

The benefits of community-led climate action

A resource to support project design,
monitoring, learning & storytelling

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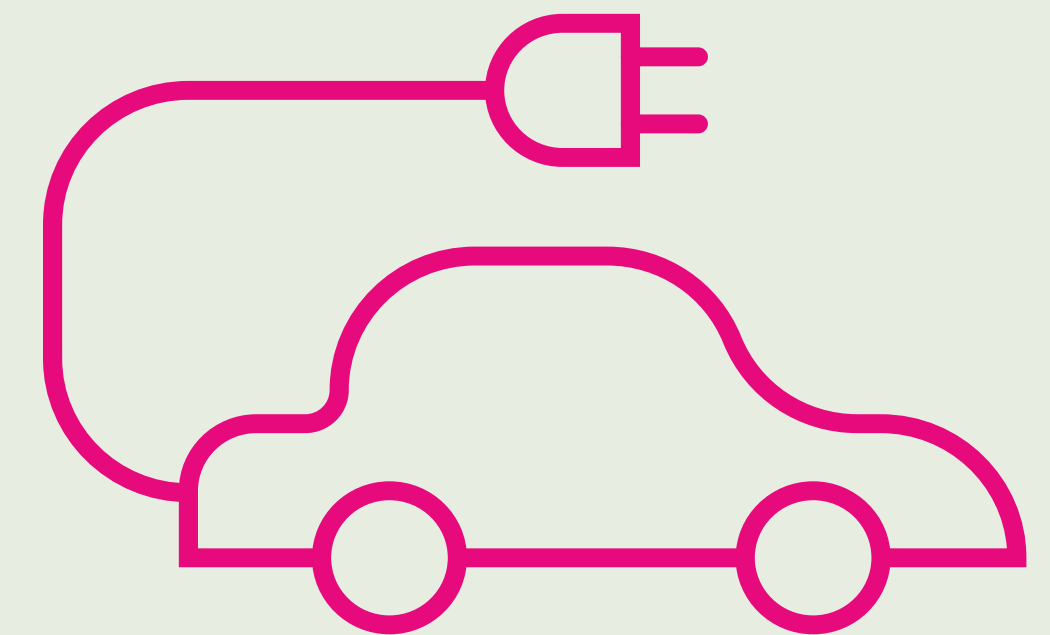
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Overview

Have you thought about the large extent of benefits that can emerge from community-led climate action projects?

Have you considered how these benefits might relate to your own climate action?

Do you know which benefits are most important to your stakeholders?

In the initial stages of project definition, it can be easy to focus on the very immediate, direct benefits that project activities are intended to achieve. When it comes to climate action, this might include reductions in energy use, green space creation, increased rates of materials reuse, among others. As projects are rolled out, those direct, tangible benefits are frequently the ones that are captured through monitoring, evaluation and learning, and communicated to stakeholders.

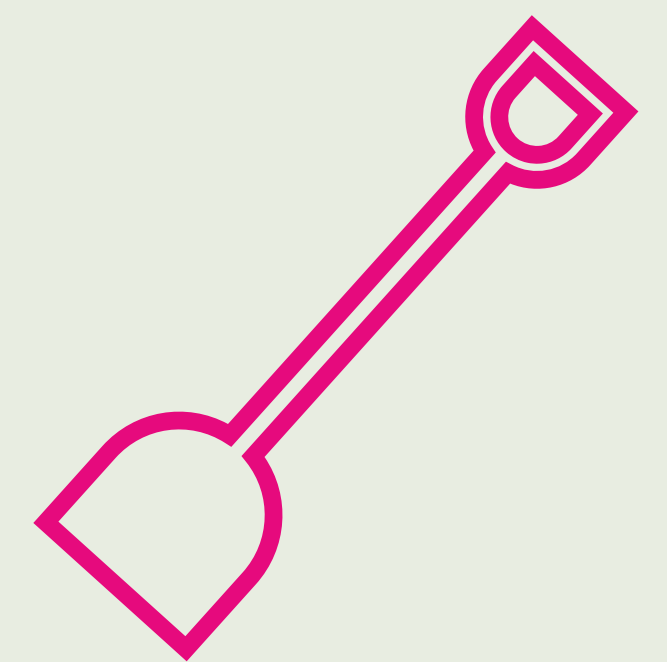
It's easy to overlook the wider, less direct benefits that activities can bring - but in many cases those benefits are just as important and impactful as the direct ones, and in some cases they may hold greater significance with the communities, partners or future funders you are seeking to engage.

