



Resilient Coasts:

A values-based approach to coastal adaptation

Community Brief

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Land acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge that some of the learning, discussions, and activities of this project are taking place on the traditional and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, part of the Anishinaabe Nation. This territory is governed by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, a treaty between Indigenous Nations to share and care for the lands and waters around the Great Lakes.

Our project also takes place on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlíl̓wətał (Tsleil-Waututh), s̓cəwəθən məsteyəxʷ (Tsawwassen), and SEMYOME (Semiahmoo) Nations. The coastal area our research engages has always been a place of learning for the Coast Salish Peoples, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions in this region.

We are grateful to be doing this work across these territories and commit to building relationships grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

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Executive Summary

— EXECUTIVE SUMMARY —

Climate change adaptation is not only about technical solutions or infrastructure—it must align with what truly matters to people and communities. A values-based approach (VBA) to adaptation offers a holistic way of understanding what communities prioritize and need, during decision-making processes. Many climate adaptation efforts fail because they do not reflect the values, needs, or lived experiences of the communities they aim to support. By focusing on values, a VBA supports the creation of climate solutions that are sustainable, fair, and grounded in local realities. The VBA process involves six practical steps developed from both academic research and real-world experiences.



1.1 What is a Values-Based Approach?



A VBA is a process that considers a range of values that individuals and communities hold when navigating adaptation solutions. These values often fall into two groups:

- Tangible values, which tend to be easier to quantify and measure (i.e., economic priorities, critical infrastructure, food security, disaster resilience), and
- Intangible values, which tend to emerge from lived-experiences and can be harder to measure (i.e., physical and mental well-being, social connectedness, cultural and spiritual practices, environmental knowledge).

It is also important to recognize that overlapping and interconnecting values span both tangible and intangible groups. For example, food security is considered a tangible value, however, access to cultural and local food sources begins to blend into intangible values such as cultural practices. Recognizing these differences can help highlight the variety of perspectives, strengths, and priorities within and across communities. Moving forward, the term ‘values’ will encompass both tangible and intangible values, while also capturing the nuances between them.



Background

— BACKGROUND —

2.1 Why a Values-Based Approach is Needed

As values influence how people perceive risks, prioritize actions, and make decisions (Reid et al., 2014) adopting a VBA can inform adaptation solutions that foster greater social acceptance, transparency, and inclusivity (Seekamp et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2018). Conventional climate adaptation often only prioritizes tangible values (i.e., technical efficiency and economic gain), while overlooking the intangible values (i.e., social, cultural, and spiritual priorities) that shape how communities experience and respond to climate change. Without considering a range of values, adaptation strategies risk being ineffective, socially dividing, or even harmful to those they intend to support.



By capturing values, adaptation planning and decision-making can reflect local priorities, needs, and strengths.

A VBA offers an opportunity for multiple knowledge systems to be integrated, including insights from local communities, lived experiences, and assessments (i.e. risks, cost-benefit). This results in a richer understanding of place-based climate risks and skills that can generate effective and culturally sensitive adaptation solutions.

2.2 How to Integrate a Values-Based Approach in Practice

Embedding values into adaptation processes involves turning community priorities and strengths into actionable steps that guide each phase of an adaptation cycle (i.e., decision-making, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation). As illustrated within the values-framework by Charlene Sanjenko, reGen Impact Media (seen in Appendix D), this requires respectful relationships and building trust with those most impacted. This process is not linear but iterative and dynamic, evolving as new information, skills, and perspectives emerge. Meaningful engagement and decision-support tools help practitioners and community leaders develop adaptation strategies that reflect shared values while addressing technical and environmental realities. Appendix B offers a starting point for engaging communities, while the case studies throughout this document connect real-world applications to parts of the VBA framework. Each step in the process reinforces the role of shared values in decision-making and long-term resilience.

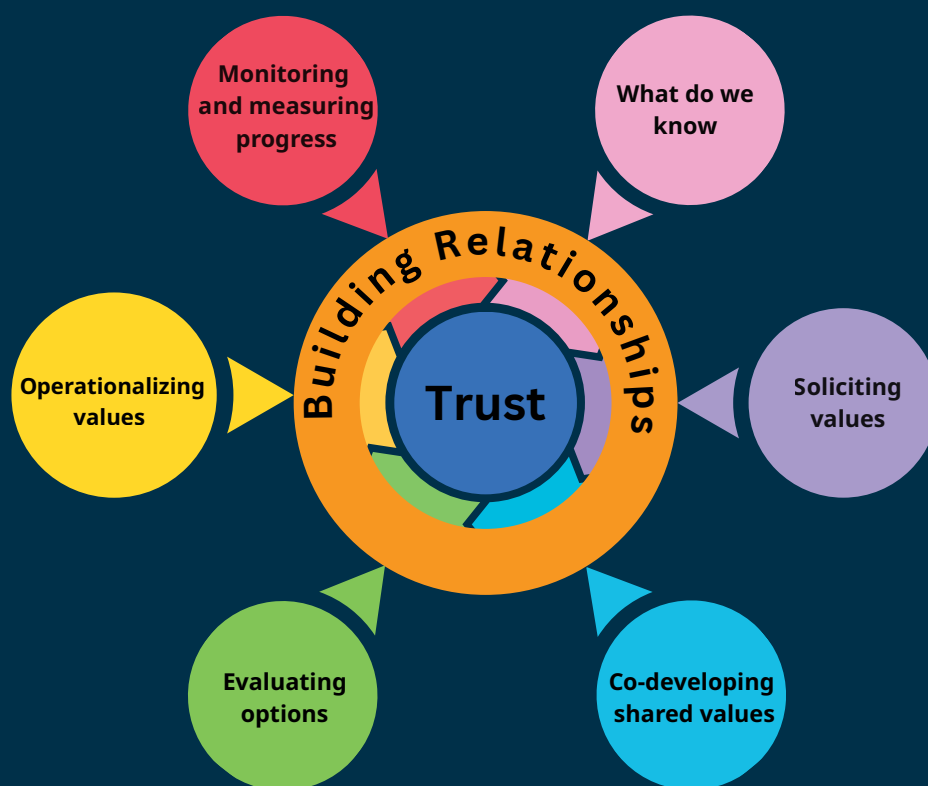


Figure 1: Visual representation of proposed values-based approach (VBA) to climate adaptation processes.¹

¹ This proposed process builds on Reid et al. (2014)'s framework, which aligns with the existing decision-making structure in the Province of B.C. The framework is adapted based on the local knowledge and input of the Gitga'aat Nation, addressing the specific climate change impacts affecting the community's daily life. The nuances and context of Reid et al. (2014)'s framework are inseparable from the lived experiences of the Gitga'aat Nation. Therefore, only the process and methodological approach is applied here, to ensure the nuances and lived experiences remain grounded in local context.

The objectives of a values-based process are:

- Understand community values, culture, and needs to guide decision-making;
- Recognize that values are inherently political and linked to power dynamics;
- Account for comprehensive dimensions of climate change;
- Use qualitative and constructed indicators to assess impact and progress; and
- Ensure approaches are place-specific and grounded in local context.



