How to talk about Community Planning for Climate Disruption

PLANNING TOGETHER FOR CLIMATE DISRUPTION
—IT'S A JOURNEY—

Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau
Auckland Council

The Workshop

About The Workshop

The Workshop is a not-for-profit narrative research and strategy organisation based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa New Zealand. We specialise in researching how people think and reason (our mindsets) and talk (our narratives) about the complex issues we face as a society. We use our research to find more helpful ways of talking that work to deepen public understanding and lead to better engagement and decision making.

Using frames and narratives to shift how people think is a key way to deepen public understanding of the solutions that make the biggest difference.

Narratives and frames can build public support for initiatives that will repair, strengthen, and maintain the connected, caring, inclusive communities and thriving ecosystems we all care about.

Our research identifies and tests narratives and frames for complex issues. We provide evidence-based narrative and framing strategy and support to people researching, advocating for, and implementing better systems. With the support of our funders, we make our research publicly available.

About Auckland Council and the Resilient Tāmaki Makaurau programme

Auckland is a special place for its environment, its people and the way of life it offers. Tāmaki Makaurau means Tāmaki desired by many. This name refers to the abundance of natural resources, vantage points, portage routes and mahinga kai which first attracted Māori, and then others. It is a place that is special to all those that spend time there. It is important we protect the places we love and even improve them.

While there are many natural resources in Tāmaki Makaurau, climate disruption is already having an impact on our land, our water and the lives we want to live. This disruption may increase over time as identified in Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri: Auckland's Climate Plan.

Auckland Council wants to work alongside the people of Auckland to plan for and prevent further harm to our communities from climate disruption, while improving our lives now. Part of this work includes finding more helpful ways to talk about community planning for climate disruption that work to deepen public understanding.

Auckland Council has commissioned The Workshop to research and develop communications tools that help people understand and participate in planning for the lives we can live in a future disrupted by climate.

Acknowledgements

Who is this report for?

This report is for people who want to deepen understanding and motivate people to act on civic action and community planning for climate disruption.

Specifically, it is written with the following people and groups in mind.

People in local and central government responsible for providing support to communities for collective planning.

People in local and central government who create communications and stories about climate disruption in general as well as the role communities play in collective planning.

People in communities who want to talk effectively about community planning for climate disruption so more local people engage and participate.

People advocating for more collective and civic planning for climate disruption in general.

Experts who are doing work on planning for climate disruption and want to communicate their research in persuasive ways.

How to use this report

This report brings together three phases of research into how to frame community planning for climate disruption.

We started this work in 2022 by talking to experts and listening to Auckland people about their thoughts and experiences of climate disruption. We completed the final phase in 2024 with testing narratives and frames to deepen understanding and improve engagement with community planning.

This report provides recommendations, based on the research, of effective narratives and frames to use when talking about community planning for climate disruption.

You can use this report in different ways. You can:

· **use the report to help understand how people think and reason about climate disruption and council to inform your public engagement goals**

· **use the recommendations in the report to develop specific narrative and framing approaches for your organisation**

· **take the full stories we tested and use them verbatim**

· **take the component parts of the stories and build your own stories.**

You can read about the earlier research for this report at theworkshop.org.nz/publications

Contents

Summary

Since 2022, The Workshop has worked with Auckland Council to find evidence-based ways of talking about the water-related impacts of climate disruption and community planning for those impacts.

1

The goal is to find ways of talking that would deepen understanding of the issue and encourage local communities to engage in planning together with the council for climate disruption.

Our framing goals

How we do it

Since 2022, The Workshop has worked with Auckland Council to find evidence-based ways of talking about the water-related impacts of climate disruption and community planning for those impacts.

The goal is to find ways of talking that would deepen understanding of the issue and encourage local communities to engage in planning together with the council for climate disruption. We want people to:

1 **Support the council to take action on climate disruption.**

2 **Understand community planning.**

3 **Feel confident they can take part in community planning.**

4 **Believe community planning and other collective actions to be impactful.**

5 **Intend to take part in community planning.**

We can deepen most people's understanding on our issue and build their intention to take action if we use frames and share messages that switch on helpful ways of thinking and reasoning about the issues and avoid switching on unhelpful ways of thinking.

Effective frames and narratives are like a beloved recipe — they need to be passed on by those who love them to be experienced by many people.

Most people are open to supporting effective climate action for the council and government, and they don't have strongly held opinions either way. Messages that engage people who already understand and support the issue are shared and repeated. This sharing is how they reach the majority of the public open to understanding and support. It is how we develop a wider understanding and support for the issues.

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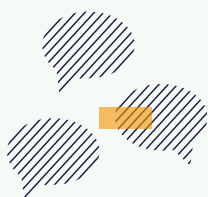
Understand the issue

We interviewed 10 topic experts about what they would like people in the public to understand about climate disruption and planning for it together.

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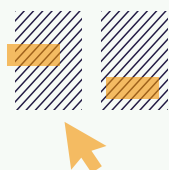
Understand the narratives and frames

We collected 84 pieces of media from 10 media outlets, looking for repeated frames, narratives, metaphors, and ways of communicating. We also analysed expert and advocate communications.

3

Listen to people and how they reason

Within 6 weeks of a major flooding event in Tāmaki Makaurau, we undertook three focus groups of 5–7 people to listen to how people in Auckland aged 20–70 think and reason about climate disruption and community planning.

4

Test the narratives and frames

We tested a set of messages with five focus groups, each with 6–7 Auckland people. We also tested the messages through a representative survey of 804 people living in Auckland.

What we found

When we centre our narratives on the better lives we can build together as we take bold action to respond to climate disruption, we can deepen understanding of what community and civic action is and increase people's willingness to engage in it.

Telling the story **we** want to tell about the opportunities that responding to climate disruption offer us in concrete everyday ways invites people into the conversation. It switches on hope and action instead of fear and fatalism mindsets.

Most people already care about climate change. We don't need to convince them it is real. They do need to understand what effective action looks like and feel part of it.

When we effectively explain community and civic action using frames, narratives, and simple language, community members are more willing to support people in council and engage in community planning.

There are some messaging challenges to overcome but it is possible, especially when people in government and council — any organisation with more resources and power than individuals — clearly name their responsibilities and show the action they are taking.

Current framing — some challenges to overcome in our own work

We found climate disruption and community action is **currently** being framed *by advocates and experts* in the following ways.

1   **Through risk and fear-based framing — for example, using the frame of running out of time.**

2   **Using fact-led messages — for example, starting with the risks of climate disruption-induced flooding.**

3   **By negating untrue or unhelpful messages — for example, by framing the truth of climate disruption.**

4   **In a passive voice without an active agent — for example, by not naming the specific actions of people in council and government.**

Positive signs from people we spoke with and listened to

There were many positive signs from the research that give us hope that shifting the way we talk can shift the way people think, reason, and act on climate disruption.

People know climate change is real and understand the relationship between it and flooding.

People want to be involved in planning for climate disruption and are eager to contribute their knowledge and support local-level decision making.

People agree that government's role is to help people prepare for a disrupted climate.

Climate-related events raised a shared desire to live in more connected communities where everyone's needs are met.

Simple narrative tools like frames and metaphors helped people understand how council and community planning works.

In testing, telling your own narrative and story is more appealing to people than mythbusting or negating unhelpful or untrue narratives.

People across the political spectrum are open to understanding this issue and are motivated by prosocial narratives and frames.

Challenges

We found some big challenges in how people think and talk about climate disruption that we need to overcome.

Direct experience of climate-related harm doesn't lead to effective civic and community action on climate.

People lack understanding of what councils do and what community action on climate is.

Talking about people's choice dominates advice and undermines thinking about collective civic-level action.

Talking about time running out leads to fatalistic thinking, fear responses, and overly simplistic solutions.

Using the terms *trade-offs* and *tough decisions* leads to people thinking about personal loss rather than collective gain.

Talking about New Zealand being a leader on climate makes it harder for people to focus on and act for a collective public good and on the better lives we can create for ourselves.

Individual behaviour change messages make people feel they are being asked to do the work of addressing climate disruption when the responsibility and resources sit with large organisations that are not being asked the same.

Expert and public communications use risk-led and fear-based framing that is demotivating for people, especially when thinking about long-term prevention.

Expert communications that lead with facts are not compelling to most people struggling to connect with the issue.

Many communications still focus on persuading people that climate change is real instead of focusing on deepening understanding of collective action and encouraging people to take collective and civil action.

The group of people who are opposed to planning for climate disruption is small. However, they are active voters and are engaged with local government.

Helping people to understand that planning for climate (adaptive actions) can also prevent further climate disruption (mitigating actions) is challenging, and further work on how to frame this is needed.

The recommendations in this report are designed to build on the positive signs and address the challenges for how people think, reason, and talk about climate disruption and community planning.

Recommendations

This report includes two types of recommendations.

Type 1

Helpful narratives to use when talking about community planning for climate disruption

Our research shows these narratives shift people away from dominant unhelpful narratives (and the unhelpful mindsets associated with them) towards the thinking and reasoning that leads to support for effective solutions.

Type 2

Specific **framing shifts** you can make in your communications and stories

These highlight the elements you can use to make your helpful narratives easy to hear, understand, and share.

See our detailed Recommendations in Section 5, **page 54**

Unlock change by shifting to helpful narratives in all your communications and stories

Recommendation 1

Frame the benefits of collective and civic climate action in your stories

Create a pattern of communication that highlights the benefits of collective and civic action (coming together to care for one another). This framing contributes to shifting thinking away from less-impactful actions at the individual consumer level and overcomes fatalism.

Recommendation 2

Paint a positive vision about the opportunities for our better life

When our messages focus on the opportunities that collective climate planning offers all of us, we help people think about and act on what is possible. We avoid leading with risk and fear.

Unlock change by shifting to helpful narratives in all your communications and stories

Recommendation 3

Highlight the interconnections between people and the places they love

When our stories show people that our solutions protect the places they love and rely on, we can shift them towards more-hopeful ways of thinking about climate planning and collaborative action and away from self-interest and fatalistic narratives.

Recommendation 4

Frame climate solutions as bold, necessary, and achievable

When our stories and frames give people a sense that there are solutions and that we can choose to implement them, we create more mental space for people to think positively about complex collective action, including prevention of further climate disruption.

Recommendation 5

Start with shared values when talking about community climate planning

When we start our messages and stories with a widely shared value, we make our issue relevant to a broad range of people open to understanding.

Recommendation 6

Talk to those who are most open to understanding climate planning

Narratives can help most people shift their mindsets — but not all people. When we engage those who support community planning for climate disruption and those most open to understanding our issue, we use our precious communication time and energy to greater impact.

Apply these strategic shifts to make your communications and stories easy to hear, understand, and share →

Recommendation 7

Explain climate disruption and community climate planning in simple terms

When we use simple words, frames, and explanatory metaphors to explain complex issues like community planning for climate disruption, we give people a scaffold to build their understanding of this complex issue and create support for the solutions we offer.

Recommendation 8

Explain that it is wise to choose protections that also prevent worsening climate disruption

When we talk about what is wise and sensible, we can help people understand the importance of planning in ways that prevent further climate disruption. This helps overcome unhelpful and fatalistic narratives about it being sensible to accept the worst.

Apply these strategic shifts to make your communications and stories easy to hear, understand, and share →

Recommendation 9

Put local government into stories about climate action

By putting local and central government processes into a recognisable story structure that includes barriers, explanations and solutions, we give people a sense of what the council is doing to plan for the big stuff we all care about.

Recommendation 10

Build a collective 'we' on community planning climate action

When people who share goals come together to use narratives and frames that work, we can have a greater impact on shifting mindsets and narratives.

Why framing and narratives matter

Framing — decisions we make about how to present an idea or issue — connects people to best knowledge and unlocks action.

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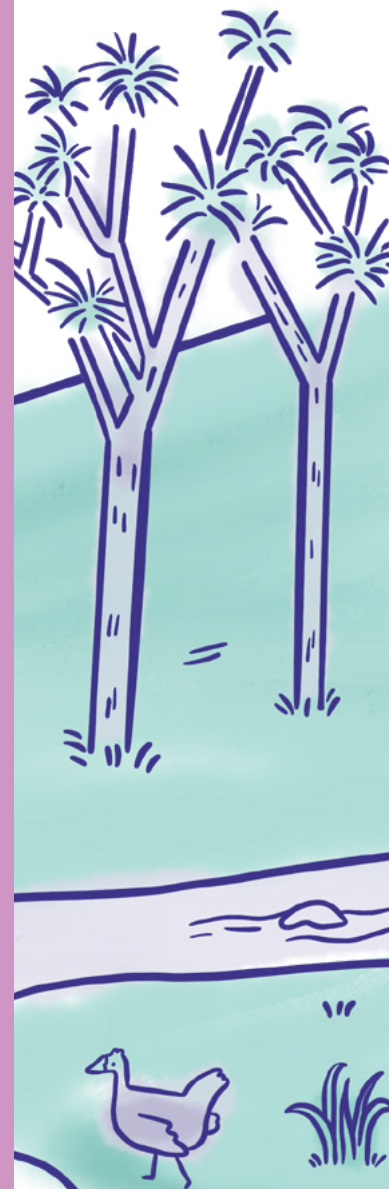
Frames and narratives strongly influence the actions, solutions, policies and political decisions people are willing to support.
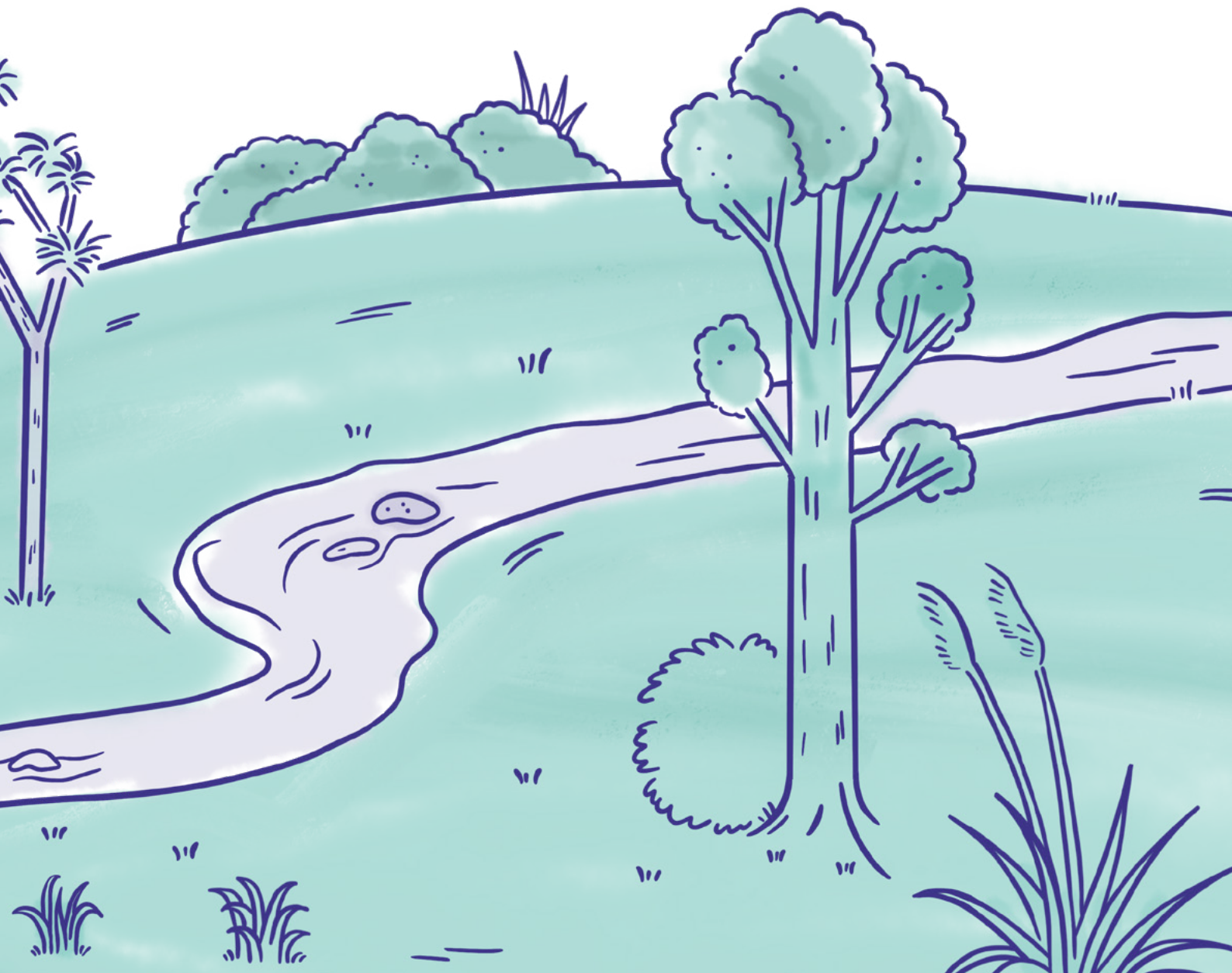
Framing

Framing — decisions we make about how to present an idea or issue — connects people to best knowledge and unlocks action or can prevent them from connecting to it.

Frames, which include narratives, are enormously impactful in influencing how people think and reason about complex issues. The frames and narratives we choose help open the door to particular information or knowledge being considered and shut the door to other information. As a consequence, frames and narratives strongly influence the actions, solutions, policies, and political decisions people are willing to support.

There are many existing shared mindsets, often with opposing ideas at the heart of them. The information context — for example, who has framing and narrative power — determines which shared mindsets are switched on and used most frequently. We can use our narratives and collective power strategically to connect people to the best knowledge and evidence, building support for the solutions that will make the biggest difference.

Research insights

In our testing, we found that threading a narrative throughout messages and stories of acting together on climate planning switched on people's thinking about the role of governments in acting on climate and their own desire to be involved.

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For further information about the role frames and narratives play in shaping people's understanding about public good issues and influencing action with regard to policy, practice, and systems, read our briefing paper:
How mindset and narrative shifts can enable change
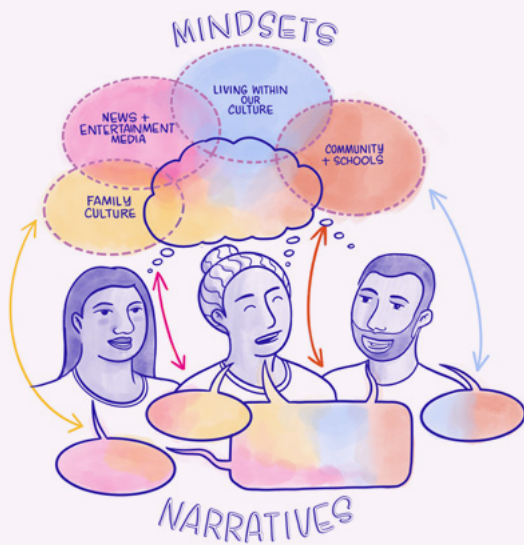
What is a shared mindset?

