

Climate Action in Cities

Tool for Offline Use

About

Implementing climate action presents tough decisions, not least around how burdens and benefits are distributed. Acceptance or support for action is contingent on what those involved value and consider to be the right course of action for them, and those they care about. Justifications matter. When policies, investments, instruments, or interventions designed to promote action are blind to, or neglect, the ethical frameworks of those involved, their implementation can be limited, face backlash, or worse—fail altogether.

This is where applied ethics comes in. Applied ethics offers a practical approach to better understand human choices and address real-world problems. Its efficacy in fields such as medicine, science, and engineering is well established. Applied ethics provides new insights for how to implement climate action, helping to identify obstacles, routes to overcome them, and new pathways to accelerate delivery and enhance impact.

Cities are a key implementation locus for global efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Those implementing climate action in cities must navigate diverse communities with different ethical frameworks and consequent perspectives. Therefore, innovative approaches that help build awareness, understanding, and capacity to identify and better work with the ethical dimensions of this type of action could be globally transformative.

Through the presentation of illustrative examples based on real-world challenges faced by cities internationally, this tool aims to demonstrate how [applied ethics strategies](#) could accelerate the implementation of climate action. Each case presented intentionally focuses on the application of just one of these strategies, but in real life more than one might be applied for better effect.

Whilst some elements of these strategies might seem familiar to those with experience in the implementation of climate action, their deliberate, systematic application is far from widespread and if adopted more comprehensively, could be globally transformative.

Credits

This tool was developed by Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs as a [Carnegie Ethics Accelerator](#) output. It was inspired by an expert convening in New York City held under the Chatham House Rule that brought together a group of expert participants including specialists in applied ethics and those working to catalyze the implementation of climate action in cities.

To learn more about the conversation during the convening, [download the Meeting Note](#).

For press inquiries or questions, please contact Carnegie Ethics Accelerator Lead Samuel Bradshaw at sbradshaw@cceia.org.

Discover how [applied ethics strategies](#) could accelerate climate action implementation

Limiting Excessive Energy Consumption During Summer Months

System: Energy | Actor: Private Company

INTRODUCTION

In a commercialized island city, recent summers have brought record heatwaves, driving up residents' energy use to cool their homes. This annual increase in energy use leads not only to increased greenhouse gas emissions from carbon-intensive utilities but also results in grid strain and occasional blackouts. While many acknowledged their consumption was unsustainable and needed reduction, actual behavior showed little change. High energy use persisted due to limited access to affordable cooling options, energy-efficient appliances, and financial incentives for upgrading in-home systems.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Grafting onto Existing Rootstock

A utilities company sought to reduce household electricity use by building on residents' social responsibility concerns related to the impact of their energy consumption on emissions and grid reliability. The company launched monthly personalized energy reports that showed customers how their energy consumption compared to similar households in their neighborhood, paired with simple, actionable summertime heat management tips. This peer-based feedback tapped into a sense of accountability and provided citizens with achievable benchmarks. Follow-up messages to customers linked energy-conscious habits to safer, healthier indoor conditions during heatwaves, reinforcing behavior change through familiar priorities. As a result, the company achieved measurable, sustained reductions in residential energy demand.

Questions To Consider

- How can private companies learn more about residents' concerns, values, or interests in relation to energy use?
- How are customers' data privacy and security protected?
- Do the personalized energy reports account for differences in household size, income, building type, or medical needs that might affect energy use?

Related Resources:

[When it is not about the money: Social comparison and energy conservation among residents who do not pay for electricity](#)

[Evidence from Two Large Field Experiments that Peer Comparison Feedback Can Reduce Residential Energy Usage](#)

Managing Offshore Wind Energy Misinformation Concerns

System: Energy | Actor: City Government

INTRODUCTION

A coastal city is evaluating a partnership with a renewable energy developer to build an offshore wind farm comprised of 70 turbines, projected to generate enough power for hundreds of thousands of homes. The proposed project would require an estimated \$4.2 billion investment over the next five years, with most of the funding allocated during the initial construction phase. While many residents expressed broad support for clean energy and welcomed the potential benefits for the local job market, a growing number voiced concerns about the city's financial contribution to the project and long-term priorities. A coordinated social media campaign began spreading misleading comparisons to past infrastructure failures, using selective or inaccurate claims that fueled public opposition to the wind farm. City officials became uncertain whether the project would garner enough public backing, despite ongoing calls from community leaders to address air quality and health disparities through cleaner energy sources.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