Having a full overview of potential benefits can help in the early stages of project definition, ensuring that projects are designed to achieve positive impacts across a range of indicators, and that they are oriented towards the interests of key project stakeholders. Benefits can be incorporated early into a project's theory of change, and then into monitoring, evaluation, learning, and project communications.

This Summary Report presents the findings from research conducted by the University of Leeds in 2025, on behalf of the Climate Action Fund (CAF) Learning & Support Partnership, including the Benefits Framework. By presenting this Benefits Framework, the CAF Learning & Support Partnership aims to highlight the range of benefits that are relevant to community-led climate action projects.

This is to encourage a broader perspective on 'total benefits', and to promote more systematic methods of measuring common benefits across community-led projects. While no project can possibly measure everything, there is likely to be a few benefits that resonate strongly in any project context.

It is aimed primarily at CAF grant holders, but other community and climate action stakeholders may also take value from the findings.



Mapping actions to benefits

While many climate action activities have a central objective to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or build climate resilience, the actual benefits often extend far beyond. This is important, as these wider benefits can address the daily priorities of local people, communities, partners, funders and decision makers, and motivate support and participation.

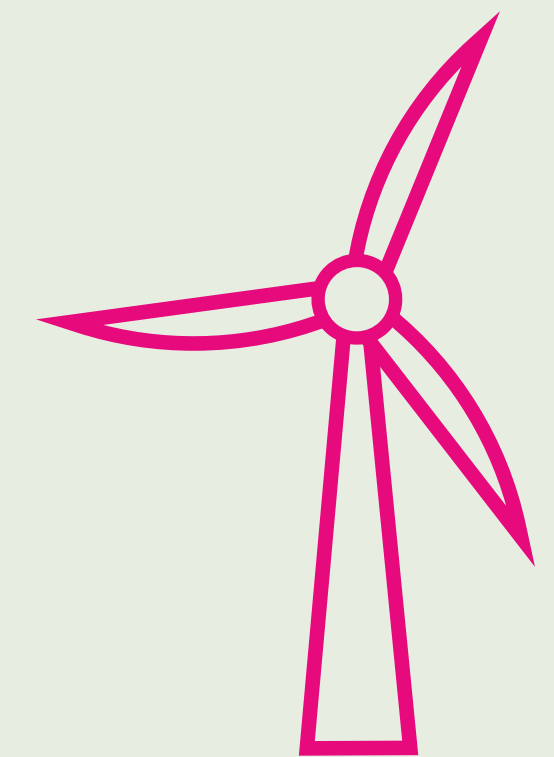
The graphic below illustrates the types of benefits that flow from community-led climate activities. Activities have been grouped under six Activity types which reflect the wide variety of project activities undertaken by CAF grant holders:

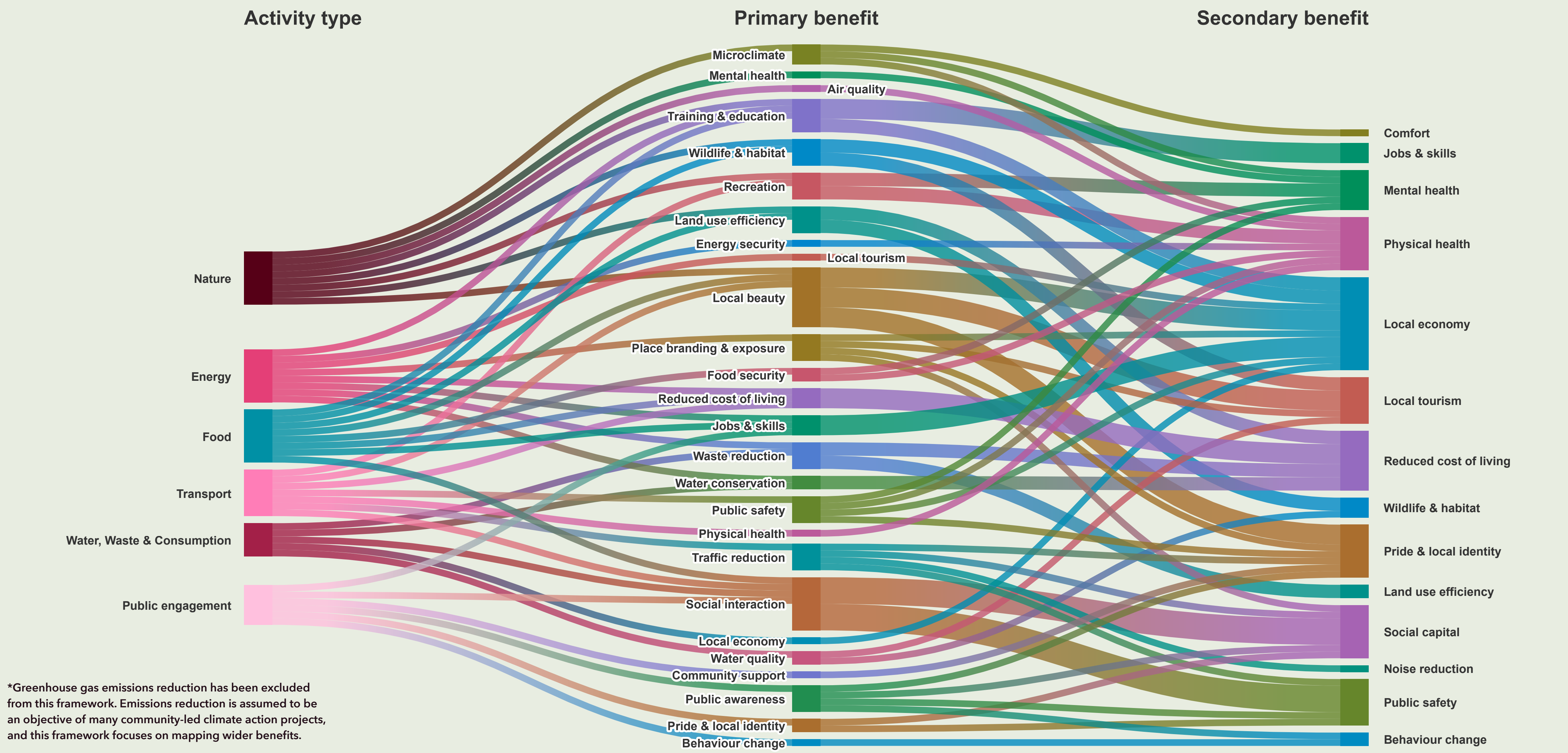
- **Nature** (e.g. tree planting, urban greening, habitat restoration)
- **Water, Waste & Consumption** (e.g. recycling, composting, water efficiency)
- **Energy** (e.g. renewable energy projects, energy efficiency initiatives)
- **Transport** (e.g. active travel, public transport, car sharing)
- **Public Engagement** (e.g. climate change advocacy, training, education).
- **Food** (e.g. orchards, community gardens, allotments).

Drawing on published literature, activities are linked to four Benefit categories:

- **Community** – benefits related to the social wellbeing of people.
- **Economic** – benefits related to the distribution of resources and wealth in a community.
- **Environmental** – benefits related to environmental quality and conservation of natural resources.
- **Health** – benefits related to the physical and mental wellbeing of community members.

Primary benefits are the immediate, direct and often most visible benefits emerging from an activity, while secondary benefits are those that may flow from primary benefits. Both types of benefit can be attributed to the initial climate action.





Measuring benefits

Recognising the benefits of an activity is one thing, but measuring them in a way that provides robust evidence of the project's impact is quite another! Measurement needs to be practical and proportionate to a project team's resources, and different methods are suited to understanding different types of benefit.