Mindsets are deep, unconscious models we use to make sense of the world. They are sometimes called mental models. Shared mindsets are those that appear and reappear (there is an identifiable pattern) across our communications. Shared mindsets provide us with unconscious explanations about how a problem has happened, who caused it, and what the solutions should be. These implicit explanations are present in shared mindsets. This means we need to work with them if we want people to understand and support shifts to systems, structures, policies, and practices, transforming the way people currently do things.
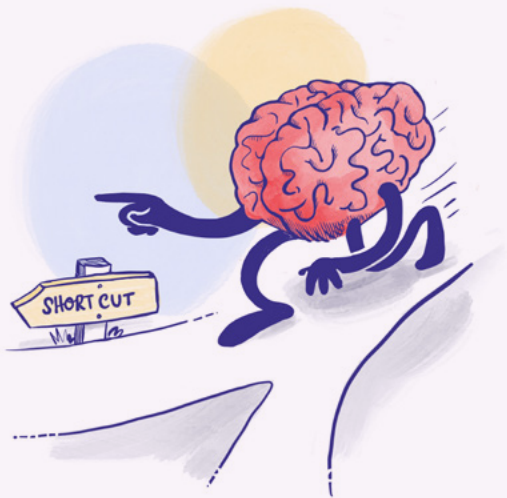
What is fast thinking?

Shared mindsets help us move through the world without having to process every input in every moment. They are part of our fast-thinking system,[1] which operates at speed at the unconscious level. We are often unaware that we are drawing on shared mindsets to interpret information. We use mental shortcuts and bias to protect the shared mindsets most familiar to us. For example, we seek different facts when we are presented with information that doesn't feel right to us — this is known as confirmation bias. We may be unaware that our fast-thinking system is protecting mindsets that contain unhelpful or incomplete information and knowledge.

Frames and narratives are one way to access and engage with shared mindsets without having to engage people's slow-thinking system, so they're useful when we can't have a one-on-one conversation to explain an issue to people.

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1   Kahneman, Daniel. 2011. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Penguin.

What is a shared narrative?

Narratives are a type of frame. They appear as patterns of words, and images that create greater meaning in our communications. Narratives are how we express our existing shared mindsets and can also build new mindsets in our culture. Particular stories, words, and images, like tile pieces in a mosaic, build a pattern that becomes a particular narrative. It is through this patterned appearance and reappearance in our media, conversations, and writing that we identify a shared narrative. Being conscious of different narratives helps us be aware of people's thinking and reasoning.
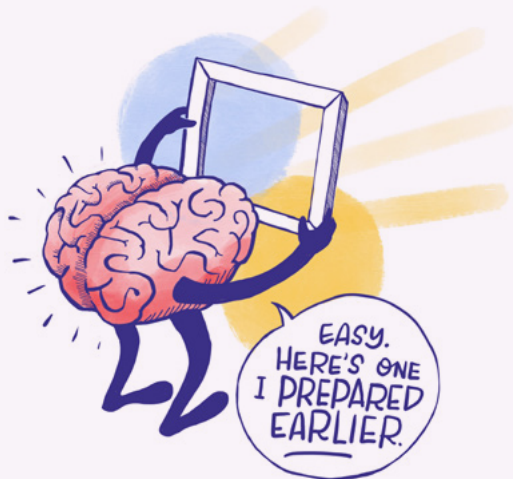
What is a frame?

Like a window, a frame gives people a particular view on an issue. It helps people focus on the things we want them to think about. It obscures or excludes ways of reasoning outside the frame.

For example, if we ask someone to think of the African savannah, they think of everything associated with those words in both our collective consciousness and their individual experience of it. They are unlikely to think about a polar bear as it doesn't fit the frame.

We cannot avoid framing. It is present in all communications because of how our minds function. We can strategically choose frames that connect people to particular ways of reasoning.

There are different types of frames — narratives are a frame, values are a frame, numbers are a frame, tone and particular messengers are a frame.

Theory in action: The unhelpful 'individualism' mindset and narrative in climate disruption

In focus groups and analysis of narratives and frames on climate disruption and community planning, we observed the individualism mindset to be particularly dominant.

Individualism has us thinking that issues related to climate disruption are shaped, constructed, and reshaped primarily by our choices and behaviours as individuals. The individualism mindset is unhelpful if our goal is to deepen understanding of collective and community action.

In focus groups, we heard people reasoning that the most impactful action they could take to prepare for climate disruption was to get an emergency bag ready and take care of their own property. More widely, we see people reasoning that the most effective climate action is to choose to recycle.

Across our culture, there are many stories, words, and images telling us that, through changes to our individual behaviour, it is as individuals that we change the world. These patterns in our communications reflect the individualism narrative.

Everything we see and hear about individuals choosing to behave differently, especially as consumers, strengthens the individualism narrative.

Particular communication frames will bring the individualism mindset and narrative to people's attention. For example, if a communicator talks about **consumers** needing to **make better choices**, they are using frames that focus people on individualism. Such frames obscure structural or systemic solutions to climate disruption, including community planning. The result is that people won't understand that such solutions are important and need support.

Strategic shifts to our communications

We can unlock change by shifting to helpful narratives. Helpful narratives make it easier for people to see an issue for what it is and understand how it came about. Helpful narratives are designed to divert people away from the unhelpful narratives that act as a barrier to understanding the issues more deeply.

3

When woven throughout all our communications, ==helpful narratives encourage deeper understanding== and ==build support== for the system-level solutions that will ==make life better== for people and the planet.

Strategic shifts
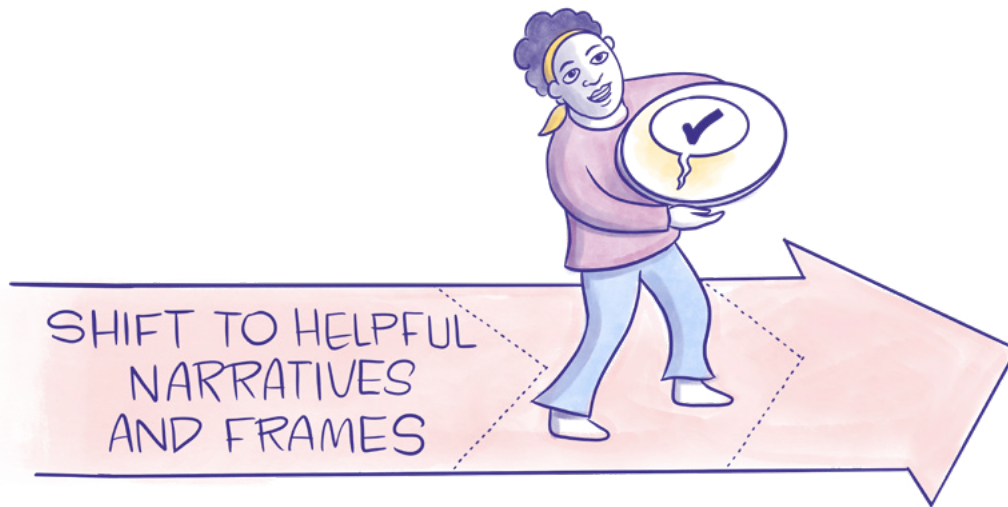
Shift to helpful narratives

Using a helpful narrative **avoids negating an unhelpful narrative and stories of people opposed to your solutions**, which only works to spread it further.

Narratives from the research

❌ Climate fatalism — an unhelpful climate narrative

In the analysis of communications and our focus groups, we found fatalism to be a powerful unhelpful narrative that people were being exposed to in communications about climate disruption. This narrative led people to think climate disruption was inevitable — even natural — and there was little anyone could or would do about preventing it, including the council. Stories that lead with risk and wide inaction and lack of concern draw on the fatalism narrative. Fatalism creates a barrier to understanding council's work and engaging in community planning.

✔ Better together — a helpful narrative

We found a better together (via community and civic action narrative) was more helpful in deepening people's thinking about community and civic action and creating support for council actions. We based a number of messages on this narrative using values frames such as meeting everyone's needs and explanatory metaphors that highlighted the community action the council is engaged in. It overcomes the fatalism we observed in earlier focus groups and in communications.

**Helpful narratives you can use in your stories are detailed on **

SHIFT TO "ALL OF US" VALUES
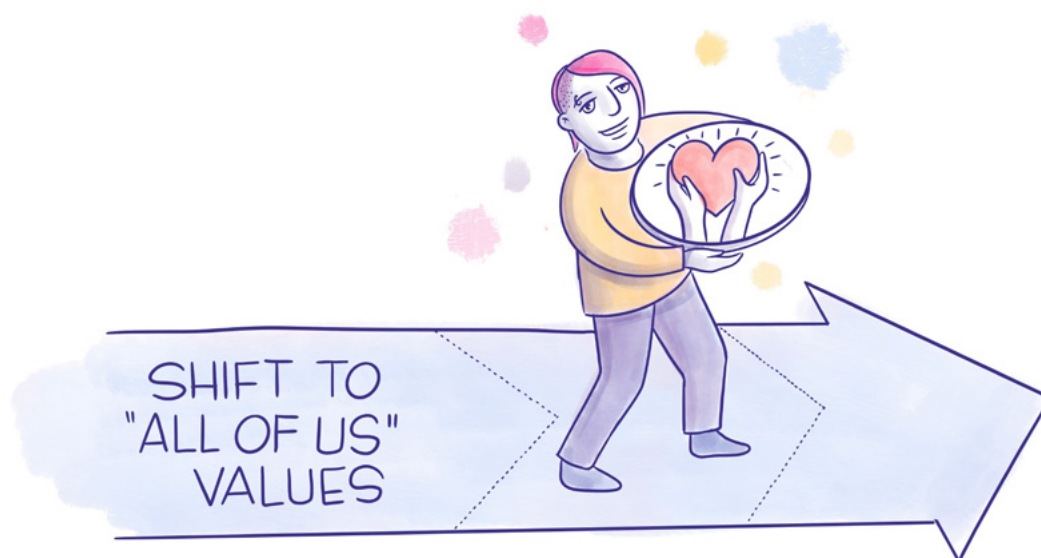
Shift to all of us values

Values are the 'why' of our actions and lives. We all have many values, many of which we share as humans. Depending on context, experience, and framing, we can prioritise particular values at different times.

By framing particular helpful values, we can connect people and their deepest motivations to our issues and help them perceive how they're relevant to them.

Starting with helpful values ensures we avoid a key communication trap — starting out with problems and fear, which is very demotivating for many people.

Research insights

❌

In many communications, we found unhelpful values such as those related to **status and achievement**.

What this sounds like:

"New Zealand is a laggard on climate action. It's shameful and we're being left behind."

✔️

In testing, people preferred messages that led with values of **responsibility and equity**.

What this sounds like:

"Creating lasting solutions to climate disruption means meeting the needs of all communities, especially those most vulnerable to climate disruption."

Helpful values you can use in your stories are detailed on page 70.

SHIFT WHO YOU FOCUS ON
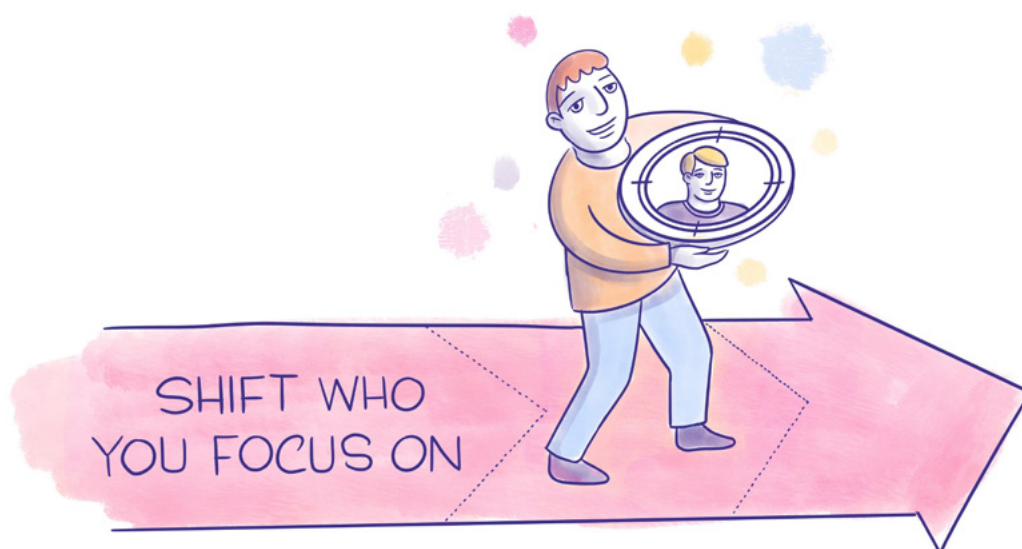
Shift who you focus on

Narratives can help most people shift their mindsets — but not all people. Focusing your stories and communications on those who are **open to understanding and persuasion** makes the most of your time, energy, and resources.

People open to understanding and persuasion are the majority of people on most issues. They don't have a firm view one way or another and can be engaged and mobilised by helpful narratives and explanations.

Supporters already understand the need for change. They play an important role in sharing stories with people who are open to persuasion.

People who are **firmly opposed** have strong and fixed views on an issue. They are unlikely to be shifted by anything except a deep personal experience. Avoid using the narratives and arguments of those **firmly opposed** so you avoid repetition and mythbusting.

Research insights

❌

In the research, we observed many communications focused on convincing people of the truth of climate change. We know most people already believe in and care about climate disruption. These communications just spread the stories of those firmly opposed.

✔️

Communications that focus on explaining effective climate action, including community planning that people can take part in, meet the needs of people most open to understanding

Shifting who you focus on is detailed in Recommendation 6 on page 72.

SHIFT TO YOUR VISION
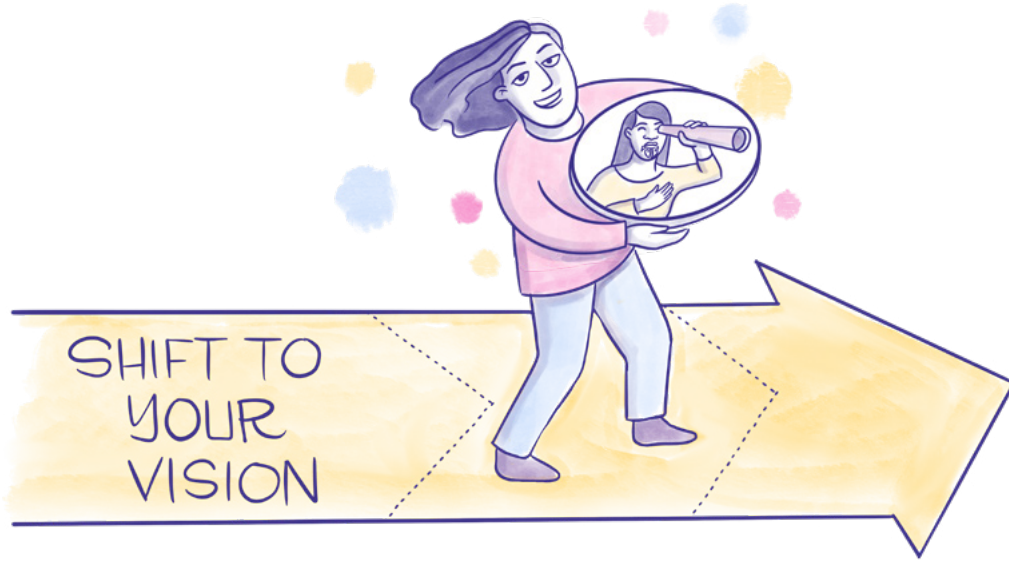
Shift to a vision

Having a compelling vision for a better world inspires hope and action. A vision helps us as communicators know what we're working towards and helps our audience see and believe that change is possible. This can overcome our fast-thinking bias that makes it hard to believe that change is possible.

❌

We've noted that very few communications made concrete the positive benefits of climate action. Instead, there is a tsunami of fear and risk-led messages in our information environment.

✔

In testing, people responded positively to messages that included clear descriptions of the opportunities for a better life that taking action on climate offers.

SHIFT TO EXPLAINING OVER DESCRIBING

Shift to explaining rather than describing

Explanations deepen people's understanding of why a barrier or problem exists and what can be done about it.

When we simply describe problems or solutions instead of explaining them, we don't shift the deeper unconscious explanations people are drawing on (shared mindsets). For recommendations about better explanations, go to .

A good explanation shows people how the problem happened, what the impact was, who made it happen and therefore who can create change, and what works better. Effective explanations use facts as a character in the story rather than facts being the whole story.

People do things

Naming the people who can make change as part of your explanation helps identify responsibility and power. If you or your organisation are the ones able to make the change, name yourself or have your allies do it. Naming an agent helps you **avoid the passive voice**. Not naming yourself ignores your power and can undermine trust.

Research insights

All the longer stories we tested named and explained the actions of people in council. After exposure to these messages, the vast majority of people open to understanding agreed with the statement that "the council should do everything it can to prevent further climate change".

See Recommendation 9 on for more about naming the people who can make the change.

Explanatory metaphors work with our fast-thinking brains

An explanatory metaphor takes what we know about a familiar object or experience and pairs it with something we don't understand to help us see how that thing, system, or process works. It is a simplifying model that can help people quickly grasp a better, deeper explanation.

Use simple words

To help deepen understanding of an issue, choose words and terms that make the issue, problem, or solution as clear and concrete as possible. Avoid technical language and terms.

Research insights

In testing, the explanatory metaphor of a **journey** helped people to better understand community climate planning and the council's role in it.

Research insights

For example, in testing, we found people preferred the term 'climate pollution' rather than 'climate emissions'.

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Shift together

For mindsets to shift, we need to tell many stories using words and images that reflect helpful narratives, making them stronger. This takes time, commitment, and consistency between people who share goals.

When shifting together each person or organisation can use their own tone and style in their stories. Individual stories can be told by different messengers, in different formats, and across different media. The key is to ensure the helpful narrative is woven through all the stories like a golden thread that pulls the stories together. This creates a powerful pattern that can shift how people think and reason.

**Recommendations on how to shift together are detailed on **

Use a structure that makes your stories easy to hear and share

The order of our story elements really affects whether people stay engaged. A simple structure works with how our brains process stories, making them easier to hear, understand, and share. This structure will help create stories that centre on your own helpful narrative and avoid mythbusting or inadvertently amplifying the unhelpful or opposition narratives.

Value

Barrier

Explanation

Solution
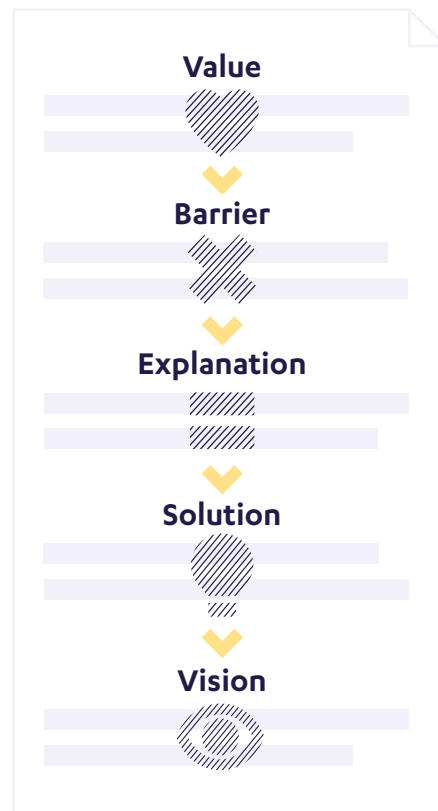
Vision

Shared value

Start with the values that matter most. Alternatively use a short vision with values in it at the start. These connect people to your issue and make sense to many people

What this sounds like:

"Across our communities, most of us want being cared for and caring for each other to come first in everything we do, including planning for climate disruption."