••• Building Trust

To build public trust and counter misinformation about the wind farm's cost, the city council launched a pre-bunking campaign—messaging to counter false claims before they spread—that proactively explained the project's financial structure, emphasizing long-term public health and economic benefits. The campaign included clear, accessible communications developed in partnership with trusted community figures, such as faith leaders, neighborhood advocates, and local media. These messengers helped improve media literacy and shared evidence-based information about the project's expected impacts. In parallel, city officials acknowledged past infrastructure failures and outlined corrective measures, including opening the project's budgeting process to community input and co-design. Together, these efforts aimed to demonstrate accountability, strengthen institutional credibility, and align the project with residents' long-term interests.

Questions To Consider

- How can the financial details and projected outcomes of the project be communicated in a transparent, accessible, and non-misleading way?
- How can city governments ensure that participants in co-design budgeting processes have access to clear, accurate, and timely information to make informed contributions?

Related Resources:

[What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?](#)

[How to fight climate change misinformation](#)

Building Local Capacity for Green Energy Jobs

System: Energy | Actor: City Government

INTRODUCTION

A city is advancing a major infrastructure initiative aimed at reducing fossil fuel dependence through the development of a regional green hydrogen energy sector. While the project is widely seen as a step toward sustainable development, it threatens to displace nearly 3,000 oil rig workers—a substantial local workforce. Residents and political leaders alike express serious concerns about the economic impact of these job losses and the potential for increased social and political tensions.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Facilitating a Just and Orderly Transition

In response, the city launched a job re-training program to help oil rig workers gain the technical skills required for roles in the green hydrogen sector, including plant maintenance, electrolysis system operation, and pipeline safety. Many participants brought transferable experience from oil and gas operations, allowing the program to build on existing competencies while bridging key knowledge gaps. By preparing a skilled local workforce, the city not only supports displaced workers but also ensures the new hydrogen facilities are staffed by community members with a stake in its long-term success. This locally grounded transition strengthens social buy-in, improves operational reliability, and helps embed the new energy system into the region's economic and civic fabric.

Questions To Consider

- Does the training curriculum align with actual job functions and career advancement pathways in the emerging hydrogen sector?
- What support systems (e.g., childcare, transportation, stipends) are in place to make participation feasible for a diverse range of workers?

Related Resources:

[Green job revolution: How C40 cities are leading the way](#)

[Renewable-energy development in a net-zero world: Overcoming talent gaps](#)

A Grassroots Response to Siloed Governance

System: Governance | Actor: NGO

INTRODUCTION

In a densely populated city with a rapidly growing suburban footprint, efforts to reduce transportation emissions are obstructed not by a lack of policy or widespread support, but by institutional fragmentation within local government. Different agencies—urban planning, transportation, environmental services—operate in silos, each with distinct mandates, timelines, and metrics for success. A proposal to implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor supported by zoning changes for higher-density housing near new transit stations stalls as departments fail to share data, coordinate timelines, and align their priorities. Despite public pressure to reduce carbon emissions, mid-level officials report feeling disconnected from climate goals that seem outside their agencies' remit. Small, cross-departmental actions that could improve walkability, optimize bus routes, or support bike infrastructure are overlooked in favor of isolated, large-scale initiatives. The belief persists that without sweeping reforms, minor steps are futile.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

• Valuing Small Decisions

An NGO organizes a coalition of local educators, city officials, and student volunteers to reframe the narrative surrounding local climate action emphasizing personal agency and the power of community action. Together, they launch a campaign called “One Trip Less,” encouraging residents to walk, bike, or carpool just once a week instead of driving. Through community workshops, school programs, and local media, they highlight how small transportation decisions—made collectively—can reduce emissions over time. Testimonials from neighbors and local business owners help illustrate how these micro-actions contribute to cleaner air and more vibrant streets. By shifting the conversation away from government shortcomings toward communal participation, the campaign helps residents see themselves not as bystanders to climate policy implementation, but as essential actors in a larger movement, building momentum for broader planning initiatives in the future.

Questions To Consider

- Which local government departments could engage with the “One Trip Less” campaign and how can the impact of their involvement be maximized?
- Which neighborhoods and communities might require more focused outreach efforts to ensure campaign outcomes are widespread?

