information on potential collaborators/community partners and their contact information. This can be collected on an online document which can be updated and shared with students.
- ***Avery Point EcoHuskies*** - Contact and collaborate with UConn Avery Point Campus students via the influential [EcoHusky](#) student group. Promote Groton sustainability events, request student feedback on surveys, etc.
 - Faculty Advisor Contact: Syma Ebbin syma.ebbin@uconn.edu

- ***Community Connections***

Connect with individuals and their respective connections and expertise via partnerships such as:

- ***David Prescott*** - Utilize Dave's expertise and experience in youth collaboration at [Save the Bay](#) to propose a specific strategy and youth climate engagement goals for the Town of Groton. Conduct focused meetings across town and identify community hubs to ensure accessible spaces for Town of Groton youth (and other citizens) to get involved.
- ***Designed for Resilience Coalition*** - community organizations and individuals striving for resilience in southeastern Connecticut and the surrounding regions
 - Contact Maggie Favretti at maggie@alliancemrw.org
- Continue to connect with and conduct events that include students from the many schools in Groton

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