Name the barrier

Say what is getting in the way and creating a barrier for this value. Be specific about who created the problem or is holding it in place.

What this sounds like:

"However, communities we are part of and serve have not had everything they needed from the council to make caring for everyone during climate disruption events a reality."

Explain simply

Explain how the problem or barrier came about and the impact of the problem on people. You can use a metaphor to simplify the explanation. Choose your facts wisely — make sure they work to deepen understanding and not just describe that there is a problem.

What this sounds like:

"Our planning processes have not worked well for all people — for example, disabled people and their expertise and needs have been left out."

Solution

Tell people what works better, who can make the change, and what action they need to take to support the change.

What this sounds like:

"People in council support community climate planning that takes care of everyone. We are providing funds for communities already under pressure and empowering our communities to decide themselves where the funds should go when making climate plans."

Vision

Wrap up with a vision of a positive hopeful future or you can remind people of the values you started with. This helps people see how the proposed change or action takes them closer to the better world most of us want.

What this sounds like:

"Tāmaki Makaurau can be a city where our climate planning draws on the strengths and knowledge of all our communities and thrives in caring for all our communities."

Research insights

In testing, when people in Auckland read messages using this story structure, most of those open to persuasion felt confident about their ability to take part in community planning.

**Examples of tested stories using the effective story structure are detailed on **

How climate disruption and community action is currently being framed

We analysed how advocates, scientists, people in government, and politicians are currently framing climate disruption and community planning.

We collected 57 pieces of communication from local and central government, Crown entities, research institutes, and other research organisations. We analysed organisational websites, expert comments in the media, and general academic literature.

We analysed these for patterns of language and looked for repeated narratives, frames, metaphors, and ways of communicating to gives us an understanding of:

- how experts and advocates talk about climate disruption and planning
- what is promising and what is problematic in public communications.

Some consistent challenges to messaging emerged. However, there are easy ways to shift away from these communication challenges — this report contains much of what you need to know to do that.

❌ Risk-led and fear-based framing

Risk-led and fear-based language in relation to climate is everywhere. It's understandable. However, communicating through risk-led and fear-based frames pushes people towards individualistic, short-term thinking and action focused on 'back to normal' solutions. It sustains fatalistic thinking and prevents people engaging in the sort of collective action that we need to prevent and plan for climate disruption.

Risk-led and fear-based language is used for different reasons. Some communicators want to convey that climate disruption is a threat to our survival over the long term. For others, especially experts in risk analysis and decision making, risk is the water they swim in and it is hard to communicate outside that frame.

It is part of our own fast-thinking system. We believe that, if we lay out the problems and risks, people will understand and support action — but **leading with the problems does not persuade or motivate people where complex collective actions are required. Instead, it directs people to protect them and theirs.**

✔

We need to start messages in a way that helps people understand and builds their sense of confidence that engaging in climate planning will lead to positive outcomes — see Recommendations 1–5 on how to do this.

Fact-led messages ✗

Much expert communication on climate and community planning is fact-led. If you give people scientific information, it is normal to presume they will act. However, facts are not a compelling counter to strongly embedded mindsets and narratives.

Facts are incredibly important to our work — we are doing what we do because our best knowledge is directing us. Conveying complex and accurate information in ways that motivate people can be done with good simple explanations.

Negating ✗

Negating is when we say what something is not rather than what it is. We do this especially when we are forced to provide a rebuttal to untrue or unhelpful narratives and stories.

Studies show people often do not process or remember the word 'not' — but they will remember the association you have made.[2]

> **We say you think**
>
> When we say "seawalls are NOT a long-term solution to sea-level rise", people hear "seawalls" and "**solution**".
>
> When we say "we are NOT overreacting to climate change", people hear "overreacting" and "**climate change**".

It's important never to negate or mythbust an unhelpful narrative or frame from people who are opposed. That does their work for them by spreading their message. Instead, we can learn the power and art of reframing.

✓ **Embrace**

We can create a city that protects the people and places we love now and into the future altered by climate disruption.

Addressing the cause of these problems is the necessary and practical thing to do to prepare for our future needs.

✗ **Avoid**

Acting on climate is not a luxury.

It's just not possible to have everything we want. We need to change now before change is forced on us.

---

2   Ecker, Ullrich, Stephan Lewandowsky, Briony Swire, and Darren Chang. 2011. "Correcting False Information in Memory: Manipulating the Strength of Misinformation Encoding and its Retraction." *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 18, no. 3: 570–578.

Focusing on telling the 'truth' of climate change is a form of negating

❌

Most people accept that climate disruption is real and are concerned or cautious about it, yet many expert communications we found in our analysis focused on conveying the reality of something people already believe.

By focusing on conveying the truth of climate disruption, we are continuing to engage with the idea that climate disruption might not be real — something only the very firmly opposed believe.

Like all negating, it has the effect of reinforcing the idea that climate disruption may not be real.

We need to communicate from our powerful position of knowing that most people are concerned and that they want solutions — they are simply lacking a good understanding of what those solutions are.

Passive voice

❌

Many messages in climate communications fail to name active agents — the people and organisations who are responsible or can create change. Communications either have no agent at all for the cause of the problem or solution or use the generalised 'we'.

Having no agent means it is unclear who caused the problem. It can lead to fatalistic reasoning — for example, thinking it's just natural, normal, or inevitable — or people will make assumptions about who is responsible based on dominant mindsets and narratives they are provided with.

Using 'we' in the collective sense means it isn't clear who is responsible and can lead to no one taking action. For an institution with more power than individuals and communities and despite having the responsibility, resources, and mandate to act, using 'we' sounds like you are asking individuals to bear the burden of responsibility.

"

You say we think

When we say "the climate is disrupted", people think "it's inevitable and natural — nothing I can do about that".

When we say "we need to work together to plan for climate disruption", people think "people in government are putting the responsibility onto me — the little guy — while big business and government do nothing".

"

Embrace	**Avoid**
Telling people what you are doing to support them to act.	Telling people what they should do.
Naming yourself if you are in an institution with responsibility and power.	Not naming yourself, which ignores your power and can undermine trust.
Naming where you have let people down in the past or where trust is an issue.	Ignoring the issues people have experienced with your institution in the past that will get in the way of them listening.

Research process

Through 2022 and 2023 we moved through four phases of research and testing, talking to people across Tāmaki Makaurau.

4

Positive signs from the research give us a lot to be **hopeful** about, but there are **challenges** that we need **to overcome**.

1
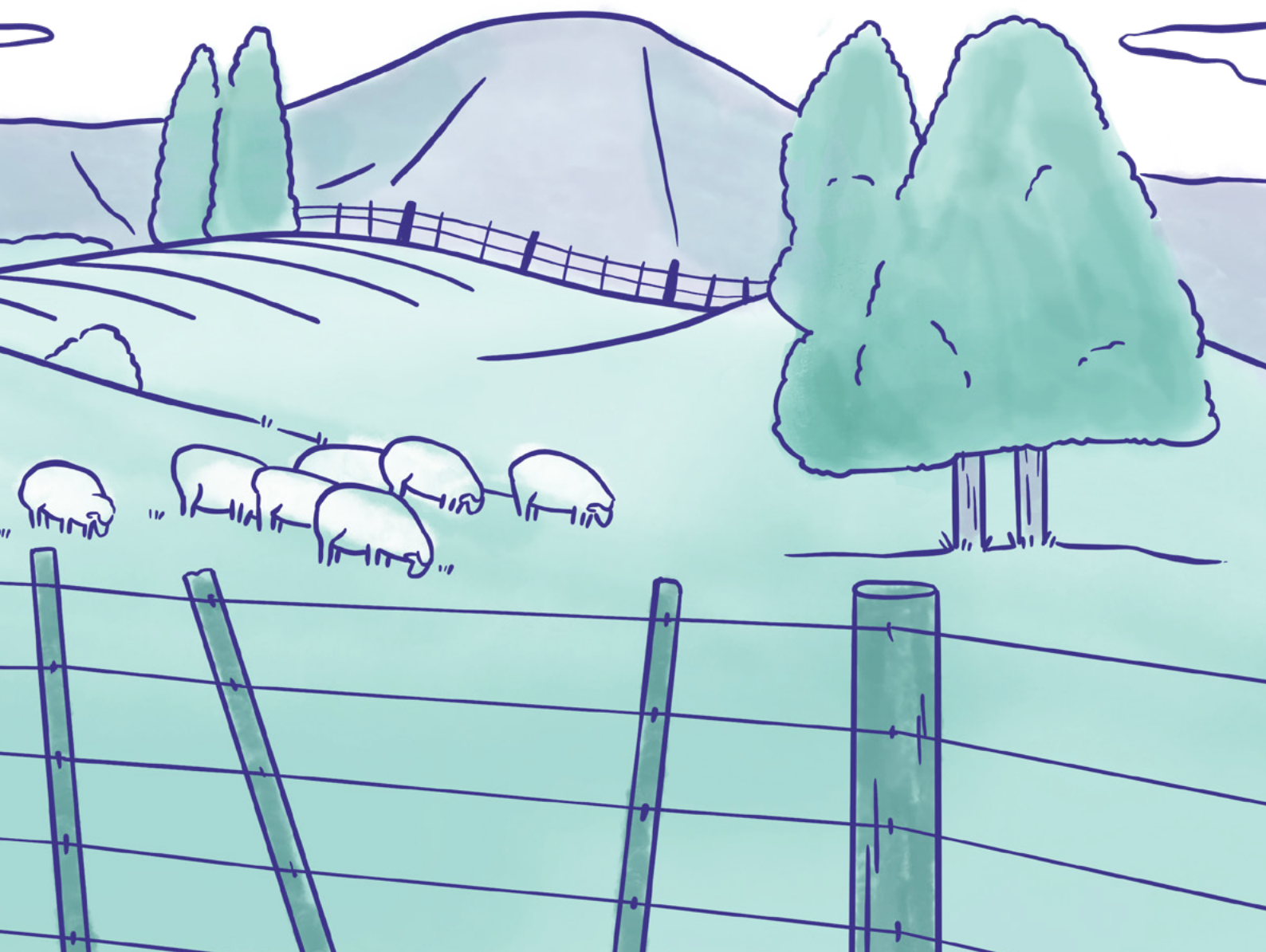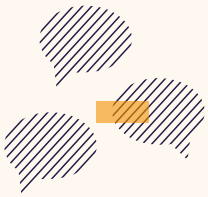
Understand the issue

What do topic experts want people to understand?

2
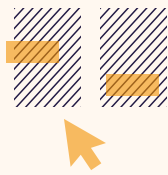
Understand the narratives and frames

How is climate disruption being framed in public communications?

3

Listen to people and how they reason

How do people reason about climate disruption and community planning?

4

Test the narratives and frames

What narratives and frames connect people to our best knowledge and spark action?

1
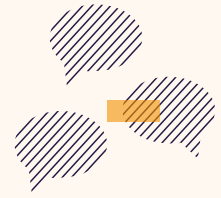
Understand the issue: What do topic experts want people to understand?

As the first phase of the research in 2022 and 2023, we interviewed 10 topic experts in climate change and community planning. Those we interviewed had expertise in climate and environmental science, environmental social sciences, mātauranga Māori, community (including youth) action, urban planning, the psychology of climate change, and local government.

We asked these experts to explain:

What they think people would benefit from understanding about their area of interest and expertise.

What they currently observe in terms of community engagement on climate and what they think is likely to impact community engagement with local government on this issue.

What kinds of specific adaptive actions communities in Tāmaki Makaurau will need to take and when.

What they understand about the implications of climate disruption and adaptation measures on equity among communities in Tāmaki Makaurau.

This qualitative research helped us understand what experts who work in the area feel is important for people to understand about climate disruption, local impacts, and community planning for climate change:

Adapting to the effects of climate disruption will not mean getting back to normal. It will mean reimagining how we live.

The changes that result from climate disruption and the process of adaptation won't be 'one and done'. We have to prepare for change that continues and adaptation that is ongoing.

Adapting to climate disruption calls for intergenerational conversations and intergenerational solutions.

Mana whenua are practised in long-term thinking and have a flexible relationship with change. This offers good examples of how to think beyond the short term.

There are ways to develop new tikanga to support our new relationships with the land we live on and are responsible for.

The effects of climate disruption won't only be felt by wealthy people with coastal property. Vulnerable people are likely to be heavily impacted. There will be widespread effects on infrastructure like roads and water systems and on places we love and share like beaches.

Some kinds of adaptation (like sea walls to protect properties) will buy time but will restrict public access to and enjoyment of space. As a community, we will need to decide what is most important to us.

The best adaptation processes are collaborative and community-led, and the process of working together can be empowering and mana enhancing.

Council has the knowledge and resources to support communities to make transformational change and can lead by example.
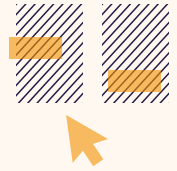
2

Understand the narratives and frames: How is climate disruption being framed in public communications?

In April–August 2022 and January–February 2023, we carried out an analysis of news media from four major news sites on the topic of climate change adaptation in Tāmaki Makaurau and elsewhere in Aotearoa New Zealand. We sought to understand the dominant narratives and frames about climate that people are exposed to via mainstream media.

We collected 84 pieces of media from 10 media outlets with an emphasis on four primary sources of nationally accessible and widely recognised news coverage. We focused on coverage of two major relevant events — the release of the government's National Adaptation Plan in August 2022 and the Auckland Anniversary Weekend flooding and subsequent impact of Cyclone Gabrielle. We planned to focus on the first event — the flooding events were coincidental.

We analysed these for patterns of language, looking for repeated narratives, frames, metaphors, and ways of communicating to give us an understanding of:

1 **The key narratives and frames people are exposed to in the mainstream media.**

2 **The shared mindsets that are likely to be switched on and those that are not.**

You can read more about this in Te Ara Uratau: Waikino / Too Much Water: Media analysis

3

Listen to people and how they reason: How do people reason about climate disruption and community planning?

In the third phase of the research, we sought to understand how people think about climate disruption, community planning, and local government:

What do people think the main problem is and how it started?

Who do people think is responsible for the problem and the solutions?

How do people reason about the impacts and effects they are experiencing and seeing?

Which solutions do people think will work, which won't, and why? Do they see a role for themselves?

How people think is more important than what they think

In understanding people's reasoning rather than their opinions, we can see where their understanding might need to shift, what is getting in the way of understanding and action, and potential areas for helping connect them to the issue. This information helps us shape communication in a way that better connects people with best knowledge on an issue.

In April–May 2023, within 6 weeks of a major flooding event in Tāmaki Makaurau, we undertook three focus groups of 5–7 people (online and in person) to listen to how people in Auckland aged 20–70 think and reason about climate disruption and community planning. Each group ran for 2 hours.

Three focus groups

Disabled people and carers

General

Māori and Pacific people
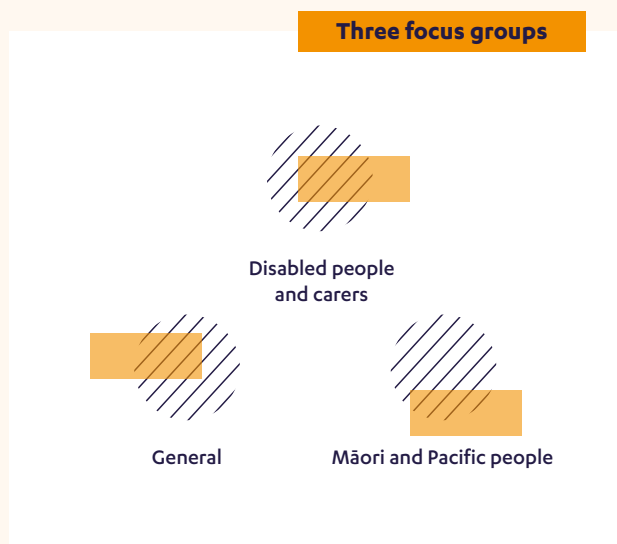
We chose a mix of people from different communities and excluded those who were employed by local government. In these focus groups, we asked a series of open-ended questions that sought people's thoughts about climate change, flooding and inundation events, solutions to climate disruption, and the role of the local government (Auckland Council).

We analysed what we heard, looking for patterns in language and thinking, to give us an understanding of:

publicly available narratives and frames people are reflecting in their talk

how people reason about climate disruption and community planning

the gap between people in the public's reasoning and expert understanding and what may be preventing them connecting with best knowledge

the opportunities for connecting people to the issue.

At the end of the third phase of the research, we reviewed pre-existing research and pre-existing tested narratives and frames related to climate disruption.

Phases 1–3 were used to inform the next stage of the research — narratives, frames, and messages about community planning for climate disruption.

4

Test the narratives and frames:
What narratives and frames connect people to our best knowledge and spark action?

In the fourth phase of the research process, we constructed and tested narratives, frames, and messages. We looked to find what connects people who are open to understanding to best knowledge and to activate their support for specific solutions and actions.

First, in August–September 2023, we took these messages to five focus groups of 6–7 Auckland people organised by different life experiences or situations. Each focus group ran for 2 hours.

We wanted to understand:

? **What sort of thinking and reasoning the messages switch on and off for different people.**

? **Whether particular words or frames were going to be a barrier to people hearing more.**

? **What we might need to add or take away from the messages.**

Five focus groups

18-24 year olds

Māori and Pacific people

Disabled people and carers

Renters

'General' — representative of Auckland
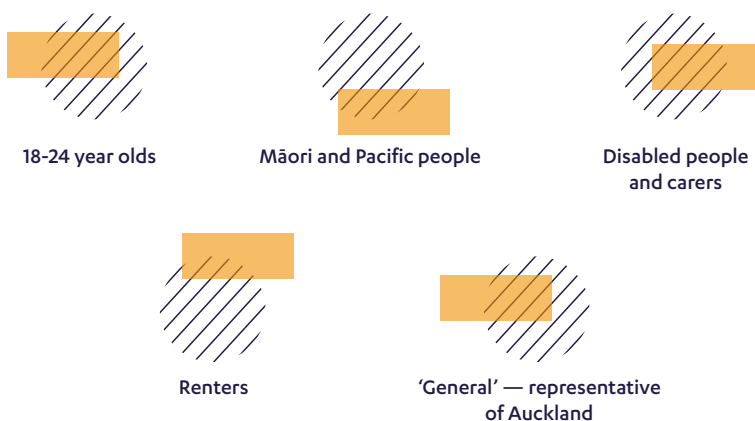
We adapted the messages based on what we heard.

We completed the testing with a quantitative attitudinal survey in December 2023. A representative sample of 804 people living in Auckland completed the 15-minute survey. The people were split into two groups of 400 and 404 so we could test more messages.

We tested a selection of longer messages, values frames, explanatory metaphors, and word frames. We asked how messages made people feel and think about the council, climate disruption, and community action. We compared responses between different types of messages — we wanted to know how people's responses to unhelpful narratives and frames compared to those we believed were more helpful ones. We investigated whether explanatory metaphors led to the understanding we intended. We asked people to indicate which word frames they preferred in matched pairs.