Related Resources:

[Challenges in implementing climate change policy within local climate action, transportation and land use planning in Japan](#)

[Seattle's Just One Trip Phase II Case Study](#)

Overcoming Political Short-Termism in Climate Adaptation

System: Governance | Actor: NGO

INTRODUCTION

In a port city facing sea level rise, efforts to implement climate adaptation plans have repeatedly stalled due to conflicting priorities between economic development agencies and local environmental organizations. Port authorities and business leaders argue for dredging and seawall construction to protect shipping infrastructure, while community groups advocate for nature-based solutions that restore wetlands and protect at-risk neighborhoods. Political leaders, pressured by election cycles and the need to deliver quick wins, avoid championing any long-term solutions that might alienate one side or require compromise. This leaves climate adaptation efforts mired in indecision despite mounting risks.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Strengthening Ethical Literacy

To address the short-termism that was stalling progress, an NGO launched a series of workshops that brought together local politicians, business leaders, and neighborhood advocates from across the city. Rather than framing climate action in moral or political terms, the sessions focused on unpacking the different ethical perspectives—duty, consequence, and community values—that motivated each group. Participants shared not only what they believed should be done, but why. These discussions revealed overlooked areas of agreement: a shared belief in leaving a livable city for future generations and a common frustration with policy inertia. In the short term, this helped a newly formed coalition co-develop near-term climate priorities that multiple sectors could support. Over the longer term, the process built a foundation for more durable cooperation by fostering mutual respect and a nuanced understanding of each group's moral commitments.

Questions To Consider

- What mechanisms can help or incentivize elected officials to support adaptation strategies that extend beyond election cycles?
- Where do stakeholders share interests or agree on principles of economic and environmental policy?
- How can this be built into actionable policies and decision-making?

Related Resources:

[Adaptation in Climate Planning and Implementation: Recommendations for U.S. Local Governments](#)

[Institutionalizing the urban governance of climate change adaptation: Results of an international survey](#)

Creating Common Ground Between Interest Groups and Government

System: Governance | Actor: City Government

INTRODUCTION

A city government is revising its strategic planning document which will shape the physical, economic, and social development of the city for decades. It is faced with a massively changed context: poor economic growth and social and environmental inequalities, coupled with an increase in mistrust of politicians and politics. A key issue is the lack of affordable housing, and the city government is under pressure to abandon or substantially reduce existing high environmental standards in the strategy as they are seen as an inhibitor to meeting housing and economic growth goals. Concerns expressed by different stakeholders vary: Local communities want more affordable housing (e.g. for those renting or homeless); developers claim that meeting climate change and environment goals is a huge cost resulting in less housing being built; and environmental NGOs see no evidence of this and fear that hard-won improvements to create green space will be lost. The city government has published a consultation to elicit views on possible changes to certain environment and climate policies and to understand the strength of support or opposition.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Prioritizing Middle-Ground Solutions

Representatives of the city government meet with community interest groups, single issue NGOs, developers, and other stakeholders to understand their views, the strength of feeling, and identify whether any compromise solutions exist and are supported. They facilitate a discussion between the single-issue NGOs, applying the “putting yourself in others’ shoes” strategy, to see if any middle-ground solutions can be identified. They then assess the relative impact that the stakeholders’ different and polarized approaches have on the city government’s stated targets and objectives, including any trade-offs. Whilst a political decision is taken to move forward with some ambitious and controversial environmental policies, some middle-ground solutions are also prioritized to address the housing issues. For example, the city government proposes setting minimum thresholds for environmental standards for housing, strict criteria for what land can be built on, and a timetable for their review so that, as evidence changes, there is a case for them to be improved.

Questions To Consider

- How can the city government convince stakeholders, whose views have not been adopted, that they have not capitulated to vested interests?

Related Resources:

[Achieving the just transition: A toolkit for city leaders across the globe](#)

[Inclusive and Equitable Climate Action](#)

[Powering Inclusive Climate Action in Cities](#)

Building Resilience to High-frequency, Low-level Flooding to Safeguard Public Health

System: Public Health | Actor: NGO

INTRODUCTION

An important economic and educational hub in the Northern Indian province of Uttar Pradesh is experiencing a range of hydrometeorological hazards. Therefore, a local NGO was tasked by an international donor to enhance the climate resilience of the city. After undertaking a range of assessments and fact-finding exercises, the NGO decided to focus on the issue of water-logging as an entry point. This form of high-frequency, low-level flooding leads to severe disruption of lives and livelihoods, creating major public health challenges.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Valuing Small Decisions