While going through the VBA process, it may be helpful to reflect on the 6W approach, as a way to critically assess adaptation decisions and their implications. By systematically asking these questions, decision-makers can uncover who is impacted, what actions are taken, where they occur, when they are implemented, and why they are prioritized. This approach helps identify power dynamics, trade-offs, and potential unintended consequences, making it a valuable tool for inclusive and well-informed adaptation planning.

Check out Appendix C for the rundown of the 6W questions.

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Values-Based Approach

— VALUES-BASED APPROACH —

3.1 Build Relationships

Before starting any work on flood adaptation, it is important that all efforts and work are grounded within trust and mutually beneficial relationships. This is especially important when working with equity-denied populations to honour their lived experiences, establish a shared baseline of knowledge, and to mitigate hierarchical power imbalances.

Good relationships look different in every community, but several key principles matter:

- Listen first, avoiding pre-made solutions.
- Acknowledge community history, as past experiences shape present approaches to change.
- Recognize community expertise, emphasizing the skills and knowledge they bring.
- Recognize and respect the Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights Indigenous communities hold.
- Identify roles and responsibilities for all involved, attempting to dismantle colonial power relations and historical injustices.

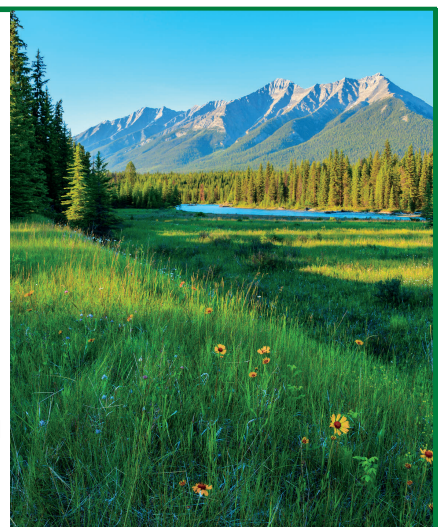
Remember that building trust takes time, but it's essential for creating flood solutions that work for all human and more-than-human communities.



3.1.1 CASE STUDY: Central Kootenay

Regional District of Central Kootenay: Whittaker et al., (2018). Building Relationships And Cultivating Social License: A Guide For Small Tenure Holders In BC. BCCFA. Read article [HERE](#).

The **Regional District of Central Kootenay** case study shows how building trust is key to strong, long-term partnerships. While the focus is on wildfire prevention, the lessons go beyond the scope of a singular hazard. Trust—what they call social license—comes from being open and honest, respecting different perspectives, and recognizing that success can look different for everyone. The case study also highlights the



importance of *place-based relationships*, meaning there's no one-size-fits-all way to build trust, especially when working with Indigenous communities and local communities.

Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

Recognizing and respecting the Titles, Rights, and Treaty Rights Indigenous communities hold	<u>2022 BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan</u>
How to ground reconciliation within climate research	<u>2020 Calls to Action to Research Scientists</u>
Guide on how to engage with communities	<u>How to engage stakeholders for powerful and inclusive climate action planning.</u>
Importance of community-driven or led action	<u>Why community engagement is essential to climate adaptation and resilience</u>
Guide on how to build meaningful relationships	<u>Beyond Conservation: Building Relationships for Collaboration – Part 1</u>

3.2 Centering Community and Place-Based Knowledge



Flood risks and their impacts are unique to each community. It is vital to understand these risks by grounding discussions and adaptation efforts in community and place-based knowledge and strengths. Communities often hold rich insights into historical flood patterns, lived experiences, and skills that can significantly amplify adaptation solutions. It is pivotal that this step in the VBA process is done in tandem with and/or led by communities, to ensure the solution is locally relevant and truly beneficial for the community.

To properly honor and use this local wisdom, here are some key principles:

- Recognize community strengths, knowledge, and capabilities in adapting to flood risks.
- Let communities lead in identifying flood-prone areas and historical flood patterns.
- Communicate risks, hazards, vulnerabilities and understand how flood risks will impact individuals, groups, communities, sectors, and organizations.
- Pursue multi-benefit solutions that address broader community needs alongside flood protection.
- Use creative engagement tools like storytelling or arts-based methods to gather flood-related insights.

Remember that the most effective solutions emerge when local wisdom guides the process. This isn't just about gathering information – it's about putting community knowledge and context at the center of every decision.

3.2.1 CASE STUDY: Swinomish Tribal Community

Swinomish Tribal Community: Donatuto, J., Campbell, L., & Trousdale, W. (2020). The “value” of values-driven data in identifying Indigenous health and climate change priorities. *Climatic Change*, 158(2), 161–180. Read article [HERE](#).



The **Swinomish Tribal Community** case study shows how Indigenous knowledge and priorities can be woven into systems or frameworks that usually rely on Western science. By working closely with a community advisory board, the project created the Swinomish Indigenous Health Indicators—a set of measures that reflect what matters most to the Swinomish people. These indicators help better understand and address health challenges, especially as the climate changes, ensuring that the community's values and priorities guide the decision-making process.

Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

The role and impact sacred sites and place play in Indigenous Knowledge - Beyond Conservation	<i>Working Respectfully with Indigenous People and Their Knowledge Systems</i>
How to conduct a community needs assessment	<i>How to do a city needs assessment to inform climate action planning</i>
Toolkit on integrating communities into research	<i>Community Guide to becoming involved in research</i>

3.3 Uncovering Values



Climate change is experienced and understood differently across cultures, communities, and individuals (O'Brien and Wolf, 2010). These differences can lead to tensions or conflicts, often rooted in values. Moreover, values are inherently political and linked to power dynamics, posing risk of further suppressing and overlooking

community voices. Engaging with diverse individuals, groups, sectors, and organizations provides an opportunity to map out distinct value systems and their connections to place. Bringing these perspectives together fosters shared learning, deepening understanding of different worldviews and creating space for more inclusive and informed adaptation strategies.

Exposure to diverse perspectives not only enhances collaboration but also strengthens the capacity to navigate complex adaptation challenges.

Key principles for uncovering these values:

- Be mindful of whose values are being centred and prioritized.
- Create safe spaces for all partners to express perspectives.
- Set clear guidelines ensuring all voices are respected.
- Understand relationships with flood-prone land and waters within project areas.

Remember that there's no single "right way" to elicit values. The process should be as diverse as the communities involved.

3.3.1 CASE STUDY: City of Surrey

City of Surrey: City of Surrey. (2016). CFAS Stakeholder Engagement Framework. Internal Document. Read article [HERE](#).

The **City of Surrey's Engagement Framework** outlines different ways to understand what matters most to partners and communities. Whether through open houses, project webpages, ESRI Story Maps, or outreach stations, there are many creative and inclusive ways to engage people. The framework also emphasizes key Engagement Principles, including the importance of two-way communication, respectful partnerships, and balance. Finding balance is especially important when navigating diverse—and sometimes conflicting—perspectives, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in the process.



Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

Establishing values and principles for working together	<u><i>Establishing Values And Principles For Working Together</i></u>
Discourse-based valuation	<u><i>2002 Discourse-based valuation of ecosystem services: establishing fair outcomes through group deliberation</i></u>
How to name values directly	<u><i>Living Into Our Values</i></u>

3.4 Co-Developing Shared Values



Establishing a path forward requires ensuring that all values are respected while identifying areas of common ground among partners. The process of co-developing shared values will vary depending on the intended outcomes. If the goal is to achieve consensus and unity in understanding, the approach will differ from one that allows diverse values and understandings to coexist. Navigating when consensus is necessary and when it is more beneficial to uphold multiple perspectives should be guided by the communities and partners directly affected by the adaptation solutions.