We were interested in the responses to messages from three groups of people:

? **People who already understand the issues and know how to act (supporters).**

? **People open to understanding and persuasion.**

? **People who are firmly opposed.**

To assign people to these groups, we tested support before they heard any messages for a group of statements about climate disruption, local government, and climate planning.

11% supporters

More likely to be women to live in west Auckland, all alarmed or concerned about climate change.

70% open to persuasion

Spread across the political spectrum, average age of 40, largely alarmed or concerned about climate change.

12% opposed

More likely to be older (55+), identify as men, own their own home, mainly New Zealand European or Pākehā, doubtful or dismissive of climate change.

The quantitative survey gave us an understanding of:

? **the effective narratives, frames, and messages that engage people who already support the issue and that persuade people in the middle**

? **how to overcome some of the unhelpful frames and narratives for people open to understanding**

? **how to explain simply some of the complex issues of climate disruption and community planning.**

The good news

Positive signs from the research give us a lot to be hopeful about

People know climate change is real and understand the relationship between climate change and flooding

In focus groups, nearly all accepted the reality of the changing climate. In our quantitative research, over 66% of the people open to understanding were alarmed or concerned and 24% were cautious about it. That means our communications don't need to focus on convincing people climate disruption is real or to care about it. We can focus on building understanding of effective action.

People in the public want to be involved in planning for climate disruption

People expressed a consistent desire to be prepared if they could have the right pathways or awareness of their options. They really valued being involved and listened to but lacked clear paths to participate.

"The fact that they were keen to hear from people like us is quite cool." (Focus group member)

Local level decision making is a clearly expressed shared goal

In focus groups, expert interviews, and in our analysis of the media, we found people in the public, people in local and central government and experts expressed the shared desire for planning, decision making, and action on climate disruption to take place at a local level.

Everyone we spoke with agreed that government's role was to help people prepare for a disrupted climate

There is a clear opportunity to frame how people across government are taking their responsibility to act seriously *in a way that reflects their power and resources.*

Climate-related events brought to the surface a desire to live in more-connected communities where everyone's needs are met

Able bodied people experienced loss and disruption from the floods, it wasn't anywhere near the loss and disruption disabled people experienced.

The disruption and difficulty people experienced as a result of climate-related events caused many to reflect on the additional challenges for vulnerable people in their communities, including the elderly, the disabled, and those lacking in financial or community support. This led to a desire to live in more-connected communities where everyone's needs are met.

Messages and frames that highlighted the need for a just and fair response to climate, including for disabled people, performed well in testing. For example people had high levels of agreement with the statement "council should do everything it can to help prevent further climate change".

People are eager to bring their knowledge to bear on the planning process

In our message testing, 85% of persuadable people who read an explanatory metaphor about shared planning between the council and communities agreed that the council should work alongside communities when planning for climate disruption.

Simple explanatory frames and metaphors help people to understand how council works

Testing showed that people can understand the complex role council plays in our lives and planning for climate disruption.

Framing your own narrative and story is more appealing to people than mythbusting an incorrect or problematic one

We found that almost all of the new frames were preferred by people open to understanding rather than mythbusting the oppositional story and frame.

Opposition:
For climate change, luxury projects – like protecting trees, making nice streams, or building cycle lanes – are just irresponsible when people need homes and jobs and better roads.

Mythbust:
Acting on climate is not a luxury. If we don't take action on the things that work now we're condemning our kids to a life of misery. It's pointless to argue about the cost of this stuff if there's no planet for them to live on.

Reframe:
We can create a city that protects the people and places we love now and into the future altered by climate disruption. With support from council staff and people with knowledge and experience we can do what is necessary to plan for and prevent climate change.

% of segment selecting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

People opposed

People open to understanding/persuasion

Supporters

Figure 1. People's preference for mythbust or new frame by audience group

People open to understanding come from across the political spectrum

In our representative survey, we found a wide variance in political party support in those people open to understanding. Therefore, political party support shouldn't be used as a proxy for potential understanding and support for community climate planning.
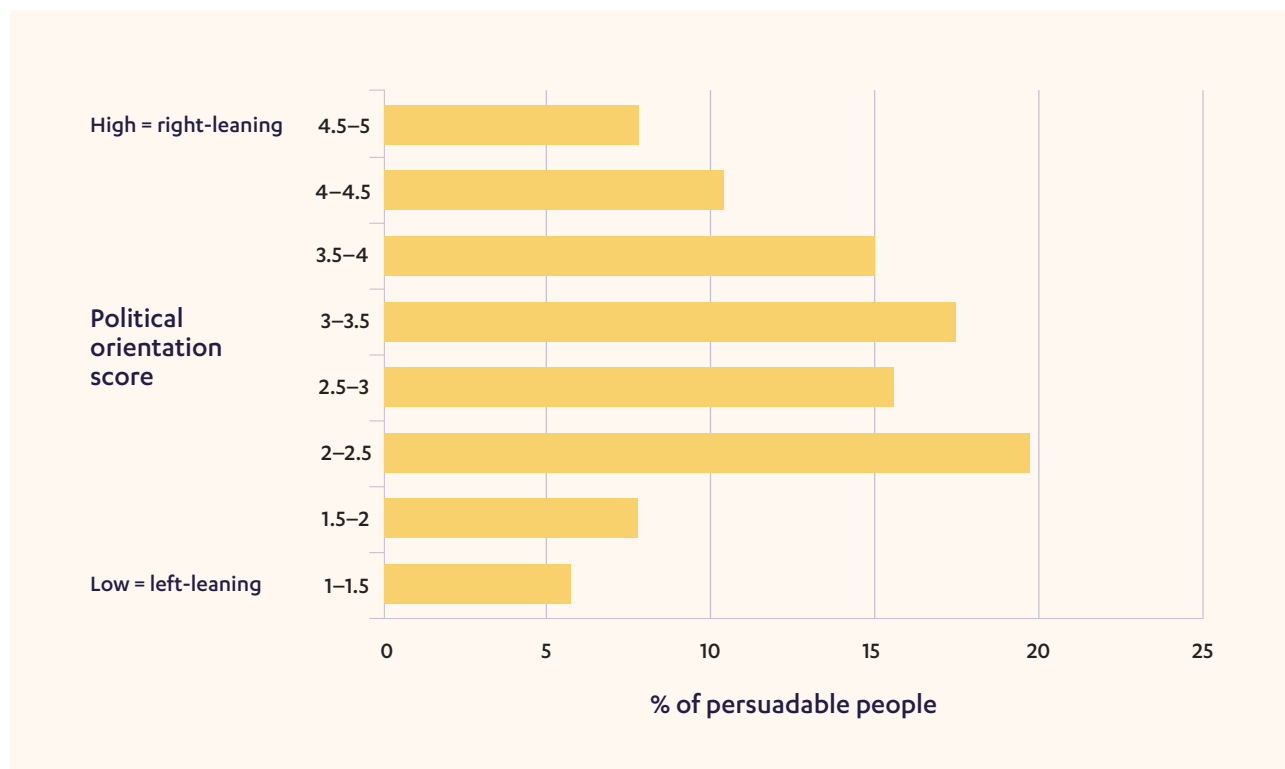
Figure 2. Political leanings of people open to understanding council-supported planning for climate disruption

Low scores indicate a left-leaning political persuasion, high scores indicate a right-leaning political persuasion, and in the middle are moderates.

Read more in How to talk about community planning for climate disruption:
Attitudinal Survey Insights Report for Resilient Tāmaki Makaurau

People inclined towards conservatism are motivated by prosocial narratives and frames

People who prioritise conservative values — following tradition, keeping things the same as much as possible, respect — are open to understanding and action on community planning and climate disruption. In testing, these people showed a clear preference for narratives and frames that engage their prosocial and intrinsic motivations rather than extrinsic ones. These values frames can be used with a broad range of people.

Survey A

Intrinsic
- A5 – Opportunity | Better life
- A6 – Public good | Purpose
- A7 – Big stuff | Bold legacy

Extrinsic
- A2 – Conservatism | Social order
- A4 – Individualism | Self-direction
- A3 – Fatalism | Capable
- A1 – Othering | Security

% people with a conservative values preference answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

Survey B

Intrinsic
- B5 – Better together | Purpose
- B7 – Balance | Wisdom
- B4 – Opportunity | Self-direction

Extrinsic
- B6 – Big stuff | Responsible
- B3 – Individualism | Self-reliant
- B1 – Conservatism | Security
- B2 – Fatalism | Security

% people with a conservative values preference answering "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

Figure 3. Preference for values statements by people with a conservative values preference who are open to persuasion

The challenges

We need to overcome some big challenges in how people reason and the unhelpful narratives and frames they are exposed to.

Direct personal experience of climate-related harm does not automatically lead people to effective action on climate

People experienced the floods as an immediate, present catastrophe to deal with. It led to fear and a disaster response and protection mindset. Fear lifts our thinking caps off. People reached for what they already knew — emergency preparedness — rather than long-term prevention or community and civic planning and action.

People lack an understanding of what council can do and how it can support them to work together as communities on climate

Aucklanders have a cognitive hole about what community action could look like — the general public has very little understanding about collective and civic solutions to climate disruption. People in focus groups struggled to identify opportunities or collective action supporting communal wellbeing. The easiest narrative and framing for people to reach for was about emergency preparedness as individuals.

Many people think of local government only as 'rubbish, rates, and roads'. In focus groups, people found it hard to see the role of people in council in climate planning. People also expressed low trust in council.

Public narratives also focus on the transactional, direct service, and hard infrastructure-based role of local government.

It is critical that communications work to scaffold a deeper understanding of community climate planning as well other collective and civic actions.

The use of the choice frame dominates advice and undermines thinking about collective civic-level action

The choice frame pushes people towards a sense that the only meaningful action is that taken alone, preferably as a consumer.

Individual choice frames bypass understanding that collective wisdom and discussion is needed for collective action and planning. Individual choice does not frame collaboration, conciliatory democracy, or examining our different options together.

We found this thinking reflected in the focus groups with comments about having to make the right choices about what to pack in our go-bags, where to build our houses, and how to clear our gutters.

Choice framing also suggests that logic and rationality can bypass the emotional and psychological processing of climate disruption, which communities need to make good decisions.

Time running out and urgency is a central feature of communications

"Time is running out" switches people to fatalistic thinking, fear responses, and simplistic solutions.

One area where urgency framing causes problems in public thinking is planning for disruption versus preventing further disruption. In the public, planning for climate disruption (adaptation) is considered urgent while prevention of more climate disruption (mitigation) is seen as long term. Expert advice says the reverse.

Currently, different factors reinforce reasoning that planning (adaptation) is most urgent, including:

- framing planning for climate disruption (adaptation) through an emergency response lens
- the immediate and visceral experience of flooding events
- mental shortcuts such as status quo bias
- narratives used by some people in politics who want to focus on adaptation.

Such framing leads people to think that planning for climate events is the most pressing and most urgent issue. It directs people to short-term individual action.

Be aware of how you frame time, speed, and urgency in your communications to ensure you highlight the short-term actions and long-term actions that are most effective.

Make the shift to framing action and solutions, especially in terms of preventing further climate disruption, as **bold yet achievable**.

Frame the better life we can have from acting urgently to prevent more climate disruption. This can rebalance narratives tilted towards risk, loss, and urgency.

Trade-offs, sacrifices and tough decisions narratives and frames feature heavily in expert advice

These frames and narratives create a way of reasoning in which people focus on the loss of climate action, especially the personal loss, as opposed to the collective gain. For example, when we say "tough decisions need to be made", it frames difficulty and loss — people think about what they are personally being asked to give up. Like fear-driven narratives, these frames and narratives cause people to retrench rather than reach out.

It is true our current ways of living will change, but for many people, responding in bold and just ways to the causes of climate disruption will improve many aspects of our lives. For people to support them, these improvements to our lives need to be seen, felt, and made real.

'Make Aotearoa great' is a national exceptionalist discourse that appears frequently in communications about climate action

"We're small, but nimble — we can use our resourcefulness to lead the world."

"New Zealand is a laggard on climate action. It's shameful and we're being left behind."

"We led on nuclear free, we can be a leader on climate."

"We're well respected internationally and people will take notice of what we do."

This individualist and status-driven framing does not align well with people being able to think and act on a collective public good.

Focus more on how we want to live into the future — together. Focus less on being seen to be a leader.

People feel they are being told to fix a problem caused by large industries, business, and nations

Messages focused on individual behaviour change and individual action often provoke negative reactions for people exposed to them. People in our focus groups often mentioned that the responsibility for climate disruption sits with large organisations yet they feel it is individuals and communities being asked to do the work of addressing it.

People in councils and other government organisations need to demonstrate how they play a central role as powerful actors in creating a supportive environment for effective action as opposed to telling people how to act and what to do.

Risk-led and fear-based frames dominate expert and public communications

While advocates and communicators acknowledge there are opportunities related to acting on climate disruption, they tend to only talk about the risk. For experts, risk is a technical term they deal with every day. For people, in the public it is just scary. This fear leads to people seeking a sense of safety. It pushes them towards individualistic, short-term thinking and action focused on 'back to normal' solutions. National surveys show most people think recycling is the most effective climate action.

If advocates and communicators do frame opportunities, they tend to frame them as simply an avoidance of risk.

Such frames are demotivating for people, especially in relation to long-term prevention. They also leave people vulnerable to narratives that argue we should ignore prevention work in favour of preparing for the worst.

Examples of risk-led and fear-based frames we saw include:

- leading communications with the significant health and economic risks of climate disruption
- framing opportunities to respond boldly to climate disruption as speculative or as the opportunity to avoid a risk
- framing preventing and planning for climate harm (mitigation with adaptation) through a lessen a burden frame.

We need to research the opportunities and focus on communicating in concrete ways what these opportunities look and feel like. We may not be able to say what the world will look like, but we can talk about what it might feel like to experience a world that has responded boldly to climate disruption.

Expert communications are generally fact-driven — they presume that information leads to action

Fact-led communications are comfortable for experts. However, fact-led messages are not compelling to most people struggling to connect with the issue, especially when they are being exposed to other more compelling but unhelpful frames and narratives.

Facts are important — how you frame them affects whether they switch people to better understanding of the issues. It is important to first understand how people currently think and reason about an issue and therefore what facts are most needed to deepen understanding. Then include facts as part of an explanation — don't lead with them.

Many communications are still focused on conveying the 'truth' of climate change

In focus groups, nearly all accepted the reality of the changing climate. In our research, across the whole Auckland population, 64% of people are alarmed or concerned about climate change — see figure 4 below.
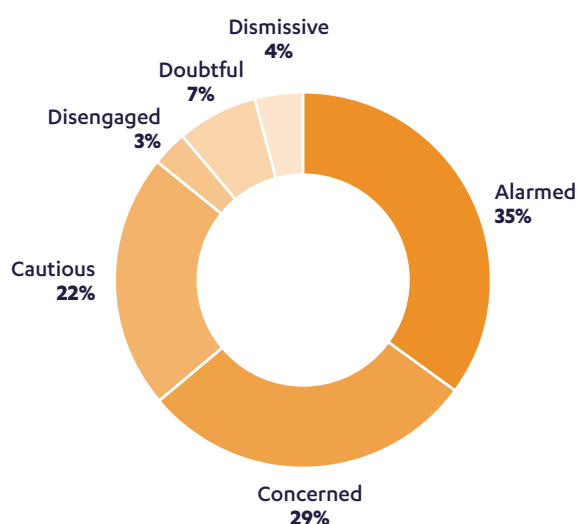
Figure 4. Climate change attitudes of all people across Tāmaki Makaurau

In people open to persuasion over 66% of were alarmed or concerned, and 24% were cautious about it. However, belief in climate change doesn't dictate understanding of floods or willingness to consider actions. What people are missing is an understanding of what effective collective and civic action looks and feels like.

Focus your communications on collective and civic action rather than conveying the truth about climate change.

Direct your communications to meet the information needs of those people who are open to persuasion, not convincing the hard to persuade. Focusing on the benefits of collective and civic action is one way to focus on the needs of those open to understanding.

The group of people opposed to planning for climate disruption is small (11%) but they reflect people who currently vote and engage with local government

Avoid frames and narratives that appeal to those most opposed. Build your communications on tested frames and messages that activate the much bigger group of people open to understanding.

Engage and work with those who are already highly supportive of this work to help activate those open to understanding, including activating them to vote and engage at a local level.

Seek to engage differently with those people who are not currently being engaged in ways that work for them.

It is challenging to help people understand that mitigation and adaptation are not mutually exclusive and that adaptive actions can also be mitigating actions

Testing did not give us a clear directive on how to do this work via narratives and frames. We need to continue to experiment with framing and explaining this key issue. There is a strong push to abandon preventing further climate change in favour of adapting to it, which would be deeply harmful.

Recommendations

**How we talk so
people understand
and act on community
climate planning.**
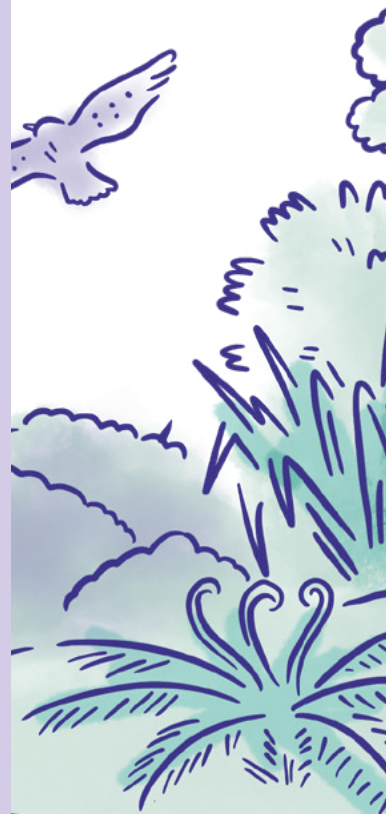
5

Frames and narratives strongly influence the actions, solutions, policies and political decisions people are willing to support.

Type 1

Unlock change by shifting to helpful narratives in all your communications and stories

Recommendations 1–4 identify the overarching helpful narratives to use when talking about community planning for climate disruption.

By intentionally turning up the volume of narratives that help people see an issue for what it is and understand how it came about, we can build support for the system-level solutions that will make life better for people and the planet. Increasing the volume of helpful narratives can also tip the balance in our information environments, dampening down the unhelpful narratives that lead to shallow and unhelpful thinking.

When we focus on our own helpful narratives and stories, we avoid mythbusting and negating. While negating and mythbusting are often done with good intentions, they only serve to repeat, reinforce, and make louder the unhelpful narratives. Many studies show replacing unhelpful narratives with a new helpful narrative or frame is effective at shifting the thinking of people open to understanding on our issue.[3]

3   FrameWorks Institute. 2021. *The Features of Narratives.*
     A Model of Narrative Form for Social Change Efforts.
     Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

Recommendation 1: Frame the benefits of collective and civic climate action in your stories

Create a pattern of communication that highlights the benefits of collective and civic action (coming together to care for one another). This framing contributes to shifting thinking away from less-impactful actions at the individual consumer level and overcomes fatalism.

