

## 15 STEPS: HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN MESSAGE

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*The following steps outline a sequential process that can increase the effectiveness of your climate communications by connecting with people's values and providing answers that are grounded in their beliefs. One-on-one conversations can help us to more deeply understand the climate concerns and hopes of our congregations.*

### **Start with people, stay with people**

If you want your congregation to care about climate change, then show that you care for them. Begin from their perspective, not yours. Infuse your conversation with tangible and relevant daily concerns. Connect with your audience before talking about climate issues, not the other way around, and keep bringing the conversation back to them.

### **Connect on common values**

As a trusted leader, you are in a unique position to connect climate issues with your audience's core values. Open your audience's hearts and minds by discussing important values and showing your congregation that you share and honor their concerns. Connect first on the values that bring the congregation together—for example, faith, family, and community. This creates an emotional and motivating bond that paves the way for a productive discussion on climate change.

### **Acknowledge ambivalence**

People approach climate from different perspectives and have varying levels of concern for climate issues. Moreover, we all have other priorities. Respect the different viewpoints of your congregation, and allow your congregants to have their own space. A simple line such as “we have a variety of views regarding climate change in our community” allows people to be comfortable and to listen with an open mind.

### **Make it real**

Many Americans still view climate change as a distant concern. By focusing on local realities that people can see with their own eyes—simple, irrefutable facts about changing seasons or record weather in their own backyards, for example—faith leaders can make climate change real and relevant. One way to connect your audience to the reality of climate change impacts is to share the story of someone you have met who has been affected by climate change. Assume the realities—don't argue the science. Use a light hand with one or two examples and then quickly pivot to solutions.

### **Emphasize solutions**

Many people do not yet realize the extent to which clean energy powers our lives or understand that it is now among the least expensive of our energy options. We also have proven policies that reduce carbon pollution while accelerating economic growth. There is a suite of economic, health, nature, and security co-benefits associated with these energy solutions (see <http://www.climatesolutions.org>). Keep your congregation engaged and listening by offering tangible examples of solutions that are *real* in the here-and-now.

### **Inspire and empower**

Americans are repeatedly told that they cannot affect climate change when, in fact, the exact opposite is true. Every day, our words and actions—from the way we drive, to what we eat, to our ministry—can support solutions and inspire the people around us. One great way to accomplish this goal is to highlight how congregations or faith communities have benefited from climate action. We can lead on climate issues and so can our states, towns, congregations, families, and congregants!

### **Focus on personal benefit**

Most Americans think that action on climate change comes with a cost to their lifestyles and to their pocketbooks. However, the opposite is true. We save money by saving energy; moreover, we are also healthier with more efficient transportation and more nutritious food. Always emphasize the personal benefits of climate solutions. And for people of faith, it is also critical to emphasize how climate solutions advance the values and mission of their faith tradition, whether by creating a more just and humane world or by using energy savings to reduce the congregation's operating costs, support mission work, or provide food to a local food bank.

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### **End with your “ask”**

Always empower your congregation with solutions. Encourage them to turn information and understanding into action. Give them examples, ideas, and steps that they can take to make a difference individually, within and beyond the congregation. Show them how behavior change is easier and more inexpensive than they might think.

### **Sequence matters**

Research reveals that you can take the same set of six facts, arrange them in different ways, and end up with very different results. Connect on common values, acknowledge ambivalence, and then transition from impacts to solutions. Finally, focus on personal and congregational benefits. If you begin with the negative and impersonal, it is very difficult to get back to the positive, personal, and relevant. Follow the first eight steps in order.

### **Describe, don’t label**

Use the language of your faith tradition in your climate communications. Furthermore, keep it simple. Jargon and labels confuse people. Avoid such terms as “mitigation,” “adaptation,” and others on this guide’s “replace” list. Rather, follow the “embrace” guidance. Remember, the most persuasive language is vivid, familiar, and descriptive.

### **Have at least 1 powerful fact from a trusted messenger**

One or two facts that pack a great deal of emotional power will add significant weight to your message. Your own testimony is important, but so is that of other highly trusted messengers or organizations, as it can lend credibility and importance to your words. Use at least one memorable and relevant quote or fact taken from someone your audience trusts. Consider your denominational head, regional or missional leader, or another well-known leader such as Pope Francis.

### **Ditch doom and gloom**

We’ve all heard advocates who attempt to spur people to action by portraying climate change in dire or fatalistic terms. Emphasizing this aspect promotes fatalism and emotional numbing, causing people to turn away and disengage. Instead, focus on the common good. Cast a vision of a restored creation, of a better and healthier world. Remind your congregation that we can work together to achieve this vision. Solutions, benefits, and personal empowerment are the messages you want your congregants to absorb.