Key principles for this process:

- Let communities decide whether consensus or diversity is preferred.
- Reflect on whose values are being centred and prioritized.

- Define shared values to guide flood adaptation solutions.
- Encourage mutual learning from different worldviews.
- Remain flexible about what shared values mean for each project.

Remember that bringing diverse values together isn't just about finding agreement – it's about creating richer, more inclusive solutions that work for everyone involved.

3.4.1 CASE STUDY: Gitga'at Nation

Gitga'at Nation: Reid, M. G., Hamilton, C., Reid, S. K., Trousdale, W., Hill, C., Turner, N., Picard, C. R., Lamontagne, C., & Matthews, H. D. (2014). Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation Planning Using a Values-Focused Approach: A Case Study with the Gitga'at Nation. *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 34(3), 401–424. Read article [HERE](#).



Reid et al.'s (2014) study demonstrates the importance of integrating and pursuing values-based adaptation planning. They demonstrate one approach on how to uncover community values, and how these values are then embedded and woven into adaptation planning and actions. The findings show that embedding community values in adaptation efforts can help avoid common challenges, like a lack of local support, making the planning process more effective and meaningful.

Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

Values and shared learning	<i><u>Enabling co-creation: From learning cycles to aligning values, rules and knowledge</u></i>
Pebble distribution method	<i><u>Exploring biological diversity, Exploring biological diversity, Exploring biological diversity, environment and local people's environment and local people's environment and local people's perspectives in forest landscapes</u></i>

Navigating community values	<u><i>Loving the mess: navigating diversity and conflict in social values for sustainability</i></u>
Operationalizing team values	<u><i>Step-by-Step Process for Groups and Teams</i></u>

3.5 Evaluating Adaptation Options



Values shape what is considered relevant, important, and worth prioritizing. They shape how decisions are made by influencing what solutions seem beneficial and meaningful to the community. Aligning values within adaptation solutions also contributes to greater community support and more successful implementation.

By placing values at the core of decision-making, communities can select adaptation solutions that are uniquely tailored and align with their priorities, strengths, needs, and contribute to long-term resilience.

Aligning values within adaptation solutions also contributes to greater community support and more successful implementation.

Key principles for narrowing options:

- Prioritize multi-benefit options that meet various community needs while addressing flood risks.
- What options are capturing both tangible and intangible dimensions of climate impacts.
- Engage all partners to rank flood adaptation solutions based on shared values.
- Clarify decision-making power in selecting solutions.
- Explore innovative decision-making approaches.
- Focus on resilience and adaptive capacity to flooding.



Remember that the “best” technical solution isn't always the right one – success depends on how well it fits with community values and priorities.

3.6.1 CASE STUDY: Prince Edward Island (PEI)

Prince Edward Island: Novaczek, I., MacFadyen, J., Bardati, D., & MacEachern, K. (2011). Social and cultural values mapping as a decision-support tool for climate change adaptation. The Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island: Charlottetown, PE, Canada. Read article [HERE](#).

The **PEI case study** highlights how GIS mapping can serve as a powerful decision-support tool for planning and prioritizing adaptation strategies. By using a values-based mapping approach, the maps capture place-based values, showing why certain areas are important to communities and should be prioritized for adaptation and protection. Additionally, the collaborative mapping process helps build trust and strengthen governance by ensuring that local knowledge and values are recognized, fostering greater community engagement in climate adaptation efforts.



Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

Indigenous Knowledge lens to climate adaptation - Factsheet	<i>Applying an Indigenous inclusion lens to climate adaptation</i>
How values shape climate action	<i>From values to climate action</i>

3.6 Integrate Values into Implementation



Values and social acceptance go hand-in-hand with one another. Values shape what is considered relevant and important to communities. Social acceptance is the element of gaining positive response and buy-in for a climate solution. Adaptation solutions that align with community values will be more likely to be accepted and supported, in comparison to solutions that do not consider the value-systems at hand. Social acceptance is an important factor to foster, as it can either catalyze or deter implementation of adaptation efforts.

Good implementation strategies will vary, but several key principles can guide this process:

- Include all partners in implementation discussions.
- Ensure ongoing collaboration and adaptability to emerging flood risks.
- Anticipate and address barriers such as funding, awareness, and political will.
- Adopt creative tools to sustain momentum.

Transitioning from theory to practice is not just about overcoming obstacles—it's about building trust, securing long-term commitment, and creating a shared sense of ownership for solutions that work for everyone.

3.5.1 CASE STUDY: Fraser River



Fraser River: First Nations Fisheries Legacy Fund & the Centre for Indigenous Fisheries. (2024). Biocultural Indicator Manual. A Guide for the Development & Implementation of Biocultural Indicator Frameworks.

Developing a biocultural indicator framework aimed to bring together Indigenous knowledge and Western science, to better manage fish and freshwater resources. Co-designed with the ᑕᑭᑕᑦᑭᑦ (Katzie), ᑕᑭᑕᑦᑭᑦ (Kwantlen), ᑕᑭᑕᑦᑭᑦ (Kwikwetlem), ᑕᑭᑕᑦᑭᑦ (Musqueam), ᑕᑭᑕᑦᑭᑦ (Tsawwassen), and ᑕᑭᑕᑦᑭᑦ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations communities, this approach ensures that community values are guiding freshwater management, decision-making processes, and support long-term stewardship of water and fish populations.

Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

Values and decision-making processes	<u>Values, rules and knowledge: Adaptation as change in the decision context</u>
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Exploring adaptation options	<u>Identifying adaptation options</u>
How to rank adaptation options	<u>Prioritising adaptation options and selecting preferred ones</u>

3.7 Monitoring and Measuring Progress

Flood adaptation is an ongoing process. After implementing a solution, it is important to monitor its impact, learn from feedback, and adjust as needed. Within a VBA process, this intends to push community leaders and consultants alike to think beyond traditional monitoring metrics and to explore other ways of understanding what success looks like and creative metrics that can be used. It is crucial to recognize that this phase will take time and require creativity and commitment in exploring different adjustments that can be made to better amplify community voices and needs, while also elevating resilience.

Key principles:

- Move beyond traditional metrics and embrace innovative approaches.
- Develop flexible systems for monitoring and evaluating flood adaptation progress.
- Adapt based on feedback, ensuring solutions remain relevant to flood resilience.
- Explore constructed or alternative indicators to assess impact and progress of adaptation.

Implementation is not a one-time action—it's an evolving process shaped by continuous reflection, creativity, and commitment to values-based resilience.

3.7.1 CASE STUDY: City of Vancouver

City of Vancouver: City of Vancouver. (2021). Values-based Planning Primer. August. Read article [HERE](#)

The **City of Vancouver's Sea2City project** is a key example of values-based adaptation for other municipalities. A standout feature is the



development of indicators that reflect community values, paired with the Protect, Accommodate, Retreat, and Avoid (PARA) framework to assess risk across different climate scenarios. By integrating community values and scenario-based outcomes, the project provides a comprehensive approach to tracking success and guiding priority adaptation actions.