The general public has very little understanding about collective and civic solutions to climate disruption — this is called a "cognitive hole" in public thinking.

We are exposed to a tsunami of stories about individual and consumer-level behaviour change, which ensures mindsets about individual-level climate action are constantly being switched on. Thinking about individual-level behavioural shifts leaves little room for people to build an understanding of impactful collective solutions.

In focus groups, people expressed anger and frustration that the most significant emitters, large business and industry for example, were not being held to account for their carbon pollution while they were being told what behaviours to change as individuals to solve climate change.

This asymmetric approach to responsibility surfaces feelings of injustice and fatalism. In focus groups, the feelings it evoked prevented people from hearing the messages.

People need to see, feel, and imagine actual options for community-led action. These options should support coming together to care for one another — tend and befriend mindsets not fight-flight-freeze mindsets. They highlight not just what community and civic action is but how it aligns to our deepest motivations to care and contribute.

Facilitating community action is also a way to create connecting experiences for people. By helping people experience civic and community action firsthand, local government can build understanding of such actions and improve outcomes across the community — a virtuous circle of effective civic and community action.

Research insights

Here is an **example of a story** that frames collective and civic climate action and tested well in our research:

Imagine the lives we can all live when across our communities we are empowered to take the bold climate actions we need and know are feasible.

Right now, many communities don't have access to the resources or connections they need to walk this path, including ways to come together and to plan for climate disruption.

People in council will support our community's climate-planning journey. By providing more resources to help communities understand the impacts of different climate solutions and supporting collective decision making about what action to take, with processes like citizen juries.

We all face a climate-disrupted future. Better lives for everyone are possible through bold community climate planning. As people in council, we will walk alongside our communities as we make it happen.

AMPLIFY MESSAGES ABOUT THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE OVER INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS
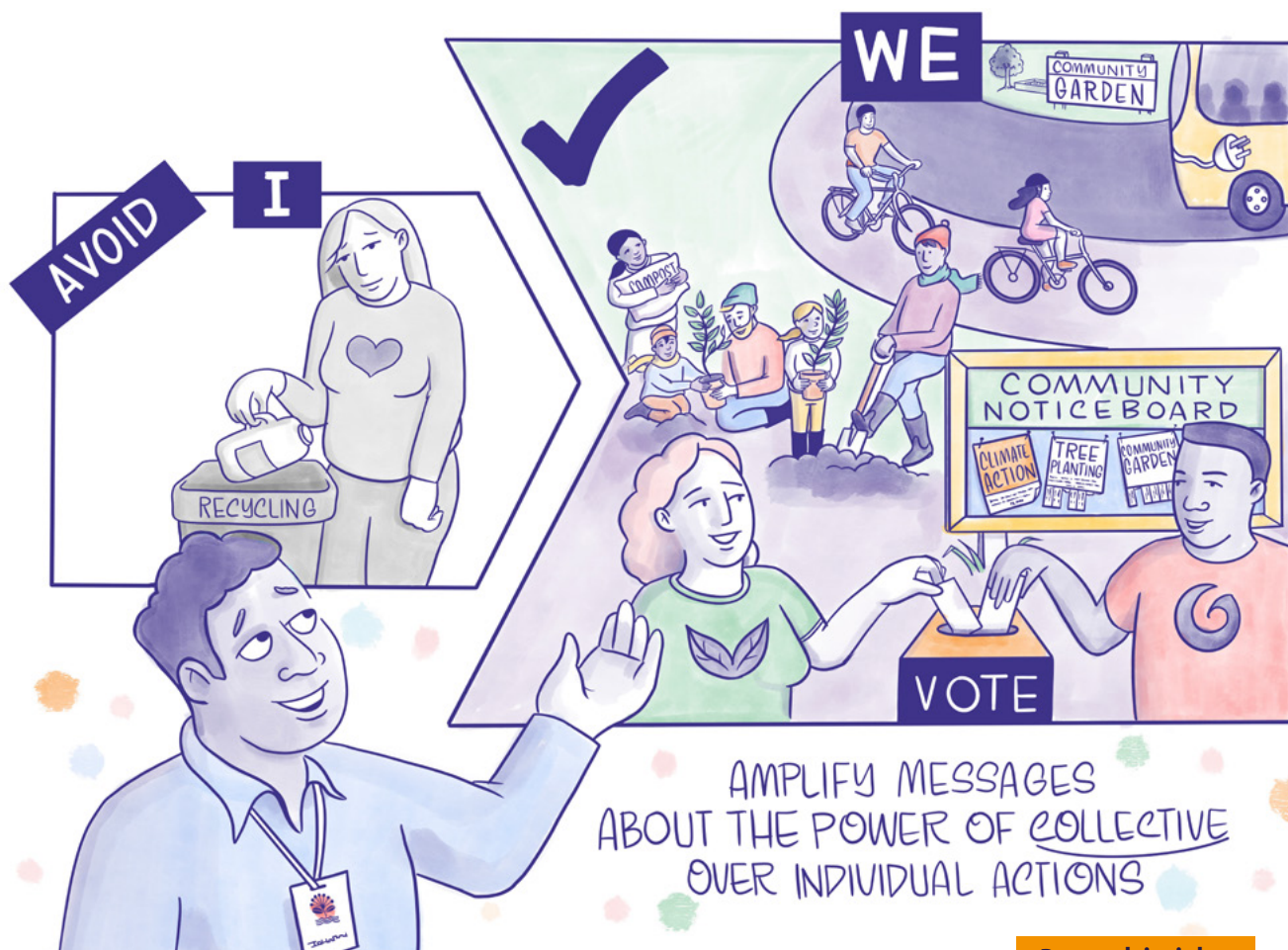
✔ Embrace	✖ Avoid
We are taking bold but feasible action.	People need to make tough or hard choices.
We want to make the best thing for the planet the easiest thing for people.	Choose to …
People need more options.	People need to change their behaviour.
Climate action will improve many people's lives.	People need to give up …
People need support to act.	People don't care about climate disruption.

Collective and civic action

Image credit: Matt Crawford, Koi Tū | The Centre for Informed Futures

Auckland University's Koi Tū | Centre for Informed Futures is an independent, non-partisan thinktank and research centre focused on long-term, complex problems challenging our future. It was invited by Te Weu Charitable Trust and Gisborne District Council to share how deliberative democracy can be used to facilitate community collaboration in climate adaptation and resilience planning.

Koi Tū explains that choosing deliberative approaches is not a 'pick it off the shelf' exercise. Rather, it's about working with communities to understand their needs.

Read more about Koi Tū's work and watch the video discussion

Recommendation 2: Paint a positive vision about the opportunities for our better life

When our messages focus on the opportunities that collective climate planning offers all of us, we help people think about and act on what is possible. We avoid leading with risk and fear.

Fear lifts our thinking caps off. People are swimming in fear, risk, and nationalistic narratives and frames about climate disruption. These make it difficult to think about complex actions.

When people have no prior experience or mental frameworks for an action like community planning, we have to create a connection for them. Connecting community planning with the better lives they would like to live, especially our collective goals, motivates people to engage.

Stories detailing what the future can look like, how it might feel, or even what values would be prioritised help us shift away from stories telling people what they have to give up or the hard or tough choices they have to make. While much of our life will change if we respond in bold ways to climate, if we do it well, it will feel like a gain not a loss.

Describing opportunities related to climate action will need us to power up our collective work on understanding climate action benefits.

LEAD WITH THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR A BETTER LIFE
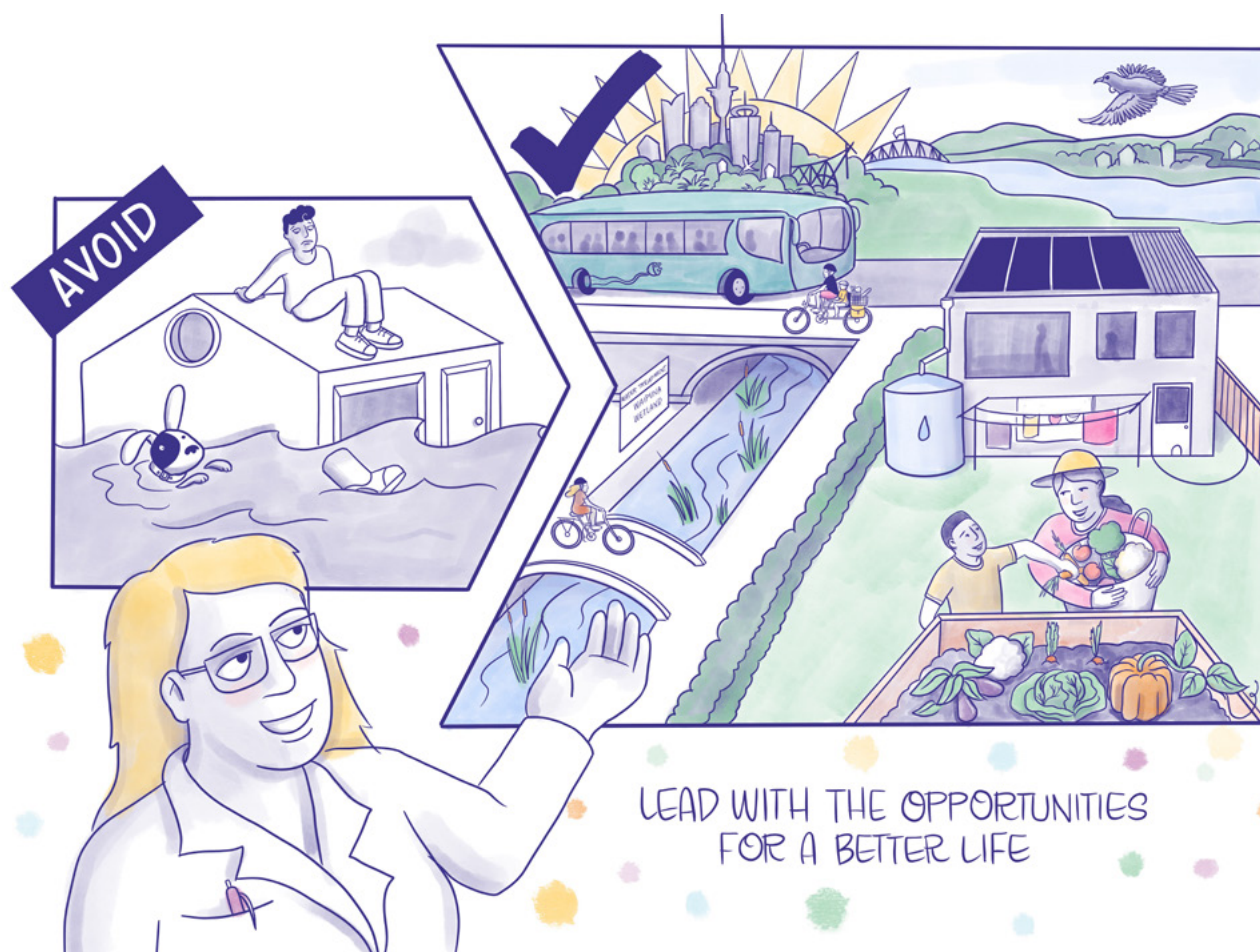
Here is an example of a story that includes a vision of the better life responding to climate disruption can help create:

Starts with framing the better life

"**Taking necessary and bold action on climate disruption means creating communities, environments, and ways of living many of us want.**

However, many communities don't yet have access to the resources they need to make this future a reality.

Names the barrier

Role of agents of change

People in council are focused on providing more resources to support local people to identify shared goals, make decisions, and take bold action in their communities to achieve the better lives we want.

Better lives for everyone are possible through bold community climate planning. When we are supported by people in council, we can have clean air to breathe, plentiful green space, clear waterways, and peaceful streets open to riding, walking, and public transport where and when we need it."

Naming the better life in detail

Talking about the risks we will avoid in the hope it sounds like an opportunity still **frames a risk**. Flip risk avoidance to the positive experiences. In testing, people preferred the term 'creating better' rather than 'avoiding costs'.

✓ Embrace	✗ Avoid
Creating better.	Avoiding costs.
We can invest in the things that matter most.	We will save millions in climate costs.
Clean air to breathe in cities.	We will avoid many deaths from pollution.

A better life narrative frames how all groups can reach our shared goals.

Stories about the types of lives we all want to live highlight shared human goals and help us feel a sense of belonging to each other. However, to reach these goals, different people need different things based on their context.

In focus groups, we heard that disabled people experience a significant additional burden from climate disruption. Disabled people and communities will need to be listened to and invited to lead climate planning solutions to ensure everyone benefits from good climate planning.

Frame a shared collective problem and the need to deliver a **fair and just** climate response that meets everyone's needs:

Draw on the shared experience of climate disruption-related weather events. This helps deepen non-disabled people's understanding of the additional burden climate disruption will bring to disabled people's lives and why they need specific solutions to get the same outcomes as the rest of the community.

What this sounds like:

"Many of us experienced significant stress and pain from climate-related flooding events in 2023. For disabled people, additional stress and pain comes from not having support and disaster response systems that keep them safe. Climate planning needs to ensure all of us are cared for during climate-related flooding."

Highlight the strength and problem solving that disabled people bring to systems that need redesign. Disabled people are navigating such systems every day.

What this sounds like:

"Every day, disabled people solve problems because structures and systems are not designed for them — from buildings without ramps to information they cannot access. Disabled people navigate the world with grit and determination. This strength and problem solving means disabled people can lead the way on planning climate responses that meet everyone's needs."

A better life story

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

How the spin-off benefits of climate action will improve life for everyone
Published: November 17, 2021 4.39am NZDT
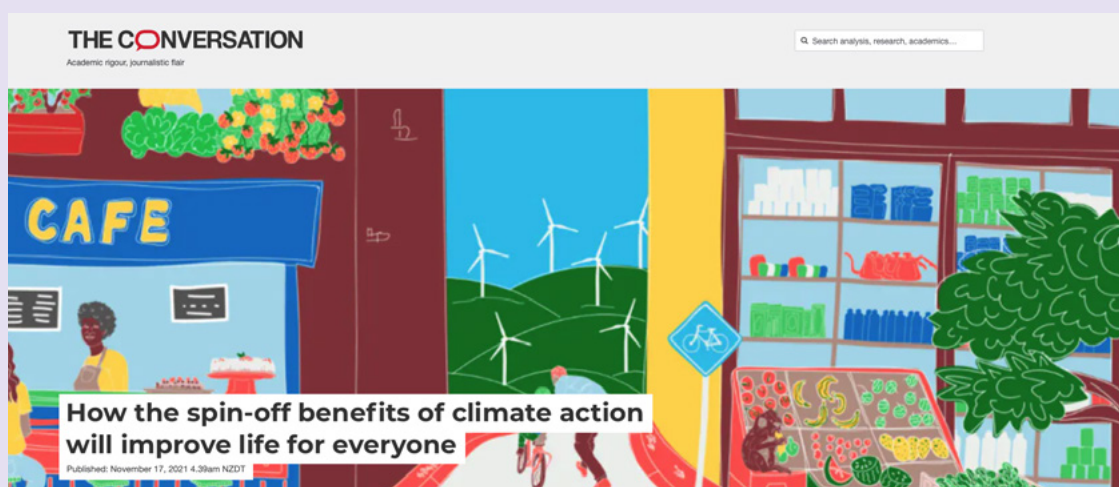
This article in The Conversation frames the opportunities of responding to climate disruption. It explains the cleaner air we will breathe, the better health we will have, and the improved employment opportunities that action will lead to. We advise giving greater prominence to explaining the benefits in terms of people's everyday lives and experiences rather than emphasising the dollar value.

Read the story on The Conversation website.

Why we recommend you avoid leading with money

When we start our communications about responding to climate with the economic benefits and risks, we are not providing a frame that connects most people to the issue. Economic benefits and risks are important information for decision makers, especially when looking to prioritise which solutions to climate disruption are the best to invest in. However, most people will not find these economic benefits and risks motivating in relation to acting on climate disruption, especially at a collective or civic level.

Leading with economic or money values also adds to the narrative problem we are trying to overcome — a predominance of self-interest values in our communications and culture. These values don't connect people with their motivations that are helpful to civic and collective action. This contributes to the values perception gap[4] — a phenomenon where most people feel that others do not share their prosocial and intrinsic motivations. This can lead to a retreat of civic and collective activities, including acting on climate.

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4   Common Cause Foundation. 2016. *Perceptions Matter: The Common Cause UK Values Survey*. London. UK: Common Cause Foundation.

Recommendation 3: Highlight the interconnections between people and the places they love

When our stories show people that our solutions protect the places they love and rely on, we can shift them towards more-hopeful ways of thinking about climate planning and collaborative action and away from self-interest and fatalistic narratives.

A large majority of people place great intrinsic value on our natural world. Research shows it to be a significant source of wellbeing for many people as well as the means by which our lives and wellbeing are sustained.

We exposed people open to understanding to a longer message that was founded on a harmony/kaitiakitanga narrative. The message framed our deep interconnection with the land and explained the need to lift from the environment the burden many human activities have overloaded it with.

What we found:

85% of people agreed that "council should do everything it can to help prevent further climate change".

74% expressed a belief that they are able to participate in collective climate action.

80% intended to take part in collective climate action.

73% agreed that collective action can be impactful against climate change.

Research insights

That message started like this:

Most of us know living in harmony with nature is essential to our life on Earth. We can have a future where all people thrive if we protect and care for the natural systems that support us.

The message also highlighted the expertise of mana whenua and the importance of supporting that expertise:

We are supporting leadership from mana whenua who have expertise in living in harmony with natural systems.

✔️ Embrace	❌ Avoid
We can protect the places we love.	People don't care enough about climate change.
People in council are supporting our communities to care for and live with the land.	People need to take responsibility for keeping their properties safe.
Māori knowledge and experience help us care for our environment and people together now and into the future.	We're messing everything up, and if we don't get on top of it, it'll be too late.

Helping people in Tāmaki Makaurau understand the strength of mana whenua and tangata moana in action on climate disruption

In focus groups, we heard that Māori and Pacific people had a greater confidence in what to expect next with a disrupted climate and an awareness of the impact on our shared places such as beaches and harbours.

We heard an expansive understanding in these groups on how to plan for and prevent further climate disruption. We also heard a very different approach to the nature of time and urgency from that heard in mainstream discourse.

Māori and Pacific people raised the value of kaitiakitanga and caring for land and noted that how we live with the land has caused many of our problems — a change in practice in society from building with the land to changing or rebuilding the land.

People also spoke about the Pacific as neighbours and our duty of care to them.

"It's really important for us to be part of that sort of Pacific Island forum, because they're also going to be heavily affected by the rising sea levels, and they're getting smashed by storms left, right and centre."
(Māori and Pacific focus group member)

Solutions as to how the people in council could better engage Pacific communities were raised.

"I think maybe if council took the opposite view of rather than trying to defund those events [arts and community]. Actually capitalise on those events and use them for community engagement opportunities."
(Māori and Pacific focus group member)

People in our expert interviews highlighted **flexibility and openness to change of Māori people and culture** as a strength in leading all communities through climate disruption:

- Kaitiakitanga requires flexibility in relationship to the whenua.