The NGO identified water-logging as an issue that was not attracting sufficient political attention despite its impact on low-income communities and chose it as a foundation for building urban resilience. The fact that an organization was finally tackling an issue that was so important to people, but had long been ignored, led to community members actively engaging with the process that began with a discussion on several everyday issues such as the functioning of local water supply, drainage, and waste management systems. It then progressed onto a discussion of political and municipal accountability and culminated in the formation of citizens committees. These committees demanded accountability from decision makers for tackling the issue of water-logging and over a period of five years led to the investment of municipal funds in solving the problem sustainably. Throughout most of the process, the NGO actively avoided framing issues in the context of “climate change” but limited the discussion to small, achievable changes that delivered an outsized impact on the lives of the city’s most vulnerable citizens.

Questions To Consider

- How can NGOs prepare theories of change that use minor changes as an entry point to deliver substantial impacts?
- What are the ways in which intractable problems such as climate change can be addressed through a series of small decisions?

Related Resources:

[Community-Based Micro-Climate Resilience | India](#)

[A participatory approach to micro-resilience planning by community institutions](#)

Protecting Older People from Urban Heat Risks

System: Public Health | Actor: NGO

INTRODUCTION

In an inland city where nearly one in six residents are over the age of 65, extreme heat due to climate change has become a growing public health risk. Older people living alone on fixed incomes, or in poorly insulated housing, face heightened risks during prolonged heatwaves. Yet city initiatives—such as public cooling centers and emergency alerts—fail to reach or resonate with this population. Many of the older people in the city distrust digital communication platforms or perceive public resources as inaccessible or irrelevant to their needs. In response, a local aging services NGO has been invited to help strengthen the city’s heat resilience strategy with a focus on older adults.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?



Speaking to an Existing Truth

The nonprofit retools the city’s messaging around extreme heat to reflect relevant health facts that resonate with the older population. Rather than relying on digital alerts or technical language, they use familiar and trusted channels: printed flyers at pharmacies, announcements through local radio stations, and direct communication from senior center staff and faith leaders. Messaging emphasizes practical, non-stigmatizing actions—like “keeping cool to stay independent” and “checking on a neighbor as a sign of strength.” By emphasizing health facts and aligning communication methods with older peoples’ daily routines, the city sees increased attendance at cooling centers, more peer-to-peer support during heatwaves, and broader acceptance of resilience planning among older residents.

Questions To Consider

- Are the communication channels being used truly accessible to all segments of the older population, including those who are socially isolated or have disabilities?
- Have the generational differences that shape how older people perceive risk, public services, or climate change messaging been accounted for adequately?

Related Resources:

[Hot and alone: how US cities work to protect isolated people in heatwaves](#)

[Heat Early Warning System and Collaboration between Health and Meteorological Agencies](#)

[Sheltering Seniors from Extreme Heat: A Study of NYCHA Senior Housing Heat Early Warning](#)

Reducing Air Pollution from Road Freight Traffic

System: Public Health | Actor: Private Company

INTRODUCTION

In a city with a long history of manufacturing and freight transport, residents in low-income neighborhoods experience disproportionately higher levels of air pollution and related respiratory illness. While regulatory efforts have targeted emissions at the citywide level, uptake of mitigation tools—like home air purifiers, electric vehicle incentives, and optional equipment upgrades at industrial warehouses and facilities—has been uneven and has failed to gain the necessary momentum. A regional logistics company, under increasing pressure to reduce its environmental footprint, seeks to implement air quality improvements that not only meet compliance goals but also earn trust and support from locals most affected by its operations.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Grafting onto Existing Rootstock

The company begins by aligning its mitigation efforts with practical needs and existing patterns of daily life in affected neighborhoods. The company partners with local mechanics and repair shops to perform EV conversions for its delivery vehicles and small fleets. It also schedules its clean-fleet pilot routes to prioritize school zones and elder care centers, which are frequented by constituencies that locals aim to protect. By taking these steps to reduce direct emissions impacting air quality, the company not only lowers exposure to harmful particulates in sensitive areas, but also strengthens local partnerships, increases community acceptance, and accelerates the adoption of cleaner technologies in high-impact zones.

Questions To Consider

- How is the impact of planned activities on air quality and community health going to be measured and reported on?
- Have partnerships with trusted local actors supported their long-term capacity, not just short-term outcomes?