Here are some resources and tools to help action these principles:

Monitoring and evaluation framework for climate adaptation	<u><i>Measuring progress in urban climate change adaptation</i></u>
Monitoring and evaluating progress for Indigenous communities	<u><i>Guidebook 6 Monitoring Progress and Change</i></u>
Participatory evaluation	<u><i>Section 6. Participatory Evaluation</i></u>



Conclusion

— CONCLUSION —

4.1 Considerations and Complexities

While VBA approaches offer numerous benefits, its implementation requires careful navigation of diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Communities hold different values and priorities, making it essential to balance the need for consensus with the importance of respecting multiple viewpoints. Recognizing when to build alignment and when to embrace diversity helps maintain trust and momentum. Cultural sensitivity is equally critical. If adaptation strategies do not accurately reflect community values, they risk reinforcing inequities or marginalizing voices.

Meaningful engagement ensures that local knowledge and lived experiences are centered, rather than treated as secondary to technical solutions.

Values are not static—they evolve alongside shifting social, environmental, and political realities. This requires continuous engagement and flexibility to keep adaptation strategies relevant. Tailoring approaches to specific communities while ensuring they remain actionable demands significant time, resources, and commitment. Without ongoing attention, values can become disconnected from decision-making, weakening the long-term effectiveness of adaptation efforts.



Living With Water workshop. CREDIT: Vanessa Lueck, PICS

Despite these complexities, VBA approaches offer opportunities to foster inclusive, context-sensitive solutions. By embracing the evolving nature of values and prioritizing meaningful engagement, VBA can create more resilient and just adaptation strategies that truly reflect and respect the needs of our communities.

Key principles:

For climate adaptation to be effective, it must align with what truly matters to people and places. A values-based approach ensures that a wide range of values shape and inform adaptation decision-making, rather than solely focusing on technical and quantifiable priorities. This approach is able to honour diverse perspectives, lived experiences, Indigenous and local knowledge, and place-based expertise, strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of adaptation efforts. For practitioners and community leaders, a VBA offers an opportunity to refine methods, deepen trust, and co-create solutions, resulting in wider acceptance and locally relevant responses.



Adopting this approach isn't just about responding to change and navigating different priorities—it's about shaping a future that resonates with communities and empowers local strengths and knowledge.

Appendices

Appendix A: Bibliography

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Appendix B: Potential (participatory) community engagement approaches

- **Land-based learning** – Engaging directly with the environment to foster deeper connections to place, often incorporating Indigenous knowledge and traditional ecological practices.
- **Storytelling** – Sharing lived experiences, cultural narratives, and histories to convey knowledge, values, and perspectives in an accessible and engaging way.
- **Surveys** – Gathering community input through structured questionnaires to assess priorities, concerns, and perspectives on adaptation and planning efforts.
- **Workshops** – Interactive sessions that bring community members together to learn, discuss, and co-develop solutions through facilitated dialogue and activities.
- **Community mapping** – A participatory process where residents identify important places, risks, and assets on a map to visualize local knowledge and inform planning.
- **Systems mapping** – A participatory process to visualize interconnecting and fluctuating systems (i.e., natural, human) that influence decision-making and understandings of complex issues like climate change.
- **Focus groups** – Small, facilitated discussions that explore specific issues in depth, allowing diverse perspectives to be heard and understood.
- **Participatory action research** – A collaborative research approach where community members co-design and conduct studies to address local challenges and inform decision-making.
- **Citizen science initiatives** – Programs that involve community members in data collection and monitoring efforts to enhance scientific understanding and local engagement.
- **Visioning sessions** – Future-oriented discussions where participants imagine and articulate their ideal outcomes for community adaptation and resilience.
- **Cultural ceremonies** – Traditional gatherings and rituals that honor cultural heritage, strengthen community ties, and provide space for knowledge-sharing.
- **Walking tours** – Guided explorations of local landscapes that highlight environmental changes, historical significance, and community priorities in adaptation.
- **Art-based engagement** – Using creative methods such as murals, theater, and music to spark dialogue, reflect community values, and encourage participation.
- **Public forums** – Open community meetings where residents can voice concerns, share ideas, and engage in dialogue with decision-makers.
- **Knowledge-sharing circles** – Inclusive gatherings where participants exchange experiences, expertise, and traditional knowledge in a respectful, reciprocal manner.
- **Design charrettes** – Intensive, collaborative workshops where stakeholders and designers co-create solutions through hands-on planning and visualization exercises.

Appendix C: The 6W's

The 6W Questions for critical assessment of decision-making within a VBA process. The examples are not exhaustive. Rather, these questions provide a starting point to begin reflecting on decision-making processes.



Who

- Who is deciding what for whom?
- Who is involved in the decision-making process?
- Who pays financially?
- Who pays with their home, livelihood, place, survival?
- Who should pay?

Where

- Where will the adaptation action(s) occur?
 - Downtown?
 - Along the coast only?
 - In an entire watershed?
 - Potential upstream or downstream implications?

What

- What adaptation actions are taken?
 - Are they structural (i.e., nature-based solutions) or organizational (i.e., change in laws)?
 - Are they for individuals on private property?
 - Are they for common property or for the public good?

When

- When will the adaptation actions be taken?
 - Before small or rural communities are destroyed?
 - After agricultural production is destroyed?
 - After property values are threatened?
 - Before a specific plant or animal becomes endangered? Extinct?

What to

- What is being adapted to?
 - A climate impact (impacts directly, or to others' responses to climate impacts)?
 - Governmental incentives?
 - Private insurance rules?
 - Increase or decrease in tourism?