- Mana whenua are attuned to change as ongoing and less oriented towards technical solutions. "I often find mana whenua, in particular, are a little more accepting of ... change. They've seen change before — often their narratives have a longer history. They can speak to things that have occurred over ... centuries-long timeframes and [speak to] change in Auckland in that way." (Expert)

- While other communities want life as we have it now to stay, Māori tend to take a different approach. "[Iwi] Māori are thinking ... actually, it's going to be a whole new world, and some of the actions we're thinking about are not about maintaining our current lifestyle. They're about adapting to a whole new way of living. But at the moment, I think the actions we hear about, and see communities taking, are mostly about trying to maintain the current way we live ... in the current places we live." (Expert)

- Specific initiatives have already been taken by Māori communities to adapt at iwi, hapū, and marae level such as Kaipara Harbour,

- Raising the idea of a new tikanga that will develop to care for ancestral lands that will no longer be available to be occupied.

Experts raised the importance of framing the issues for Māori in ways that work for Māori:

- Talking about mauri is a good way to engage with Māori as opposed to the climate change language rhetoric.

- It is also important to engage with Māori who don't whakapapa to the rohe. This can be done through local boards and other mechanisms.

How to frame Māori leadership by Māori and partnerships between Māori and non-Māori communities and the government on environmental issues

In 2021, The Workshop completed an attitudinal survey to determine how to frame Māori leadership by Māori and partnerships between Māori and non-Māori communities and the government on environmental issues. The work was led by Jordan Green (Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui). The following values frames performed better than almost all narratives and frames that framed Māori leadership and shared decision making about the environment between Māori and government as a problem.

All of us being valued for who we are (equity)

"All of us want to be valued for who we are. For Māori, this means our ways of living, seeing the world and our culture are treated as normal and important."

Open to different perspectives (broad mindedness)

"We learn from each other when we're open to different perspectives. Māori knowledge and experience helps us care for our environment and people together."

Importance of mātauranga (mātauranga)

"Māori wisdom and knowledge is unique, developed through a long, deep relationship with this land. Mātauranga Māori helps us to care for this place and our future."

Recommendation 4: Frame climate solutions as bold, necessary, and achievable

When our stories and frames give people a sense that there are solutions and that we can choose to implement them, we create more mental space for people to think positively about complex collective action, including prevention of further climate disruption.

In our analysis of climate communications, we found a powerful narrative we called time is running out. This narrative of urgency is a central feature of climate communications. It makes sense in some ways. However, as indigenous experts pointed out, the nature of time is very culturally bound, and many Māori do not see climate disruption through the same panic-inducing urgency lens. As a consequence, they are planning more thoughtfully and boldly.

We observed that planning for significant climate events (adaptation) was framed with the most urgency and emergency. However, experts note our most pressing issue is preventing further climate disruption by redesigning how many of our systems work — for example, those currently reliant on fossil fuels and environmental harm.

When we use time is running out narratives to consistently talk about climate planning, people think in terms of emergency response like planning escape routes or having emergency kits. Such framing crowds out thinking about climate disruption in more complex, more organised and more collective ways. It points people towards scarcity thinking and fatalistic mindsets.

We observed that the time is running out narrative caused problems for people's thinking in focus groups. We found people were most focused on the emergency in front of us and planning in small ways for that.

To switch on shared mindsets in which people reason it is possible to put in place effective climate-disruption solutions, we need to **avoid the time is running out narrative** and instead:

- get to **solutions quickly**

- lead with values such as **wisdom, responsibility, creativity, and pragmatism**

- use terms like '**bold**' and '**necessary**'

- frame with **tones** that **are positive but realistic** about the challenges.

Getting to solutions quickly means we lead with values, briefly describe the barriers, and then explain solutions in very concrete terms. Such an approach can help people quickly move past the sense of fatalism that can arise when listening to people talk about climate disruption.

What this sounds like:

"Making wise and bold decisions about climate disruption now, ensures a positive future. However, many communities are not well supported to put their future-focused thinking into action. We can solve this problem together. People in local government will provide resources, tools, and support so communities understand their local challenges, including water and flooding risks, and have the option to take bold climate planning steps such as restoring wetlands, planting a lot more trees, and creating more spongy areas in the city."

Embrace

We have solutions. Let's be bold and act on them now.

Avoid

This is an emergency. Prepare for it.

We have time to plan for what comes next.

We are running out of time to plan for the next disaster.

Wise decisions now will prevent further disruption to the climate.

Climate disasters are becoming more and more frequent.

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Lead with these values

Pragmatism

*"Taking **necessary** and bold action on climate disruption means creating communities, environments, and ways of living many of us want."*

Responsibility and wisdom

*"When council, iwi, and communities act boldly to address climate disruption, we leave a **positive legacy** for future generations."*

Frame the better lives climate action creates

This framing makes space for thinking about what is possible. For example, in testing, people responded positively to these messages:

"Better lives for everyone are possible through bold community climate planning."

"A solid community plan and response to a disrupted climate means all our communities are protected during and after a crisis."

"We can't reverse all the harm. However, we can prevent more damage by centring the care and repair of our natural systems in our planning for climate disruption."

"We can have a future where all people thrive if we protect and care for the natural systems that support us."

/////////////

Type 2

Apply these strategic shifts to make your communications and stories easy to hear, understand, and share

The following recommendations cover the specific strategic shifts you can make in your communications and stories. They highlight the narrative elements you can use to make your helpful narratives easy to hear, understand, and share.

Recommendation 5: Start with shared values when talking about community climate planning

When we start our messages and stories with a widely shared value, we make our issue relevant to a broad range of people open to understanding.

Values are the 'why' of our actions and lives. By bringing values to the surface, we remind people why they care about this issue and connect them to what we're saying. We all have many values, which we prioritise differently depending on the context.

Leading with shared values works with our fast-thinking brains, which mainly make quick unconscious decisions based on values, emotions, and beliefs, not logic or facts.[5]

If we start with problems, fears, or facts, most people listening find it very demotivating. We are also making it difficult for people to see how the issue relates to what motivates them. Instead, by starting with prosocial values, we can build a bridge for people between our issues and their core motivations.

Framing our communications with prosocial values can also switch on shared mindsets that are more helpful to the issue because values are already embedded in our shared mindsets and narratives. Social science shows that most people are more motivated to care about each other and what's best for all of us — prosocial, intrinsic, or all of us values — than they are motivated by personal gain.

However, it can be hard for people to prioritise and act on their prosocial values when we are swimming in narratives and mindsets that tell us that what matters most in life is money, status, appearance, and being safe from scary 'others' or a terrible future, and that makes it hard for people to prioritise and act on their prosocial values.

Starting our communications with prosocial all of us values contributes to shifting this unhelpful narrative and mindset environment, making it easier for people to support and act on their prosocial values.

5   Berentson-Shaw, Jess. 2018. *A Matter of Fact: Talking Truth in a Post-Truth World*. Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books.

Research insights

Here are some examples of shared values messages people open to understanding preferred in our testing rather than self-interest values messages commonly seen in climate communications:

"Responsible climate action from people in council includes helping communities plan for climate disruption in ways that create a better city for everyone."

"Creating lasting solutions to climate disruption means meeting the needs of all communities, especially those most vulnerable to climate disruption."

"When council, iwi, and communities act boldly to address climate disruption, we leave a positive legacy for future generations."

"Taking necessary and bold action on climate disruption means creating communities, environments, and ways of living many of us want."

"Together, we need to choose climate solutions that mean our children, grandchildren, and people that come after us will thrive."

"Staff at council know planning for the big challenges, like climate disruption, is the responsible thing to do."

"Bringing all communities' experiences and strengths to the climate challenge is a wise approach."

Embrace

Taking necessary and bold action on climate disruption means creating communities, environments, and ways of living many of us want.

People have not had the right support from our government to take this action in their local communities.

Local government is now providing many different ways for our communities to come together and help us take bold action together and create better ways of living.

Avoid

We are an international laughing stock. New Zealand needs to pull our weight on climate action before it is too late.

(This message has no agent so people may assume they are being told they are the problem. This message also uses an achievement-led values frame, which does not connect people with their prosocial collective public good mindsets and values. It is very demotivating.)

Planning for the big stuff — putting values of responsibility and pragmatism at the centre

In focus groups, people were very clear on the leadership role people in government need to take on climate disruption. Young people especially strongly believed in the responsibility and leadership of people in government. They expressed surprise that government was not already taking action in areas such as planning for climate disruption.

In our testing, people responded positively to a message about planning for the big stuff, which framed the values of responsibility and pragmatism and was delivered by the head of community climate planning for Auckland Council. The full message can be read on .

Here is an excerpt from the message:

Imagine the better future we could all have if we choose the bold and necessary solutions to the big challenges we all face — including a disrupted climate. Planning for the big stuff is the responsible thing to do and one that most of our communities want us to do.

Recommendation 6: Talk to those who are <mark>most open to understanding climate planning</mark>

Narratives can help most people shift their mindsets — but not all people. When we engage those who support community planning for climate disruption and those most open to understanding our issue, we use our precious communication time and energy to greater impact.

Think of your audience in three groups:

1 **Supporters** who already understand the need for change. It is important that your supporters like and share the messages because they play a role in getting the stories to people who are persuadable.

2 People **open to understanding and persuasion** are the majority of people on most issues. They don't have a firm view one way or another and can be influenced by helpful narratives and explanations.

3 People who are **firmly opposed** have strong and fixed views on an issue, and they are unlikely to be shifted by anything except a deep personal experience. People firmly opposed tend to use overly simplistic or individualistic narratives. They also tend to be noisy and get a lot of media attention, which can make people who are open to persuasion falsely think these narratives reflect most people's views.

Most people are already concerned about climate disruption. However, this belief and concern has not yet translated into a general understanding of effective action, especially collective and civic action.

When we communicate to engage or persuade those we think don't believe in climate change, we are not helping those who are most likely to act understand what to do. Neither are we empowering supporters with the tools that they can use to best engage people open to understanding. A good message needs to be shared to have an impact.

We need to create effective messages that our supporters are willing to share with those who are persuadable rather than messages trying to persuade people who are firmly opposed.

Instead, we are spending valuable resources engaging with unhelpful narratives, which often leads to repetition of those unhelpful narratives through techniques like mythbusting.

When we repeat, negate, or mythbust unhelpful narratives, we reinforce and amplify the unhelpful narratives to people who are open to understanding and persuasion. It is also unlikely to shift those who are firmly opposed.

Here are some examples from our testing of reframes that were more compelling to people open to persuasion than negating or mythbusting.

When people opposed say: *"New Zealanders can't stop climate change — it's too big and out of our hands. Anything we do wouldn't make a difference. No one else is doing what they need anyway. But we can protect ourselves. Now's the time to do that."*

✔ **Embrace this frame for people open to understanding:** *"Responding sensibly now to climate disruption will help us reach the goals we share for a better life for ourselves and the people we love — cleaner air to breathe, more green spaces, clean waterways, streets open to children walking and riding bikes."*

✖ **Avoid this mythbusting:** *"We have the opportunity to show the world how this should be done. New Zealand's a small but nimble country. Let's lead on climate action."*

When people opposed say: *"Everything gets blamed on climate change. But this is just weather, which changes all the time. It's making a generation of anxious kids. Just use common sense and prepare for bad weather."*

✔ **Embrace this frame for people open to understanding:** *"People in council's role is to think and act in dependable ways as we face big challenges as communities. As more severe weather events happen more often, we will use our resources to properly plan for and prevent more climate disruption."*

✖ **Avoid this mythbusting:** *"The data is clear — we risk our future lives and our kids' lives with every 0.1 degree of warming. What we're experiencing with the climate isn't just weather or natural cycles. We can't just hope it goes away."*

When people opposed say: *"For climate change, luxury projects — like protecting trees, making nice streams, or building cycle lanes — are just irresponsible when people need homes and jobs and better roads."*

✔ **Embrace this frame for people open to understanding:** *"We can create a city that protects the people and places we love now and into the future altered by climate disruption. With support from council staff and people with knowledge and experience, we can do what is necessary to plan for and prevent climate disruption."*

✖ **Avoid this mythbusting:** *"Acting on climate is not a luxury. If we don't take action on the things that work now, we're condemning our kids to a life of misery. It's pointless to argue about the cost of this stuff if there's no planet for them to live on."*

When people opposed say: *"Council's role on climate change is to give people information to make their own choices. When they remove car parks, restrict what people can do on their properties, or where they can live, that is dictating how we live."*

✔ **Embrace this frame for people open to understanding:** *"People in our council need to do the responsible and challenging work to address the many big problems we are facing — a disrupted climate, housing issues, and transport problems. Addressing the cause of these problems is the necessary and practical thing to do to prepare for our future needs."*

✖ **Avoid this mythbusting:** *"People need to understand that there will be sacrifices and trade-offs as we adapt to climate change. It's just not possible to have everything we want. We need to change now before change is forced on us."*

What about false information?

Be strategic. Where false or misleading information is likely to be used, plan responses that give listeners the compelling narrative and story you know they need alongside the correct information.

If false information is being widely listened to and shared by people open to understanding, try a truth sandwich.

TRUTH SANDWICH

An adaptation by The Workshop of George Lakoff's Truth Sandwich.
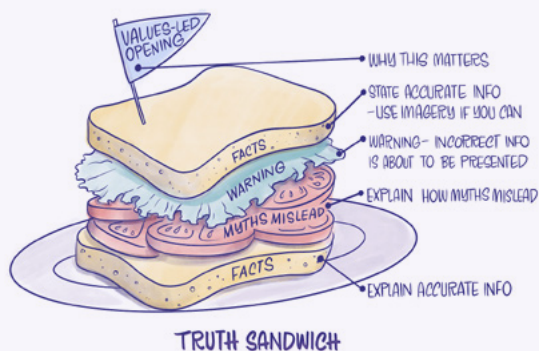
The Workshop variant of the Truth Sandwich involves:

- values-led opening (why this matters)

- facts — state the accurate information (use pictorial depictions where you can)

- warning that incorrect information is about to be presented

- explain how the myth misleads — for example, the logical fallacy[6] it is making

- facts — explain the accurate information as many times as possible to increase exposure. This truth needs to be included as an alternative explanation.

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6   A logical fallacy is the use of invalid or faulty reasoning in making an argument.

When you have a legal obligation to consult with everyone

Central and local government organisations often have a duty to consult with all people impacted by strategic and structural changes. Shifting the focus of your general (not consultation) communications to people open to understanding and persuasion increases the opportunities to hear from people who are most excluded and those not being well engaged by current approaches. This could increase the number of people and range of perspectives you hear from in formal consultation processes.

In formal consultations, it is important to acknowledge what you have heard from all your audiences, including the firmly opposed. However, don't use your storytelling resources to publicly negate an unhelpful narrative.

To learn more about shifting who you focus on, go to .

Recommendation 7: Explain climate disruption and community climate planning in <mark>simple terms</mark>

When we use simple words, frames, and explanatory metaphors to explain complex issues like community planning for climate disruption, we give people a scaffold to build their understanding of this complex issue and create support for the solutions we offer.

Explanations contribute to overcoming unhelpful mindsets and narratives in ways a description of a problem or solution does not. With a good explanation, people are more likely to support the proposed solution.

People need to know how a problem happened and how to solve it — not just that there is one. Just describing a problem or giving people facts about the problem doesn't work to shift people's mindsets. Rather, it can leave a gap in people's understanding that their fast-thinking system can incorrectly fill in.

We can create a better explanation with a structure that works with our fast-thinking brains. The effective explanation structure uses facts as a character in the story rather than facts being the story. A good explanation uses facts to shows people:

- how the problem happened

- what the impact was

- who made it happen and therefore who can create change

- what works better.

A description: *"Climate change will lead to significantly more flooding events across the country in coming decades. We need to be prepared."*

An explanation: *"As more carbon pollution is created from the way we live, work, play, and travel, it traps heat like a blanket, which warms the Earth and disrupts the climate and weather systems. This climate disruption causes more flooding events and droughts. We can plan for these events together in ways that also reduce levels of carbon pollution in the atmosphere. Planning and prevention at the same time is how we prevent climate disruption getting worse."*

The research has shown us we need better explanations as to what community planning is and how people in council are providing opportunities for local communities to bring their knowledge to bear on community climate planning.

How we need to explain climate disruption and community planning in simple terms:

1   **Use helpful explanatory metaphors.**

2   **Use simple language to explain big ideas about climate change.**

3   **Use facts to highlight an explanation instead of describing a problem.**

4   **Show, don't just tell.**

1 Use helpful explanatory metaphors

Trip planning metaphor

In testing, this trip planning explanatory metaphor helped people understand and support the role of the council in climate planning.

Community planning for climate disruption is like preparing for a challenging trip together. It means deciding a destination, figuring out how to get there, and making a feasible plan.

So when we plan as communities, iwi, and hapū for climate disruption, we come together to discuss the future we want and explore solutions that will get us there. We agree what actions are necessary and feasible to protect people and places in our community. We make bold decisions and identify what resources, guidance, and leadership we need from people in council. Together, with people working in council, we put the plan into action.

Like planning a trip together, community planning for climate disruption helps us get where we need to go while making sure everyone is taken care of in a future altered by climate disruption.

In this explanatory metaphor, we explicitly name the people in council as agents of support and change. This is because of what we found in focus groups — a lack of visibility of the council's climate disruption work, the low trust people expressed in the council, and the frustration people expressed about those with more power not being asked to do the work on climate. Naming the people who can make change helps identify responsibility and power. Not naming yourself ignores your power and can undermine trust.

How metaphors deepen understanding[7]

Many studies have investigated how metaphors shape people's thinking and responses to policy solutions, health information, and climate change. A 2011 study at Stanford University looked at how metaphors shape people's responses to police about crime.

People were put into two groups. One group received a report on crime in the city that described crime "as a virus infecting the city". The other group received a report that described it as "a beast preying on a city". They were then asked the best way to solve the crime problems in the city.

The results revealed how influential metaphors are in shaping how people understand a problem and the solutions they reach for — the mindsets that get switched on.

Those people who read about crime as a virus suggested understanding the causes of crime and preventing it through addressing those causes, including overcoming poverty and improving education — much like a vaccination works to prevent a virus taking hold.

Those who read about crime as a beast suggested harsher punishments and enforcement practices.

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7   Thibodeau, Paul, Rose Hendricks, and Lera Boroditsky. 2017. "How Linguistic Metaphor Scaffolds Reasoning." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 21, no.11: 852-863.

Metaphors are very powerful in the mindsets they evoke. Being mindful of those we use and the reasoning they lead to is critical.

Infrastructure of care, connection, and contribution metaphor

The infrastructure metaphor can be used to widen the lens of the work of people in council and to talk about government more generally.

In focus groups, we heard that people struggle to see the vast range of work people in council do to support people to live good lives and care for our environment.

One powerful metaphor to help widen the lens of government work is the infrastructure of care, connection, and contribution metaphor.

What this sounds like:

"At the council, we are building infrastructures of care, connection, and contribution. For example, our climate disruption planning programme enables local communities to fully contribute to deciding how we care for the places we love in the face of climate disruption."