### **Use stories to strengthen engagement**

Stories allow your message to seem relevant and vivid. They help you to create connections with your congregation, allowing you to build bonds, enhance empathy, and open hearts and minds to new perspectives. Deepen your message by weaving in your personal story—tell them how you became concerned about climate change, for instance, and how you see it as connected to your faith tradition and as a central part of your ministry.

### **Stay above the fray**

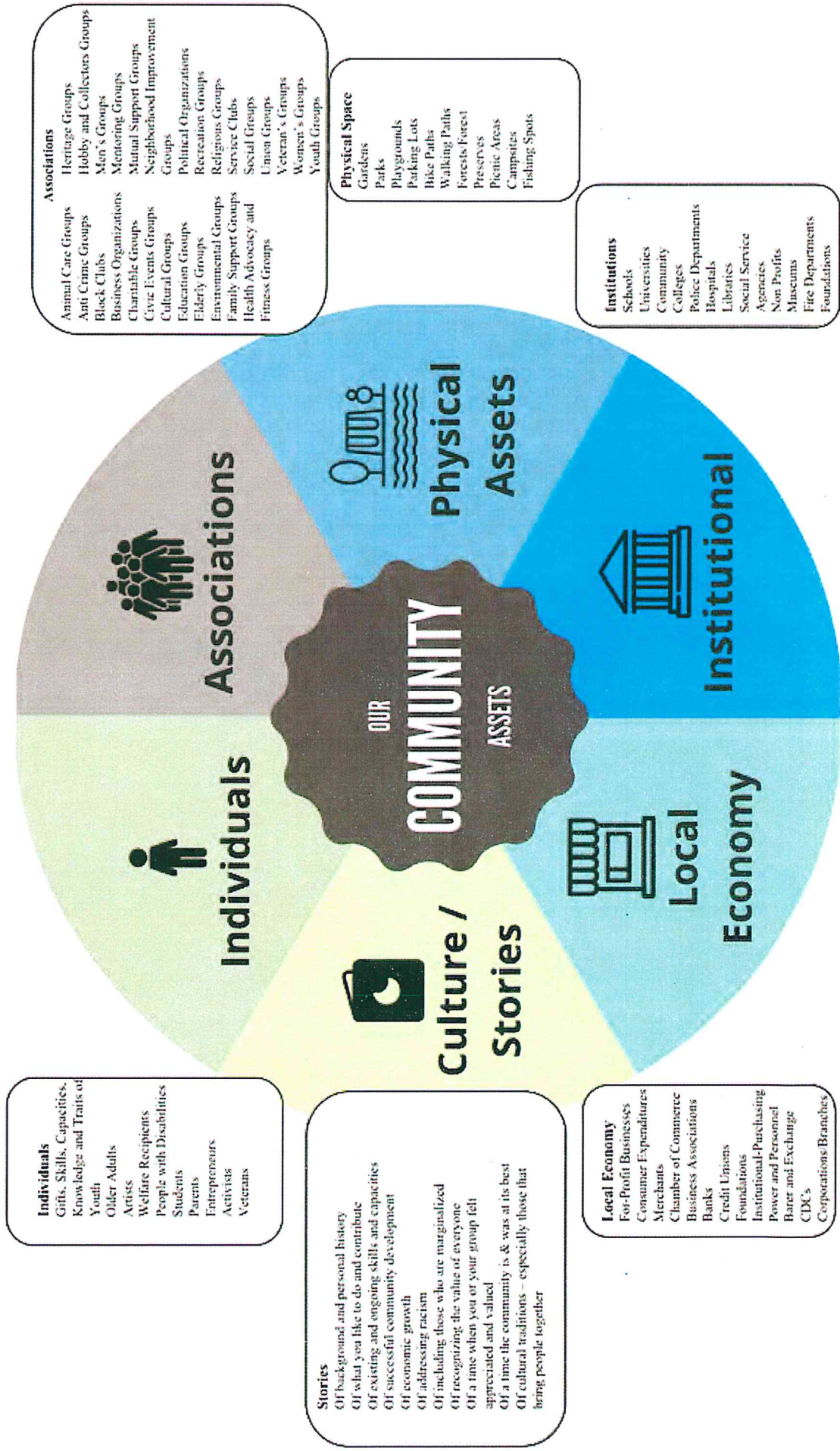
Focus on the big picture; that is, emphasize what is important to your congregation and faith tradition. Do not get caught in the trap of arguing or diving into details, and do not get sidetracked if an individual tries to poke holes in your thesis. Avoid demonizing opponents, blaming adversaries, and engaging in confrontations that can distract from your message, cause you to lose your audience, or reduce your effectiveness.

### **Message discipline is critical**

Stay true to your talking points. Repeat your key points. Do not explain the same thing in different ways—this can be more confusing than enabling. Follow the steps outlined in this guide, and be consistent across all messaging platforms. Use climate messengers and integrate climate messaging in all ministries, but be sure to tailor your message to your audience.



# SAMPLE ASSET MAP



# ASSET MAPPING TEMPLATE