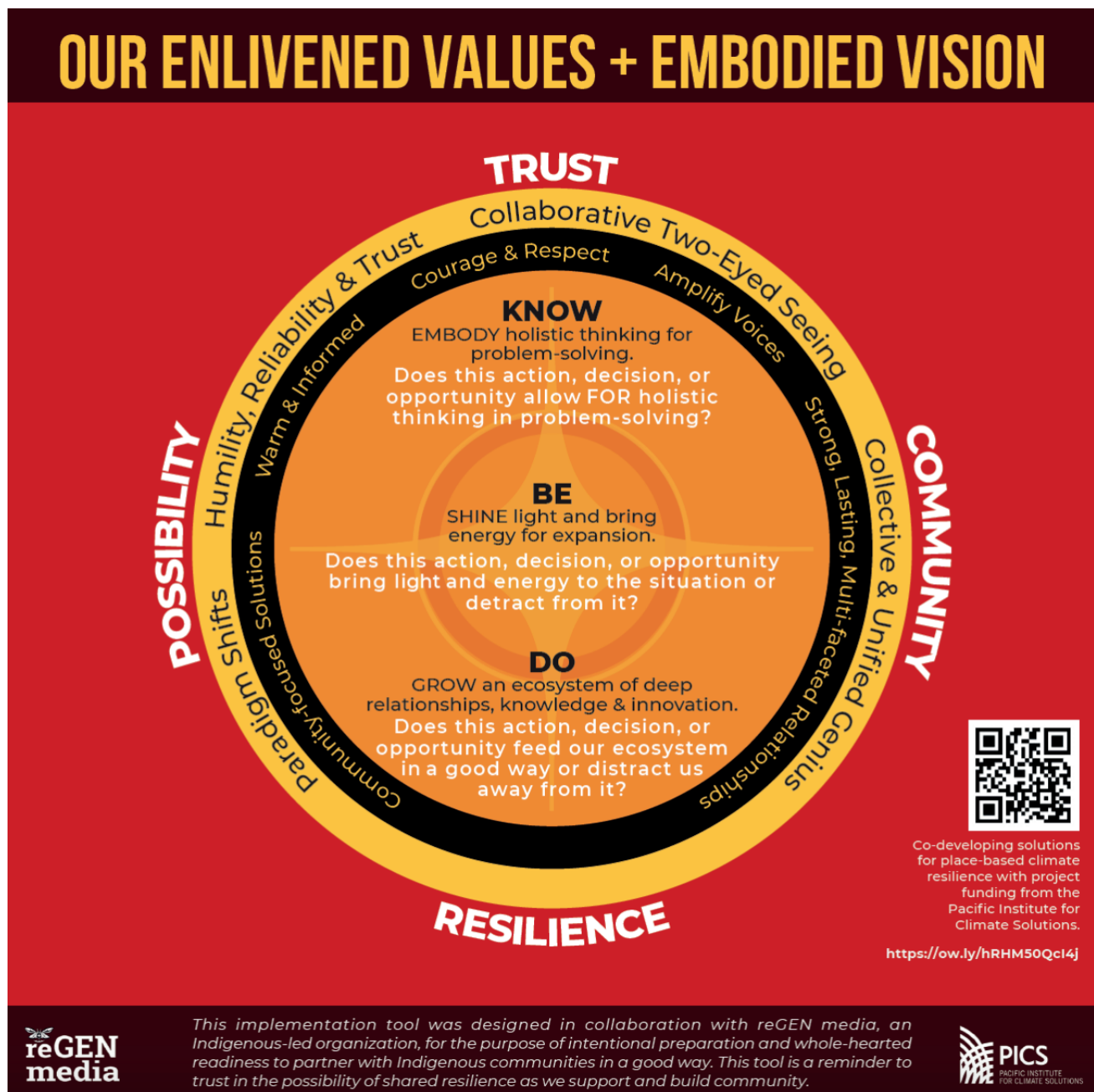
Why

- Why are specific adaptation actions taken?
 - To save costs?
 - To be in relationship with the world around us?
 - To protect financial investments?

Appendix D: Values framework

Values framework used to support co-development of solutions for place-based climate resilience by Charlene Sanjenko, reGen Impact Media.

Created for the *Serving Rural & Remote Communities: Co-developing Place-Based Climate Resilient Solutions* Project.





Resilient Coasts:

A values-based approach to coastal adaptation

Policy Brief

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Land acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge that some of the learning, discussions, and activities of this project are taking place on the traditional and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, part of the Anishinaabe Nation. This territory is governed by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, a treaty between Indigenous Nations to share and care for the lands and waters around the Great Lakes.

Our project also takes place on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the xʷməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlílŵətał (Tsleil-Waututh), s̓cəwəθən məsteyəxʷ (Tsawwassen), and SEMYOME (Semiahmoo) Nations. The coastal area our research engages has always been a place of learning for the Coast Salish Peoples, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions in this region.

We are grateful to be doing this work across these territories and commit to building relationships grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

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Executive Summary

— EXECUTIVE SUMMARY —

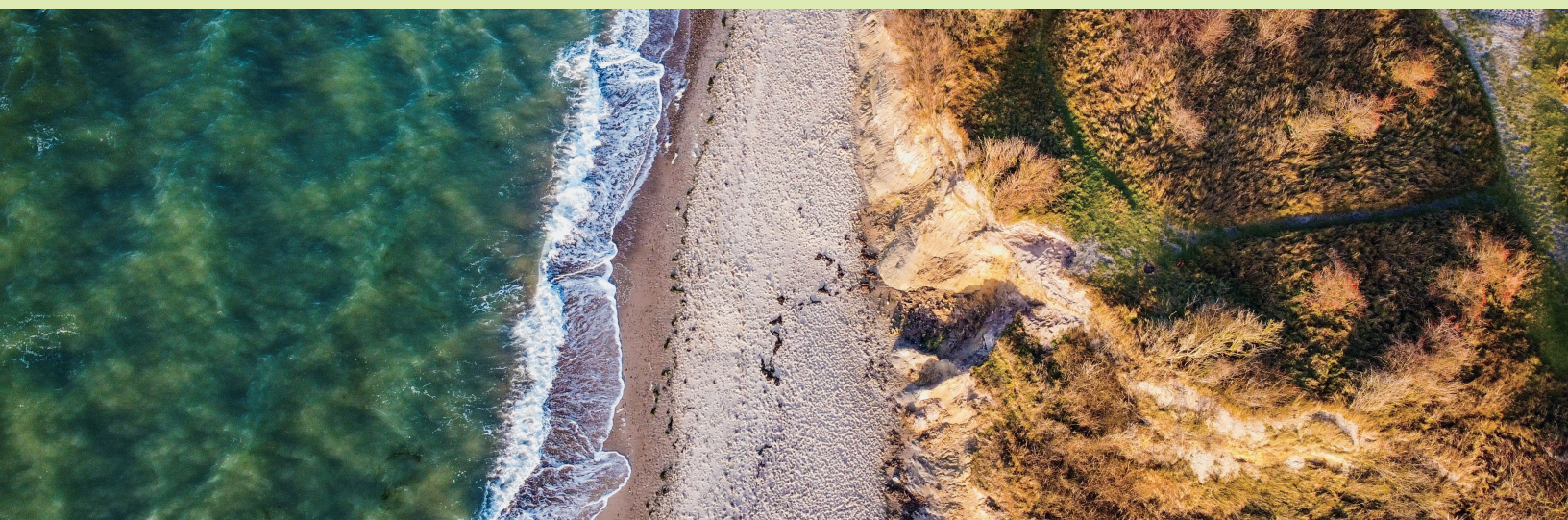
This policy brief introduces a values-based approach (VBA) to climate change adaptation—an approach that emphasizes alignment with what truly matters to people and communities. Adaptation efforts focused solely on economic and technical priorities often face resistance because they overlook social factors such as community values and lived experiences. A VBA offers a pathway to integrate community priorities, strengths, and needs alongside economic and technical considerations in decision-making.

Grounding solutions in community values fosters strategies that are not only effective in mitigating risks, but also meaningful and relevant to the communities most impacted. By prioritizing local perspectives and knowledge, this approach empowers communities to co-create equitable and widely supported adaptation solutions. The process outlined in this policy brief consists of six iterative steps, informed by both practitioner insights and academic literature.





Background



— BACKGROUND —

A values-based approach (VBA) extends beyond human communities to encompass more-than-human kin and the natural environment. Indigenous knowledge has long recognized the interdependence of human well-being and ecological health. Elevating this perspective, VBAs inform decision-making that prioritizes ecosystem sustainability as essential to long-term human well-being (Artelle et al., 2018; Wolf et al., 2013).

Moreover, a values-based approach uses asset-based framing, acknowledging and uplifting the strengths and skills communities have.

Traditional ‘rational’ decision-making, which evaluates risks, alternatives, and potential outcomes, has been praised for its structured approach. However, this approach often fails to account for the more social and emotional factors that shape real-world decision-making (Siders & Pierce, 2021). It assumes community goals remain constant and that new information alone can secure social acceptance—an assumption that oversimplifies the complexity of adaptation challenges (Siders & Pierce, 2021).