Related Resources:

[Real-World Contribution of Electrification and Replacement Scenarios to the Fleet Emissions in West Midland Boroughs, UK](#)

Addressing Financial Constraints that Delay Climate Progress

System: Waste Management | Actor: City Government

INTRODUCTION

A city aiming to meet its climate targets faced growing waste volumes and aging landfill infrastructure, but lacked the funding to implement a modern organics collection and composting system citywide. While leaders proposed a fee-based program to cover operating costs, concerns quickly emerged from lower-income neighborhoods that already struggled with utility burdens. Community members voiced skepticism about paying into a system they feared would roll out unevenly across the city. What began as a practical funding gap quickly became a matter of equity and trust, stalling political momentum and raising broader questions about how the costs and benefits of waste management driven by targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would be distributed.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Facilitating a Just and Orderly Transition

To respond, the city's public works department worked with community representatives to co-design a phased implementation plan that explicitly addressed distributive fairness. Pilot programs were launched in historically underserved neighborhoods first, with subsidies provided through a green infrastructure equity fund. The department also established a participatory budgeting process to shape how revenue from the program would be reinvested—prioritizing local composting sites, green job creation, and educational outreach. By centering fairness in both rollout and funding mechanisms, the program was understood not as a burden, but as a shared investment in community health and climate resilience—earning broader support and unlocking additional state-level sustainability grants.

Questions To Consider

- How could a progressive funding model be used for citywide organics collection and composting systems?
- What metrics or indicators should be tracked to evaluate the fairness and effectiveness of the phased rollout and funding approach?

Related Resources:

['Waste collection is green work': how a pro-poor partnership created jobs and cleaned a city](#)

[The Truth About the Minnesota Miracle: The Coordinated Investments and Strategy That Built the Power to Win Equitable Climate Action in Minnesota](#)

Addressing Opposition to Waste-to-Fuel

System: Waste Management | Actor: City Government

INTRODUCTION

In a city undergoing economic transition and positioning itself as a clean energy innovation hub, a proposed waste-to-fuel facility became a flashpoint for public concern. Residents near the proposed site raised alarms about air quality, odors, and the potential for hazardous waste residue. City officials had focused on economic benefits and greenhouse gas emissions reductions in early outreach efforts but underestimated the degree to which local fears—shaped by practical concerns about health, safety, and daily life—would dominate the public conversation. Efforts to move forward stalled as public meetings grew contentious, and opposition hardened across neighborhood groups.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

○ Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes

In its efforts to find a way forward through more productive engagement, the city's sustainability department invited a diverse set of residents to join a community advisory panel with direct influence over specific aspects of the project's design and oversight. City staff worked to understand and reflect community priorities not only through dialogue, but by embedding those concerns into project negotiations including an independent air quality control plan, requiring third-party verification of odor mitigation technologies, and negotiating protocols for transparent reporting of waste residue management. By centering local concerns within early-stage project planning, city officials shifted the conversation from opposition to collaboration.

Questions To Consider

- How will the advisory panel reflect the full diversity of perspectives, especially those most directly impacted by the facility?
- How will technical information (e.g., air quality metrics, odor controls) be communicated in ways that are accessible, transparent, and verifiable to the public?

Related Resources:

[Sri Lanka's first waste-to-energy power plant turns mountains of trash into clean electricity](#)

[Millerhill Recycling and Energy Recovery Centre – Midlothian, Scotland](#)

Lack of Trust in City Council to Deliver Waste Management Improvements

System: Waste Management | Actor: NGO

INTRODUCTION

In a mid-sized coastal city, efforts to overhaul waste management practices have stalled due to widespread public distrust of the city council. Past initiatives were criticized for favoring certain neighborhoods and failing to deliver promised benefits equitably. As a result, new proposals—even those designed with community input—are met with skepticism, and recycling rates remain stubbornly low. An NGO focused on environmental justice has been invited to help build bridges between the council and residents.

How could applied ethics address this challenge?

Finding Common Language

The NGO conducts listening sessions across different neighborhoods to understand residents' lived experiences and values around stewardship and fairness. They then translate technical waste management goals into narratives that resonate with local values—for example, framing recycling initiatives as acts of community pride or ancestral responsibility. By honoring diverse expressions of shared values, the NGO fosters greater public understanding and cooperation, helping to rebuild trust and enabling waste reduction goals to move forward more equitably.

Questions To Consider

- How can NGOs improve attendance and participatory engagement in listening sessions?
- How can technical policy goals be communicated in ways that align with local values?