You can read more about frames and narratives that you can use to talk about government in The Workshop's guidance How to talk about government and its work for the long-term public good

2 Use simple language to explain big ideas about climate

Many people don't understand concepts like emissions, adaptation, mitigation, and even climate change. We need to say what we mean by putting those concepts in plain language to build understanding and support.

In testing, we found people open to understanding preferred simpler terms like 'climate pollution' and 'plan and prevent'.

Embrace

Climate disruption.

Plan and prevent.

Disrupted climate.

Climate pollution.

Avoid

Climate damage.

Adapt and mitigate.

Extreme weather.

Climate emissions.

3 **Use facts to highlight an explanation instead of describing a problem**

Climate disruption and the solutions we need is a highly complex area of work. When we see people struggling to understand the complexities or being led astray by incomplete data or false narratives, it is tempting to try and fill people up with a lot of facts. Researchers call this the information deficit model of communication. It isn't effective.

Instead of leading with facts, when we use them as part of providing a better explanation, we can account for the unhelpful mindsets and narratives that people's fast-thinking system may be protecting.

Use facts to explain:

· how the problem happened

· what the impact was

· who made it happen and therefore who can create change

· what works better.

Here is an example of using facts in an explanation about planning for climate disruption:

Tāmaki Makaurau is a land resplendent with water. During the development of the city in the 1950s, many of Auckland's natural streams and waterways were channelled into underground pipes by council and urban planners. This design can only cope with a limited amount of rain and wastewater — it can't absorb the amounts we will get now our climate has been disrupted.

Rampant carbon pollution has trapped heat like a blanket in our atmosphere and warmed the oceans, leading to a disrupted climate and more extreme weather events. A lot more water is one of the effects.

As we experience more extreme weather events more often due to climate disruption, communities like Northcote are experiencing repeated flooding and damage to the places

they care for. Due to the disruption to our climate, experts predict that 20–30% more rain will fall in short timeframes during weather events with nowhere for the water to soak into.

The council is working alongside mana whenua, communities, and urban planners to redesign our city to be more spongy to soak up this extra water. By uncovering our natural waterways and building more wetlands, urban ponds, and green spaces, we can give water space to flow and rise.

We've already seen this spongy city approach work. In the Anniversary Day floods, the newly redesigned spongy Greenslade Reserve accommodated 12 million litres of water that would have otherwise flowed over roads and into homes.

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4 Show, don't just tell

When we show examples of community and civic action as opposed to just telling people about them, we make concrete what is abstract.

When we show people in council already taking action on the things people find hard to see or express scepticism about, we build trust that people in government are doing what they say.

Show people successful community planning examples in concrete and specific terms using plain language and **highlighting the collective and joint decision-making aspects**.
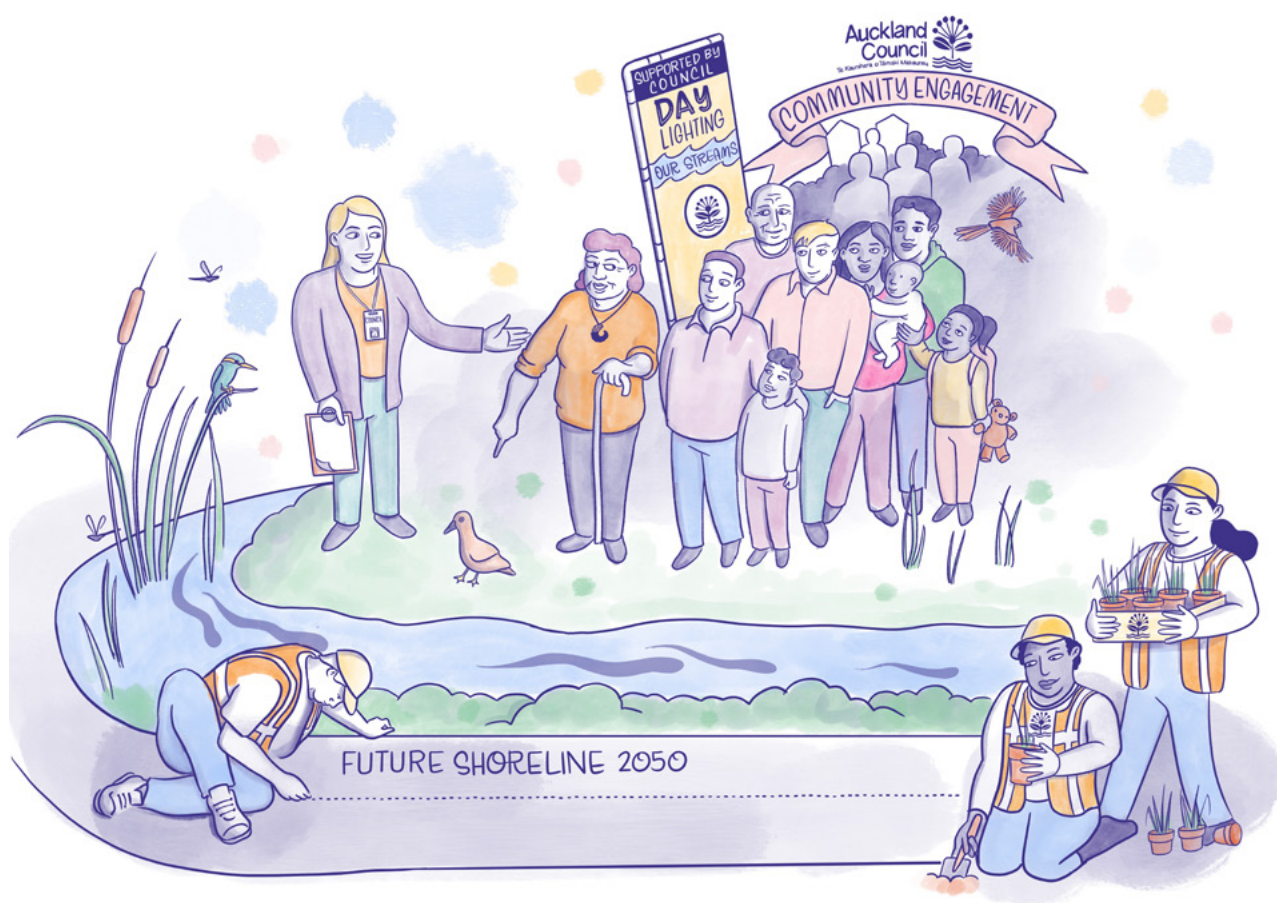
Wellington City Council group rides

Wellington City Council hosted college students (and other community members) for guided group rides of new cycling paths. It used the group rides as a way of inviting young people into an issue that impacts them. By showing people the opportunities the new infrastructure offers, it enabled people who wouldn't usually ride to experience the benefits of safe and comfortable cycleways. It then used extensive storytelling to broaden the reach of the experience as seen through the eyes of young citizens.

Licence to ride, with Wellington High

"What's the most important thing? Is it parking, or the environment?"

The question is raised by one of the teens from Wellington High School, Fern, after a class trip along Wellington's newest stretch of bike lane from the Basin Reserve to the waterfront.

Fern's concern echoes those of many young Wellingtonians. Decisions made now will affect these young people for longer than most other Wellington residents, and their outlook is often longer term as well.

But it takes a different approach to get young people to speak up on the shape of their city, which is why we're here.

Group rides along the city's growing bike network is one of the ways Wellington City Council supports Wellingtonians to try out some of the transport changes going on around the city.

The experience lets people who may not have a bike or might otherwise not have tried the routes to see what they're like and tell city planners what they think.

Recommendation 8: Explain that it is <mark>wise to choose protections that also prevent</mark> worsening climate disruption

When we talk about what is wise and sensible, we can help people understand the importance of planning in ways that prevent further climate disruption. This helps overcome unhelpful and fatalistic narratives about it being sensible to accept the worst.

People are exposed to a set of unhelpful narratives suggesting that we should only focus on planning for the worst and abandon prevention efforts. When combined with flooding events and experiences and emergency preparedness language, it is difficult for people to think and reason about the need for preventing further climate disruption. There are ways we can switch people to their more helpful thinking about preventing worsening climate disruption.

Use the values of wisdom and pragmatism

"Preventing more climate disruption while responding to the disruption we cannot prevent is the wise and sensible thing to do."

Provide concrete examples

"When we rebuild our transport infrastructure after big flooding and climate events, we can design infrastructure that prevents worsening climate disruption — infrastructure that supports transport that does not release carbon pollution, like bike paths, footpaths, trains, and shipping."

Use helpful metaphors

"When we prioritise preventing further climate disruption in our community planning, the **foundations we lay** for responding to serious events will stop things from getting worse."

"By redesigning our cities to be **spongy**, with more green spaces and trees, we can be prepared for the additional water we know to expect. Planting more trees and having more green spaces also helps us prevent future climate disruption by reabsorbing carbon pollution already trapped in the atmosphere."

Embrace
Plan and prevent.

Avoid
Mitigate and adapt.

"Spongy city" metaphor

In this *NZ Herald* story, Jamie Morton uses the spongy city metaphor to describe work done as part of the Te Ara Awataha greenway project, which designed spaces to work with water rather than channelling it away.

Read the story on the *NZ Herald* website

Recommendation 9: Put local government into stories about climate action

By putting local and central government processes into a recognisable story structure that includes barriers and explanations and solutions, we give people a sense of what the council is doing to plan for the big stuff we all care about.

Part of a good explanation includes naming the people who can make change. This helps identify responsibility and power, sometimes called agency. By naming people with agency, we show that humans made the problem and humans can fix the problem. If you or your organisation are the ones able to make the change, name yourself or have your allies do it. Not naming yourself ignores your power and can undermine trust.

People in our focus groups were clear — and at times positive — about the responsibility of people in the government, local and national, to take climate action. That is an opportunity to name yourselves and the action you are taking.

People also wanted to be involved in any local planning, recognising their local knowledge is valuable.

For disabled people especially, it was critical that their expertise about climate planning was recognised and sought out. Again, this is an opportunity to talk about and show how you are planning together.

However, at this point many people feel let down by people in government. In focus groups, they expressed low trust they would be involved, especially those who have many experiences of being excluded or asked but not listened to — for example, disabled, Māori, and Pacific communities. It led to fatalistic thinking and a withdrawal from civic and democratic activity, including the sort needed for climate planning.

We say you think

When you say, "People need to take responsibility to plan as individuals for climate disruption", they think, "Well what about the council? What are they doing?" What about the leaky pipes on that council land over the road?"

Trust and a sense of confidence in local government can be built and maintained

Instead of naming what people and communities should do or have not done, **put yourself into a simple story structure in terms of the barriers and solutions**. Don't shy away from naming prior negative experiences people have had with the council or government. It creates an opening for a new story about infrastructure, programmes, and plans that shift the conversation onto more productive ground.

You could explain about lack of resources, a failure to engage people in ways that work for them, or having a lack of information to date. Once you name and explain the barrier, move swiftly to the action you are taking to right this problem.

Putting the barrier and solution in the story structure

◈ Value

"Across our communities, most of us want being cared for and caring for each other to come first in everything we do, including planning for climate disruption."

⌄

◈ Barrier

"However, communities we are part of and serve have not had everything needed from the council to make caring for everyone during climate events a reality."

⌄

◈ Explanation

"Our planning processes have not worked well for all people — for example, disabled people and their expertise and needs have been left out."

⌄

◈ Solution

"People in council support community climate planning that takes care of everyone. We are providing funds for communities already under pressure and empowering our communities to decide themselves where the funds should go when making climate plans."

⌄

◈ Vision or values

"Tāmaki Makaurau can be a city where our climate planning draws on the strengths and knowledge of all our communities and thrives in caring for all our communities."

Value
⌄
Barrier
⌄
Explanation
⌄
Solution
⌄
Vision
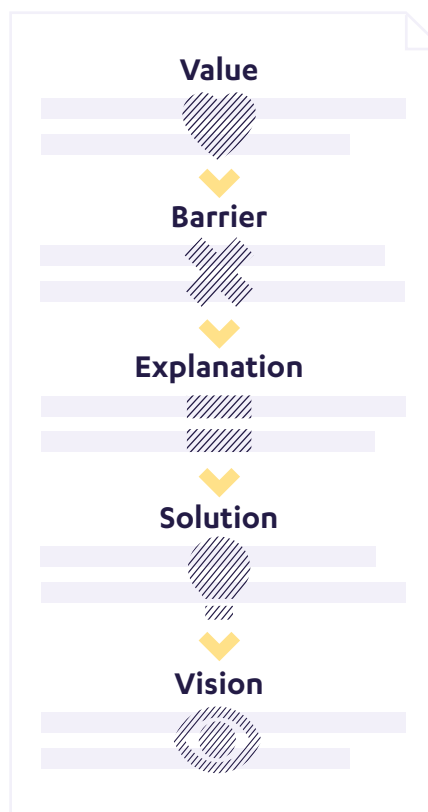
Recommendation 10: Build a collective 'we' on community planning climate action

When people who share goals come together to use narratives and frames that work, we can have greater impact on shifting mindsets and narratives

For mindsets to shift we need to work together to turn up the volume of the helpful narratives by telling as many stories as possible that use the frames, words, and images of the helpful narratives, making it stronger.

Creating a collective approach takes time, commitment, and consistency between people who have shared goals.

You don't need to be all working on the same solutions to take a collective approach. Instead, focus on the common ground you have — what you want people to understand and think about the issue and the unhelpful narratives you want to overcome so that the different solutions across the collective can be supported.

How to take a collective approach

Identify who shares your larger goals and vision

Build and strengthen relationships

Talk about shared barriers to overcome and the range of solutions that you're working towards

Explore the unhelpful narratives and mindsets together, identify the thinking and reasoning you all want people to have about your issue

Decide the best helpful narratives you are all comfortable with, and share a selection of values frames, terms, and metaphors that support those narratives

Implement the narratives in your individual stories and communications and shared campaigns

Continue to work together over time as a community of practice to feed back and continue to develop the narrative approach

Messages to embrace and replace

Embrace tested messages that work to deepen understanding and build support for community planning for climate disruption.

6
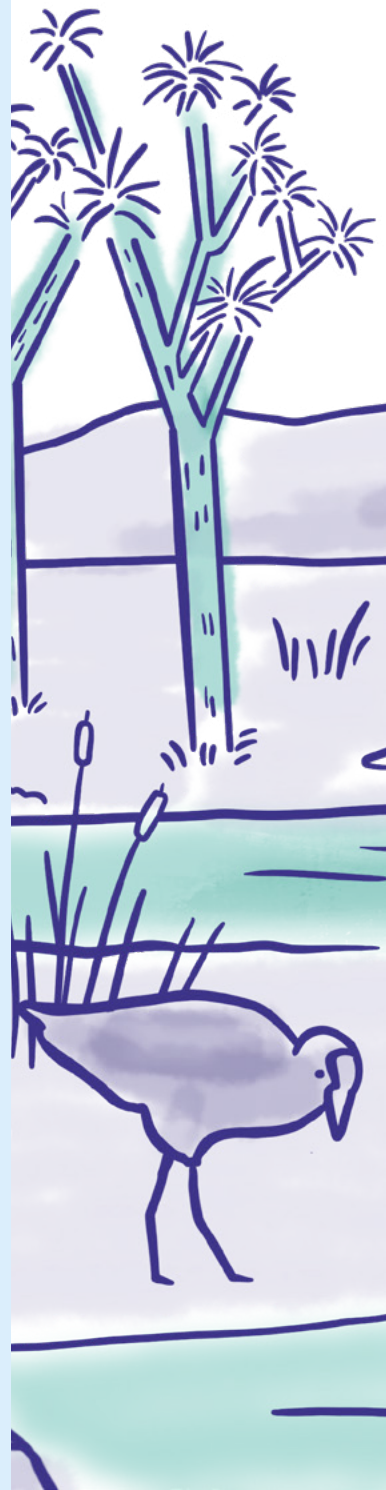
Putting tested messages into an effective story structure makes your stories easier to hear, understand and share.
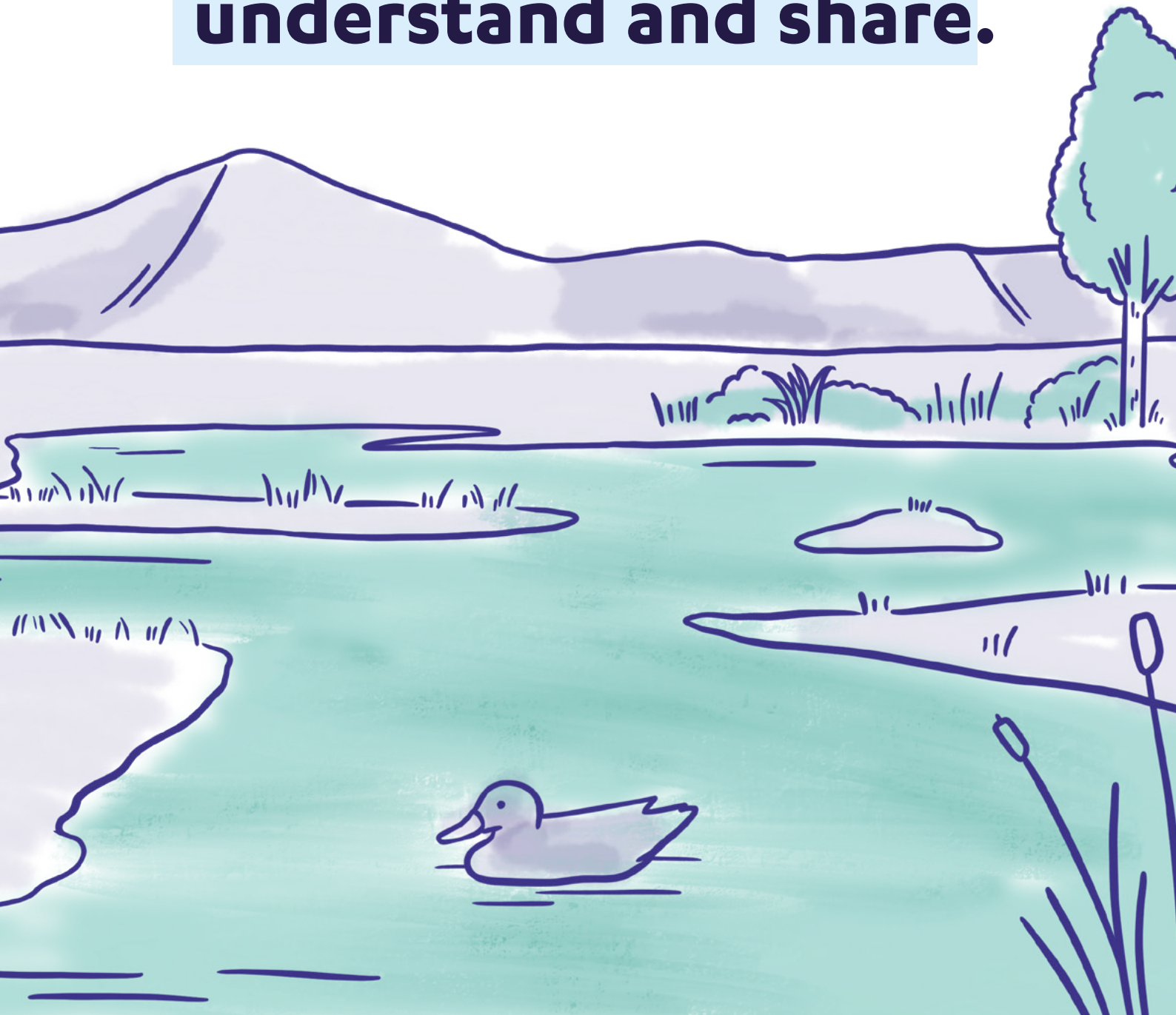
In the survey, we tested four longer messages using the frames we thought would be most effective. All these messages performed well with people on measures that included:

1 **Agreement with council doing everything it can to help prevent further climate changes.**

2 **Belief that they are able to participate in collective climate action.**

3 **Intention to take part in collective climate action.**

4 **Understanding that collective action can be impactful against climate change.**

Each longer message follows our recommended story structure:
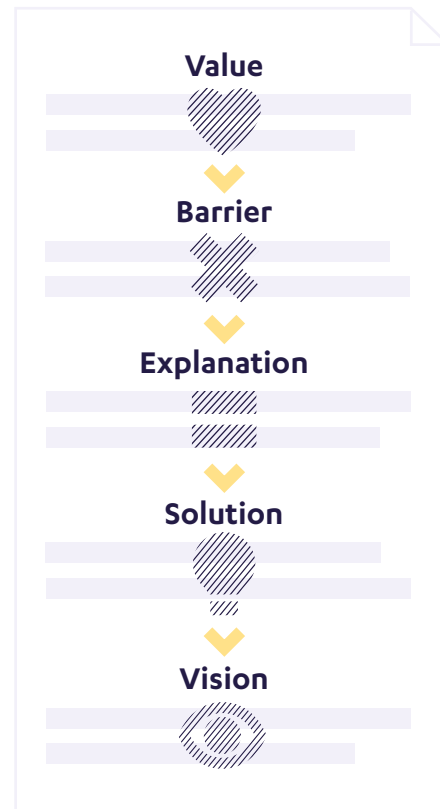
"Imagine the people we can be, the lives we can live"

Imagine the people we can be, the lives we can live uses the opportunity and better life narrative, which is a counter to fatalism framing and narratives about climate planning and action. It uses self-direction (choosing own goals) values and a journey explanatory metaphor to explain the role of council. It positions the council as the mechanism that can help communities achieve their goals. The messenger for this statement was the head of community climate planning for Auckland Council.