In this context, "community" includes both place-based (i.e., remote, urban, rural, and, natural) and identity-based (i.e., Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, and faith-based) groups.

Overlooking community values poses a risk of marginalizing the communities they aim to support. For example, while Canada’s National Adaptation Strategy (NAS) increased Indigenous representation within working groups, Indigenous communities still struggle with unequal decision-making power, perpetuating systemic oppressions like colonialism (Wale, 2023; Latulippe, 2019; Malin & Ryder, 2018). Effective climate adaptation requires decision-making processes grounded in a range of values, as priorities vary across time, locations, and diverse groups (Seekamp et al., 2020; Adger, 2013).

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Values-Based Approach

— VALUES-BASED APPROACH —

3.1 Foundations for a Values-Based Approach (VBA)



A Values-Based Approach (VBA) to climate adaptation offers a pathway that centers the values and strengths of those who the adaptation solution aims to support. Recognizing that values influence how people perceive risks, prioritize actions, and make decisions (Reid et al., 2014), adopting a VBA fosters greater social acceptance, transparency, and inclusivity of adaptation solutions (Seekamp et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2018).

Values generally fall into two categories:

Tangible values



Easy to quantify and measure (i.e. economic priorities, critical infrastructure, food security, disaster resilience, salmon, cedar)

Intangible values



Tend to emerge from lived-experiences and are more complex to measure (i.e. physical and mental well-being, social connectedness, cultural and spiritual practices, environmental knowledge)

It is also important to recognize that overlapping and interconnecting values span both tangible and intangible groups. For example, food security is often considered a tangible value, yet access to culturally significant food sources ties into intangible values like cultural traditions. Moving forward, the term “values” aims to capture this complexity, recognizing the dynamic interplay between tangible and intangible values within communities. This also illustrates the breadth of values that individuals and communities hold and where folks may differ in values and priorities.

3.2 Advancing a Values-based Approach (VBA)



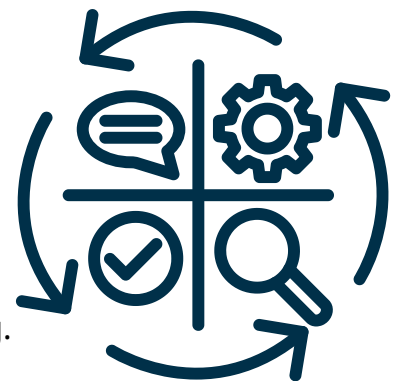
Embedding values into adaptation processes involves turning priorities, local strengths, and shared principles into actionable steps that guide each phase of an adaptation cycle (i.e., decision-making, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluating). This requires respectful relationships and building trust with those most impacted. While trust and relationship-building takes time, the long-term benefits of collaboration and partnership are significant.

Through meaningful partnerships with Indigenous and local communities, governments can empower equitable adaptation pathways that reflect diverse perspectives and foster long-term resilience.

While there are various examples on how to integrate values into climate adaptation processes in the literature, we draw on Reid et al. (2014)'s four-phase methodology and the adaptation process articulated within Canada's National Adaptation Strategy, to illustrate a values-focused decision-making approach. The overlapping of both processes articulates entry points on where values can be considered within an already accepted decision-making model.

Engaging with Indigenous and equity-denied communities requires centering their voices, lived experiences, and perspectives in the adaptation process ([Bill C-29, 2024](#); [DRIPA, 2019](#); [TRC Calls to Action 2015](#); [UNDRIP, 2007](#)). Each Indigenous community has distinct strengths, challenges, and experiences, necessitating tailored approaches for engagement and solution development. The framework outlined below prioritizes inclusivity, mutual respect, and the recognition of diverse lived experiences.

Adaptation is an iterative process, not a linear one. Steps may need to be revisited multiple times before progressing or returning to later stages, particularly when embedding values. This flexibility allows for continuous learning, reflection, and refinement, ensuring that adaptation efforts remain responsive to evolving community needs and environmental conditions. The proposed VBA process is structured to reinforce values at every stage, embedding them into decision-making and long-term resilience planning. By doing so, the process remains dynamic, adaptive, and aligned with the lived realities of the communities it serves.



3.3 Proposed VBA Process

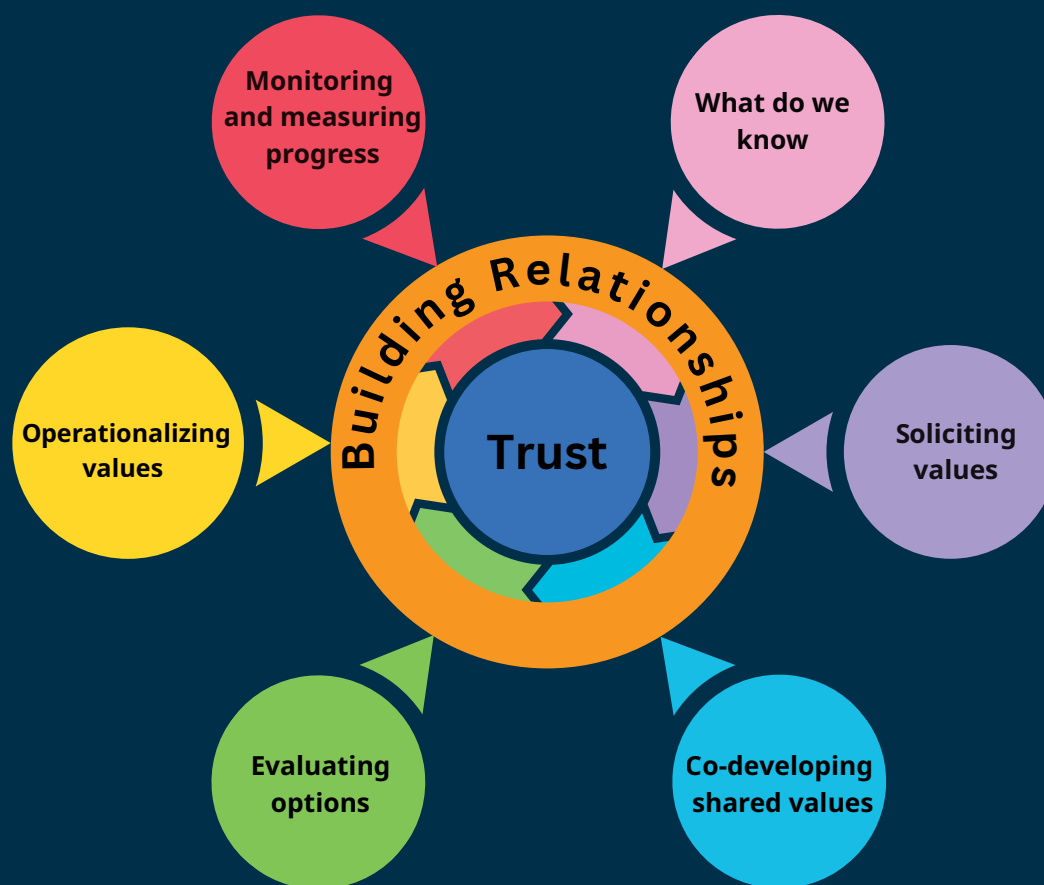


Figure 1: Visual representation of proposed values-based approach (VBA) to climate adaptation processes. Circular process that centers on trust, and revolves in iterative cycles.¹

3.3.1 Build relationships



Building trust is the foundation of effective flood adaptation efforts. Before engaging in plans or discussing values, it is essential to establish genuine connections with communities, especially those historically excluded from decision-making processes. Earning trust requires time and patience, but ensures flood adaptation solutions are equitable and effective.

