

A Climate Change Network

By Dan Adamson

1. We are holding this workshop at a time when climate change impacts are probably not at the top of our busy list or priorities – maybe we're a bit early. But each of you have taken time today to connect with others on this - probably because you know that soon we are going to have to move it higher up on our priority list.
2. By way of example, look at the Mountain Pine Beetle community coalitions in the Cariboo-Chilcootin and the Omineca. These Mayors and Directors are working now to address potential community economic development strategies that look ahead 5-8 years from now. They under-score the importance of being pro-active, of being in front of the emerging issues – not waiting until the issue has fully surfaced into a crisis. So, maybe we should learn from these community leaders. Perhaps we're not too early.
3. So today, you're connected. But I wonder, what happens after today? Do we all leave today and not talk about this until the next session? Or, is there an opportunity now to start building something that will support you and others following your lead? This is where we started thinking about a network. So what do we mean by a network?
4. First, I should mention that I don't have any specific designs in mind about what a network might look like. So, for now I wanted to leave you with some ideas and thoughts.
5. Most of you are familiar with networks. Networks can provide a variety of functions, such as helping people connect, acting as an information resource, providing information and linkages, fostering dialogues, supporting a community of practice to do tasks, or even creating events such as workshops or training sessions. Networks can connect the research community with the practitioners – providing advice back and forth about research priorities and needs and how to apply research outputs. Networks can be complex or simple. They are about supporting a collective or individuals with similar goals or interests.

6. In particular, a network for BC or northern BC might be especially important because the champions and community leaders interested in climate change impacts will be geographically spread out from one another. How can we help a councillor in Burns Lake connect with someone in Prince George or elsewhere that might have the information he or she is looking for? People all over BC, Canada and beyond are dealing with this – how can we tap into them and visa versa? How can a researcher at UNBC get their findings in the hands of municipal planners and how can a city manager influence a climate change researcher to focus on a burning issue they are facing? How can the public works managers share their experiences in dealing with infrastructure impacts?
7. The option of a web-based network is intriguing to us, because people can go to the web-site when it's convenient for them. This helps address the "busy" factor or the "capacity" issue, which I would argue is the biggest challenge ahead for supporting those that want to be a leader and champion in their community. Believe it or not, there are other issues that community staff, managers and leaders have to deal with on a daily basis.
8. There are numerous examples of successful internet-based communities of practice, learning communities, knowledge networks and so-forth. The successful ones emerged because the online interaction was not the *goal* itself, but was rather a *means* to help a group achieve its goals. Given this, I think we need to be clear on what people want out of a network, what the goals are, who should be involved, how they would interact, etc. Therefore, we need to get the initial users together first and begin the steps in building a network and then build the supporting tools.
9. You will have opportunities this afternoon during the Courtyard Café to provide your thoughts on the network idea and we'd appreciate your advice, comments and ideas. In general, the concept is wide open. My only caution is that we would probably be best to build something in stages – smaller bit-size parts - to ensure we are getting it right along the way. If we go ahead on this, let's be sure of the why's and the what's first – then we'll be able to address the how's.