Leading with self direction values

Pragmatism values

Barrier

Naming council as agent

Explaining civic and community action as a solution

Council naming itself as agent of change

Journey planning metaphor

"Imagine the lives we can live when our communities take the bold climate actions we need. We will have clean air to breathe, plentiful green space, clear waterways, and peaceful streets open to riding, walking, and public transport where and when we need it. We know it is necessary and doable to create this future.

However, many communities, including those we are members of, don't yet have access to the resources they need to make this future a reality.

So as we plan for a climate-disrupted future, we are providing more resources for community climate planning and empowering communities to decide who needs the funds. We will help communities understand the impacts of different climate solutions and support shared decision making with processes such as citizen juries.

We all face a climate-disrupted future. Better lives for everyone are possible through bold community climate planning. As people in council, we will walk alongside our communities as we make it happen."

Clearly articulated benefits and opportunities named

Council naming themselves as agents of change

Self-direction values

Reminder of the shared opportunity and vision

After reading this message, 82% of people open to understanding agreed that "council should do everything it can to help prevent further climate change". We saw a particularly strong response to this message in terms of agreement that collective action can be impactful against climate change (efficacy).

Efficacy	87%
Capability	68%
Intentions	61%

Proportion of sample with a scale score above neutral

Legend:
- Belief that collective action can be impactful against climate disruption
- Belief in own ability to participate in collective climate planning
- Intend to take part in climate planning
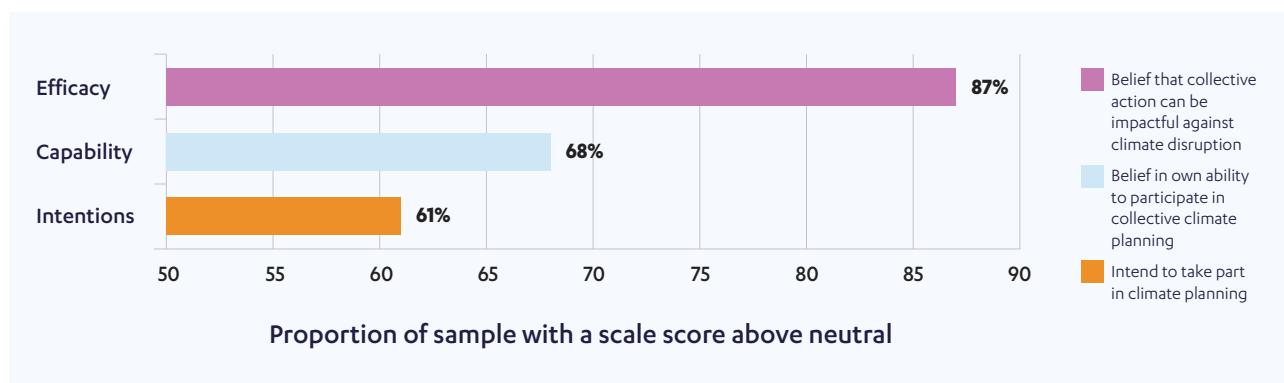
Figure 5. Beliefs about self and collective climate action after reading the imagine the people we can be, the lives we can live message

"There are solutions we can all be part of"

This message surfaces a public good and better together narrative, which can counter us versus them mindsets and narratives. It uses universalism — values of equal opportunity for all people no matter their background. The messenger was a community member who recently received support from Auckland Council.

Universalism value – meeting the needs of all communities

Explains the barrier

Naming the agent for change

Frames the strength of all community members

Universalism values

Puts council in the story as an agent of change

> "Imagine a future where being cared for and caring for each other comes first in everything we do, including planning for climate disruption.
>
> We are all feeling the impacts and stress of a disrupted climate, but for people who are already under pressure, severe weather events are an extra burden. Disabled people, the elderly, those on low incomes, and people with young children need to be supported so they also live good lives in a future altered by a disrupted climate.
>
> People in the council support community climate planning that takes care of everyone. They are doing so by providing funds for communities already under pressure; empowering our communities to decide themselves where the funds should go when making climate plans. Making sure that our city's climate planning draws on all communities' strengths and knowledge.
>
> A solid community plan and response to a disrupted climate means all our communities are protected during and after a crisis. For people in council, that means making sure all our communities are cared for before we face climate-related disasters and events."

Universalism values – showing everyone having the opportunity to live a good life

Universalism values

Explains civic and community action as a solution

Universalism values

After reading this message, 79% of people open to understanding agreed that "council should do everything it can to help prevent further climate change". We observed high levels of belief in the ability to participate in collective climate action, intention to take part, and that it is impactful.

Efficacy — 80% — Belief that collective action can be impactful against climate disruption

Capability — 74% — Belief in own ability to participate in collective climate planning

Intentions — 68% — Intend to take part in climate planning

Proportion of sample with a scale score above neutral
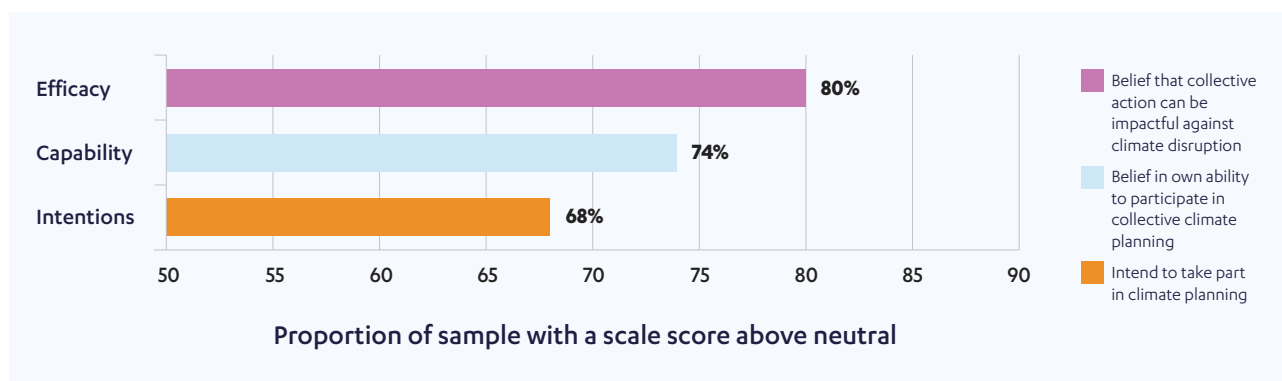
Figure 6. Beliefs about self and collective climate action after reading the there are solutions we can all be part of message

"Care for the land and the land cares for us"

This message was delivered by a community member. It is an example of a harmony/kaitiakitanga narrative, conveying the idea that, if we care for the land, the land cares for us. It draws on the explanatory metaphor of overloaded and related terms like 'unburden' and 'lift the load'. The message incorporates the preferred term 'climate pollution'.

Interconnection values

Most of us know living in harmony with nature is essential to our life on Earth. We can have a future where all people thrive if we protect and care for the natural systems that support us.

Universalism values – harmony with nature

Harmony/ Kaitiakitanga narrative

Explains the barrier

However, the way we have designed many food, transport, building, and economic systems has overloaded our natural systems. The carbon pollution we continue to produce has damaged and permanently disrupted our climate system.

Simple term instead of technical term

We can't reverse all the harm. However, we can unburden these natural systems and prevent more damage by centring the care and repair of these natural systems in our planning for climate disruption.

Overloaded metaphor

Harmony/ Kaitiakitanga narrative

Naming agent of change

People at council are supporting our communities to plan for and prevent more climate damage. We are working to help communities understand how nature-based solutions to climate disruption will work. We are supporting leadership from mana whenua who have expertise in living in harmony with natural systems.

Names a solution

Harmony/ Kaitiakitanga narrative

Overloaded metaphor

As we plan for climate disruption, we can lift the load on our natural systems and put care for nature at the heart of our plans.

Universalism values

After reading this message, 85% of people open to understanding agreed that "council should do everything it can to help prevent further climate change". The figure below shows beliefs about self and collective action after exposure to the message.

	Proportion of sample with a scale score above neutral
Efficacy	83%
Capability	74%
Intentions	70%

Belief that collective action can be impactful against climate disruption

Belief in own ability to participate in collective climate planning

Intend to take part in climate planning

Figure 7. Beliefs about self and collective climate action after reading the care for the land and the land cares for us message

"We are planning for the big stuff"

This message deploys a pragmatism and responsibility narrative about taking pragmatic steps to prepare for upcoming weather-related challenges. It starts with a short vision and frames values of responsibility and dependability. The messenger was the head of community climate planning for Auckland Council.

Pragmatism and responsibility narrative

"Imagine the better future we could all have if we choose the bold and necessary solutions to the big challenges we all face — including a disrupted climate. Planning for the big stuff is the responsible thing to do and one that most of our communities want us to do.

Responsibility values to emphasise the narrative

Explains the barrier and problem

As severe weather events happen more often and we plan for a disrupted climate, the communities we are part of and serve don't have everything needed to make these bold and sensible solutions a reality.

Naming Council as the agent of change

That is why we are supporting our communities to plan for climate disruption in ways that work best for them.

Pragmatism and self direction values

Explaining civic and collective action as the solution

We are providing resources for community climate planning and empowering communities to decide who needs the funds. We will help communities understand the impacts of different climate solutions and support shared decision making with processes such as citizen juries.

Pragmatism and responsibility narrative

Preparing sensibly and responsibly for a disrupted climate means long-term solutions that prevent further harm to our communities while improving our lives now. We will support our communities to do so."

Council naming their role in change

After reading this message, 83% of people open to persuasion agreed that "council should do everything it can to help prevent further climate change". The figure below shows beliefs about self and collective action after exposure to the message.
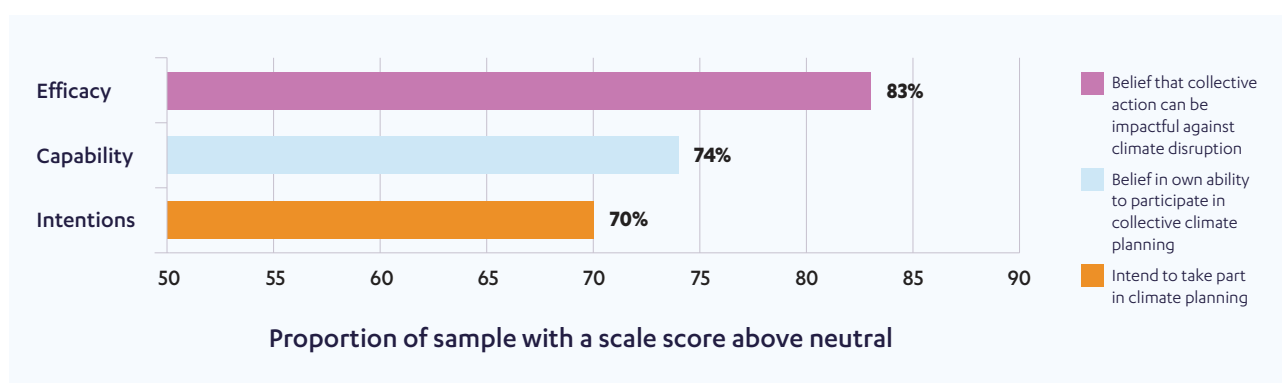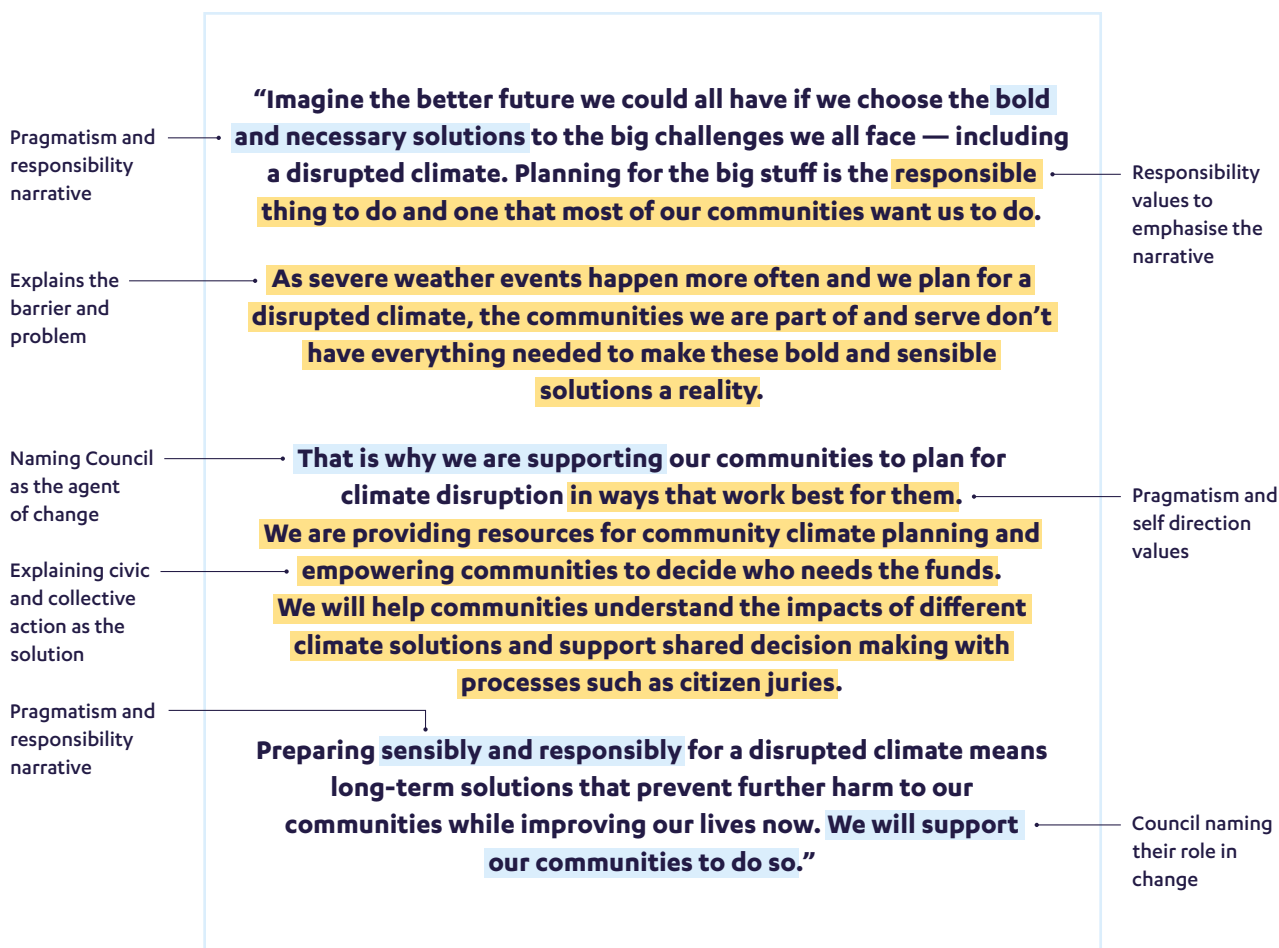

Efficacy	84%
Capability	74%
Intentions	72%

Proportion of sample with a scale score above neutral

Belief that collective action can be impactful against climate disruption

Belief in own ability to participate in collective climate planning

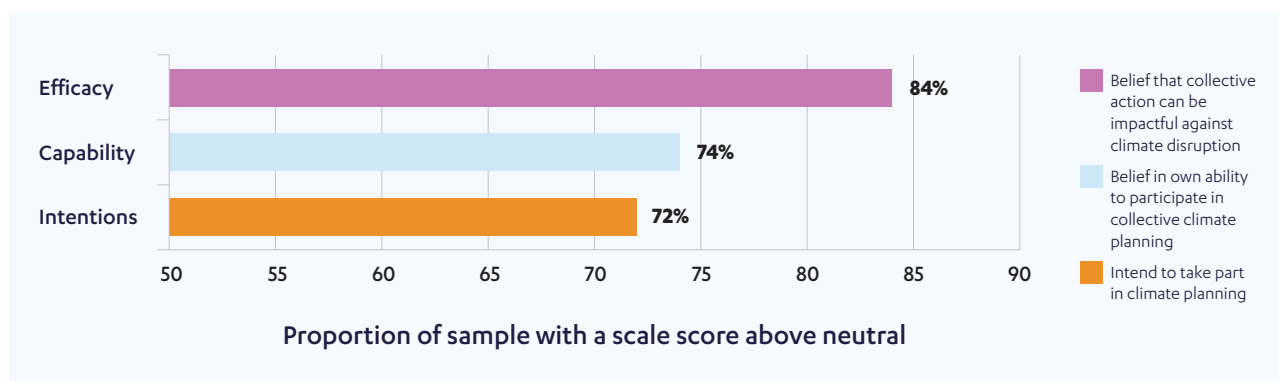Intend to take part in climate planning

Figure 8. Beliefs about self and collective climate action after reading the we are planning for the big stuff message