¹ This proposed process builds on Reid et al. (2014)'s framework, which aligns with the existing decision-making structure in the Province of B.C. The framework is adapted based on the local knowledge and input of the Gitga'a't Nation, addressing the specific climate change impacts affecting the community's daily life. The nuances and context of Reid et al. (2014)'s framework are inseparable from the lived experiences of the Gitga'a't Nation. Therefore, only the process and methodological approach is applied here, to ensure the nuances and lived experiences remain grounded in local context.

Key principles:

- Listen first, avoiding pre-made solutions.
- Acknowledge community history, as past experiences shape present approaches to change.
- Recognize community expertise, emphasizing the skills and knowledge they bring.
- Recognize and respect the Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights Indigenous communities hold.
- Identify roles and responsibilities for all involved, attempting to dismantle colonial power relations and historical injustices.

3.3.2 Centering community and place-based knowledge



Local communities possess unique insights into flood risks and vulnerabilities, informed by generations of lived experience. Honoring and centering this knowledge enhances adaptation efforts.

Key principles:

- Recognize community strengths, knowledge, and capabilities when adapting to flood risks.
- Let communities lead in identifying flood-prone areas and historical flood patterns.
- Communicate risks, hazards, vulnerabilities and understand how flood risks will impact individuals, groups, communities, sectors, and organizations.
- Pursue multi-benefit solutions that address broader community needs alongside flood protection.
- Use creative engagement tools like storytelling or arts-based methods to gather flood-related insights.



3.3.3 Uncovering values



Flood impacts vary across cultures and communities, shaped by differing values and connections to land and water. Understanding this perspective is critical for inclusive flood adaptation solutions. The process for uncovering values should reflect the diversity of the communities affected by flooding.

Key principles:

- Be mindful of whose values are being centred and prioritized.
- Create safe spaces for all partners to express perspectives.
- Set clear guidelines ensuring all voices are respected.
- Understand relationships with flood-prone land and waters within project areas.

3.3.4 Co-develop shared values



This step focuses on identifying shared values or fostering mutual respect and understanding among differing or conflicting values. Flood adaptation solutions are strengthened when diverse perspectives are acknowledged and incorporated, rather than requiring full agreement. The aim is to create a foundation that reflects the priorities and lived experiences of all involved while ensuring inclusive and practical outcomes.



Key principles:

- Let communities decide whether consensus or diversity is preferred.
- Reflect on whose values are being centred and prioritized.
- Define shared values to guide flood adaptation solutions.
- Encourage mutual learning from different worldviews.
- Remain flexible about what shared values mean for each project.



3.3.5 Evaluating adaptation options

Flood adaptation solutions are more effective when they align with community values, increasing the likelihood of social acceptance and long-term success. This step assesses potential options based on shared priorities, ensuring that selected solutions are both technically sound and socially supported.

Key principles:

- Prioritize multi-benefit options that meet various community needs while addressing flood risks.
- What options are capturing both tangible and intangible dimensions of climate impacts.
- Engage all partners when selecting flood adaptation solutions based on shared values.
- Clarify decision-making power in selecting solutions.
- Explore innovative decision-making approaches.
- Focus on resilience and adaptive capacity to flooding.

3.3.6 Integrate values into implementation



Implementing VBA solutions requires addressing barriers such as limited resources, varying risk perceptions, and political inertia. Aligning solutions with community priorities fosters political commitment and buy-in while ensuring that adaptation efforts remain grounded in local needs. Trust, shared ownership, and value alignment are essential to bridging the gap between planning and action, making implementation more effective and meaningful.

Key principles:

- Include all partners in implementation discussions.
- Ensure ongoing collaboration and adaptability to emerging flood risks.
- Anticipate and address barriers such as funding, awareness, and political will.
- Adopt creative tools to sustain momentum.

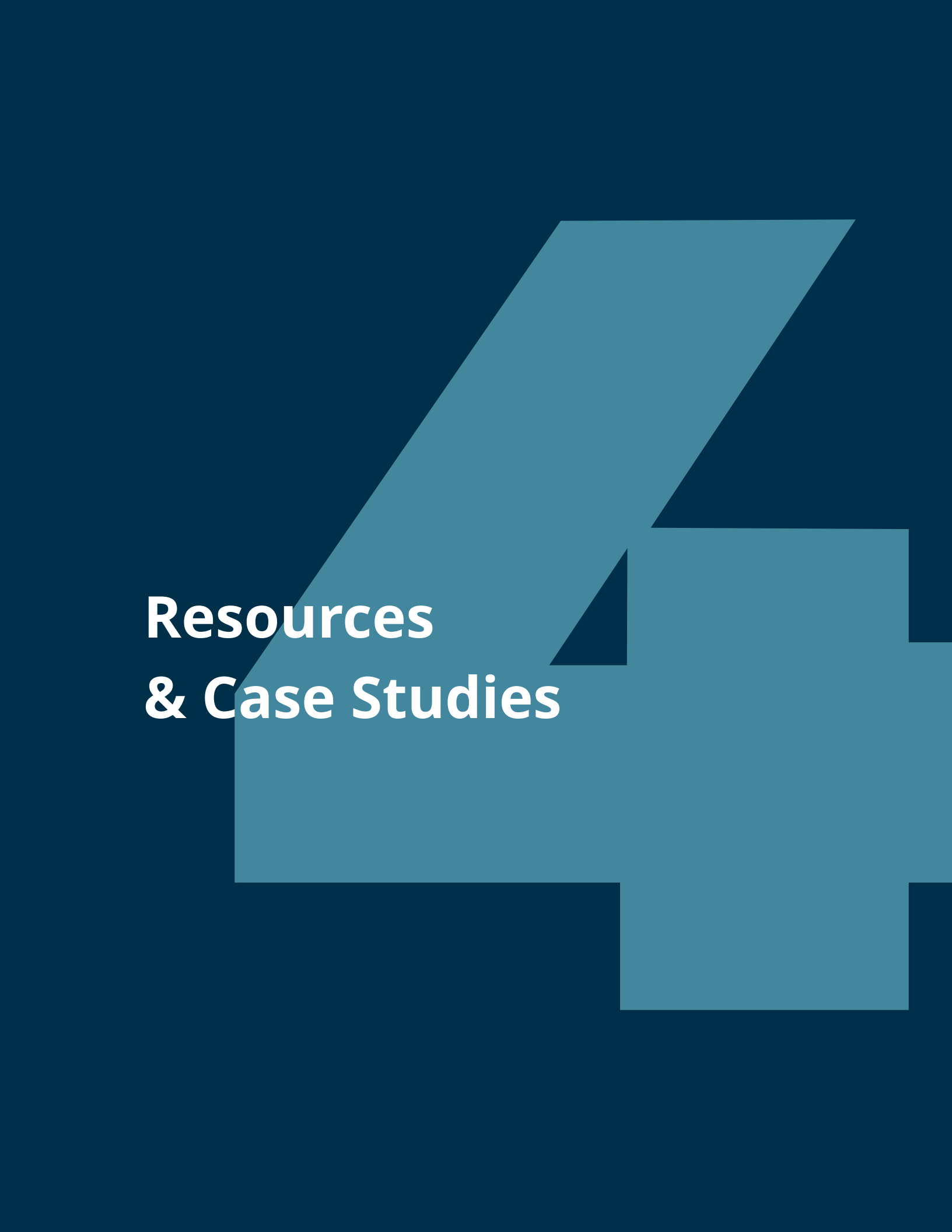
3.3.7 Monitoring and measuring progress



Implementation is an iterative process that requires consistent monitoring, learning, and adaptation. When the monitoring and evaluation metrics center community values, it ensures solutions reflect what truly matters to those affected, making them both effective and widely supported. The monitoring, learning, and adaptation step requires continuous reflection, creativity, and a sustained commitment to community needs.