Related Resources:

[The Flint Community's Action Plan to Rebuild Trust and Encourage Resiliency During the Post Water Crisis Phase](#)

[How Imams, Royalty and Family Celebrations are Wiping Out Polio in Nigeria](#)

[The 'Don't mess with Texas' Campaign](#)

Climate Action in Cities

Applied Ethics Strategies

To see how these ethics strategies could be applied to accelerate climate action implementation in cities, [visit the Carnegie Ethics Accelerator tool.](#)

●●● Building Trust

Public acceptance of actions proposed to address climate change can be hindered if there is a loss of trust in the institutions, systems, or actors involved in initiating or managing their implementation. Perceptions of hypocrisy or lack of belief that costs and benefits will be fairly distributed can substantially affect support for, or participation in, action. This is true even when the proposed change is supported in principle. Building trust in the competency and intentions of implementing actors, systems, and institutions is essential in overcoming this source of inertia.

●●● Facilitating a Just and Orderly Transition

Change is disruptive, and systemic change even more so. Therefore, ensuring transitions are orderly and fair in their distribution of burdens and benefits—and the process through which distribution is decided—can help ensure acceptability and more comprehensive support for, and participation in, the transition.

●●● Finding Common Language

Language is a powerful indicator of cultural, societal, and group values and principles. Certain words or phrases can be interpreted as indicating a wider set of values and principles that may be considered incompatible with one's own—and consequently the underlying message (and any associated messages) risks being ignored or rejected. For example, use of the phrase “climate change” may be interpreted by some as representing a worldview grounded in socially liberal, progressive, left-wing, or “woke” values which fail to resonate with those not sharing such values. This may consequently put them off before considering the core message about the need for action on climate change. Sensitivity to the semiotics of language used in advocating for climate action and finding common language that connects with—rather than conflicts with—the diverse range of values and principles represented in the target audience can ensure more effective and widespread engagement with the message being communicated.

●●● Grafting onto Existing Rootstock

Top-down implementation of climate action can fail to find full support or uptake at individual or local levels due to issues such as lack of trust, perceptions of fairness, or perceived conflicts in underlying values and principles. Scaling the adoption of any action requires sensitivity to and connection with the established cultures, practices, values, principles, needs, and interests of the individuals or communities involved. Climate action is no different. Designing implementation attuned to these things can ensure more effective and widespread engagement and uptake.



Prioritizing Middle-Ground Solutions

There's a tendency for actors involved in the design and implementation of climate action to either strive for perfection or think they must choose between polar opposites while overlooking creative, middle-ground solutions. Prioritizing such 'inflection points' rather than pursuing absolutes can help avoid delays resulting from perfectionism or polarization.



Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes

Lack of understanding and consideration of the values, principles, needs, or interests of those involved in climate action can result in pushback, criticism, polarization, or stalemates. Consequently, parties involved may either disengage altogether or focus on defending their position rather than being open to more productive engagement. Taking critics seriously and honing active listening skills to "sit on the same side of the table" and see matters from different perspectives can help ensure more productive engagement. These skills can be effectively driven by empathy and concern for others, the principle of charity, or simply a desire to find convergence based on common interests or towards common outcomes.



Speaking to an Existing Truth

Many advocates of climate action unwittingly fall into the trap of trying to "inject" their message into the minds of their audience. Driven by their sense of urgency (or passion), each failed attempt prompts an even more forceful intervention. Finding the means by which to speak to an existing truth already held in minds (or hearts) of the target audience can be an effective means to connect.



Strengthening Ethical Literacy

When deciding on whether and how to engage in action on climate change—or promoting activities to encourage others to do so—understanding the underlying ethical frameworks guiding such decisions can hugely help or hinder implementation. These frameworks are often assumed, implicit, or unexamined. There are many ways to answer the question, "What should I do?" It can be analyzed by the consequences of an action, or the obligations or duties you believe an actor has, or what the action implies about a person's character or values. The strongest arguments are those that can be expressed in multiple ethical "languages." In turn, this requires advocates to be ethically "literate" across the spectrum of these "languages." Such literacy can help advocates of climate action better frame their arguments using the multiple "languages of ethics" that are being accorded validity within their ethically diverse target audiences.



Valuing Small Decisions

Given the global scale of climate change, there is a tendency to discount or overlook the potential of small changes and instead focus on large actions and actors to deliver the scale of impact required. But small decisions matter. Emphasize that a small change—when made by a large number of people—can have an outsized impact. The biggest challenge is not that we are powerless, but the belief that we are powerless.