Key principles:

- Move beyond traditional metrics, embracing innovative approaches.
- Develop flexible systems for monitoring and evaluating flood adaptation progress.
- Adapt based on feedback, ensuring solutions remain relevant to flood resilience.
- Explore constructed or alternative indicators to assess impact and progress of adaptation.



Resources & Case Studies

— RESOURCES & CASE STUDIES —

4.1 Resources and tools for reference



- Who is the solution for?
- Adopting an Indigenous lens to climate adaptation work
- Guidebook on inclusive municipal adaptation planning
- Equitable climate adaptation considerations for local governments

4.2 Case studies of VBA in practice



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Novaczek et al., (2011). Social and Cultural Values Mapping as a Decision-Support Tool for Climate Change Adaptation. November.

FRASER RIVER

First Nations Fisheries Legacy Fund & the Centre for Indigenous Fisheries. (2024). Biocultural Indicator Manual. A Guide for the Development & Implementation of Biocultural Indicator Frameworks.

SWINOMISH TRIBAL COMMUNITY

Donatuto, J., Campbell, L., & Trousdale, W. (2020). The “value” of values-driven data in identifying Indigenous health and climate change priorities. *Climatic Change*, 158(2), 161–180.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-019-02596-2>

CITY OF VANCOUVER

City of Vancouver. (2021). Values-based Planning Primer. February.

GITGA'AT NATION

Reid et al., (2014). Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation Planning Using a Values-Focused Approach: A Case Study with the Gitga'at Nation. *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 34(3), 401–424.

CITY OF SURREY

City of Surrey. (2016). CFAS Stakeholder Engagement Framework. Internal Document

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF CENTRAL KOOTENAY

Whittaker et al., (2018). Building Relationships And Cultivating Social Licence: A Guide For Small Tenure Holders In BC. BCCFA.

RURAL AND REMOTE BC COMMUNITIES

Enlivened Values and Embodied Vision framework by Charlene Sanjenko (see Appendix B)

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Conclusion

— CONCLUSION —

5.1 Benefits and Importance



A VBA approach fosters trust, inclusivity, and collaboration, ensuring adaptation measures are socially accepted and culturally appropriate. By aligning values within adaptation processes, it addresses the interconnectedness of climate impacts on people and ecosystems, creating regenerative and long-term solutions. This approach highlights the importance of social acceptance and the role of values in determining what adaptation measures are considered acceptable or desirable. It also reveals the underlying motivations, strengths, and concerns that influence people's willingness to support or resist certain interventions, guiding more context-sensitive and culturally responsive adaptation efforts.

5.2 Challenges



Communities often hold diverse values, making it challenging to balance differing perspectives. Practitioners such as consultants, facilitators, and decision-makers, must approach local values with cultural sensitivity to avoid misunderstandings that could undermine trust and collaboration.

Since values are dynamic, a VBA requires ongoing engagement and updates to remain effective, which demands investments of time, funding, and resources.

Tensions may arise between community-specific values and Western science adaptation goals and strategies that have been traditionally adopted by government and political actors. One manner to navigate such tensions is by facilitating discussions in a manner that respects all entities' knowledge, skills, and priorities. Moreover, translating complex local values into rigid policy frameworks or international agreements adds another layer of complexity.

5.3 Conclusion



Climate change adaptation strategies often face resistance when they fail to align with the values, priorities, and lived experiences of the communities they aim to serve. A Values-Based Approach (VBA) to climate adaptation offers a pathway to embed values into the decision-making process. This approach prioritizes inclusivity, mutual respect, and collaboration, ensuring adaptation measures are relevant, equitable, and sustainable. Overall, a VBA highlights the importance of empowering community values, skills, and needs, when advancing long-term resilience. Adopting this approach is not just about responding to change and navigating different priorities; it is about implementing place-based, socially accepted, and effective adaptation solutions that resonate with communities and empower local strengths and knowledge.

5.3.1 Sample reflection questions to help guide this process

Embedding community values in adaptation planning requires ongoing reflection, careful navigation of differing perspectives, and a commitment to inclusivity. These reflection questions help centre the priorities of the communities adaptation efforts aim to serve while balancing cultural sensitivity, strategic alignment, and long-term engagement. They provide a framework for critically assessing how values are identified, communicated, and upheld throughout the adaptation process. By using these questions to guide decision-making, practitioners can begin fostering trust, responsiveness, and accountability, ultimately strengthening adaptation efforts that are socially meaningful, equitable, and effective.

Understanding community values

1. What core values do you have that fundamentally inform and influence your decision-making process?
2. What values do you hold that will shape how you understand and interpret community values?
3. What values do you use when working with communities?
4. What are the key values held by the communities we serve, and how do we identify them effectively?
5. How can we engage diverse community members, especially underrepresented groups, to ensure their values are included in the adaptation process?

Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity

1. Are we approaching community engagement with sufficient cultural awareness and sensitivity to avoid reinforcing inequities?
2. How can we ensure that our processes honor Indigenous knowledge systems and respect traditional values?

Adaptability and ongoing engagement

1. How do we ensure our strategies remain flexible and responsive to the evolving values of the community?
2. What mechanisms can we put in place for continuous community feedback and involvement in decision-making?

Holding accountability

1. How do current practices and decisions actively reflect and uphold the values of the communities they impact?
2. What mechanisms are in place to ensure community voices are genuinely integrated into decision-making processes?
3. What steps are taken to ensure ongoing, transparent communication with communities about decisions that affect them?

Managing tensions

1. What steps can we take to mediate conflicts when community values conflict with adaptation goals, policy priorities, or within the community?
2. How do we balance conflicting values within a community while maintaining fairness and inclusivity?
3. What conflict-resolution strategies can you incorporate to navigate conflicting values between you and the communities and/or partners you are working with?

Measuring success

1. What indicators can be used to assess whether our adaptation strategies reflect and uphold community values?
2. How do we define success?
3. What alternative indicators or tools can demonstrate success in ways that challenge Western definitions of success and align with Indigenous worldviews and other ways of knowing?
4. How can we document and share lessons learned to improve VBA implementation in future projects?

Appendices

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Appendix B: Values framework

Values framework used to support co-development of solutions for place-based climate resilience by Charlene Sanjenko, reGen Impact Media.

Created for the *Serving Rural & Remote Communities: Co-developing Place-Based Climate Resilient Solutions* Project.