Whether you choose a quantitative approach to measurement or a more qualitative approach based on observation, opinion and experiences, the key is ensuring consistency over time to build up a clear picture of the change you are making. Being transparent about the approach you have taken and acknowledging any limitations will help you and your stakeholders to use data appropriately.

So, what are the methods you could use to measure the broader benefits of your work? Many benefits can be assessed using surveys or interviews to gather opinions/preferences, or perceptions of change over time. Other quantitative methods are suggested below.



Measuring benefits

Community benefits

Benefit

Local beauty

Place branding & exposure

Community support

Pride & local identity

Training, education & awareness

Social interaction

Social capital

Behaviour change

What am I looking for?

Enhanced visual aesthetics of the community, e.g. through greening

Improved reputation or identity of a neighbourhood

Increased engagement and backing for climate action.

Increased community morale & stronger cultural connection to a location

Greater knowledge about climate change & action

New connections made between local people

Enhanced networks of trust, cooperation & mutual support

Increased desire to engage in sustainable behaviours

How could I measure it?

Change in area of green space

Change in quality of green space, e.g. thriving plants and amenities

Change in visitor numbers over time

Change in community participation/volunteerism (in climate action)

Change in community participation/volunteerism (in broader local initiatives)

Change in availability of/attendance at local classes & learning events

Change in level of understanding about climate change, reported by participants

Change in number of/attendance at community events

Change in personal connections, reported by participants

Change in community perception of local support networks

Change in volunteerism rate

Change in attendance at events, e.g. repair cafés, etc.

Behaviour changes reported by people/community groups

Measuring benefits

Economic benefits

Benefit

Reduced cost of living

Jobs & skills

Local economy

Local tourism

Energy security

What am I looking for?

Reduced expenses for local people, e.g. lower utility bills

Job creation & increase in skills relevant to green jobs

Increased viability of local businesses, leading to local growth, prosperity & jobs

Increase in visitor numbers due to environmental or cultural features

Improved access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy supplies

How could I measure it?

Change in household costs, e.g. food, energy, water, based on a sampling approach

Change in availability of/attendance at local classes & training events
Change in number and type of local job listings

Change in number/size/scale of local businesses

Change in footfall in local area over a defined period

Change in number of households supplied with locally generated energy
Change in number of households reporting energy poverty

Measuring benefits

Environmental benefits

Benefit

Air quality

Microclimate

Noise reduction

Waste reduction

Water conservation

Wildlife & habitat*

Traffic reduction

What am I looking for?

Improved atmospheric conditions due to reduced emissions & local pollution

Localised climate regulation, such as cooling from trees

Decreased ambient noise

Reduced generation of solid waste

Reduced use of water

Increase in biodiversity or extent of good quality habitat

Fewer vehicles on the road, leading to less congestion

How could I measure it?

Change in concentration of key pollutants (e.g. PM10), using sensors in key locations

Change in localised temperatures, using sensors in key locations

Change in noise levels, using decibel meters in key locations

Change in volume of solid waste at the project or wider community level

Change in water use based on meter readings

Change in number of species (plant/animal) observed in a defined area over time

Change in number of cars on the roads over a sample period
Change in walking/cycling numbers over a defined period

*Further insights about the measurement of nature benefits is being developed by the CAF Learning & Support Partnership.

Measuring benefits

Health benefits

Benefit

Food security

Mental health

Physical health

Public safety

Recreation

What am I looking for?

Improved access to sufficient, safe, nutritious and affordable food

Improved mental health & wellbeing

Improved physical health

Reduced impacts from hazards

Increased participation in leisure activities

How could I measure it?

Change in crop yields from community gardens/allotments
Change in number of people accessing fresh food from community sources
Attendance at events that provide information on nutrition, healthy food, etc

Reported change in mental health concerns by project participants/
surrounding community

Reported change in physical health concerns by project participants/
surrounding community

Change in reported safety incidents within a neighbourhood by local
community

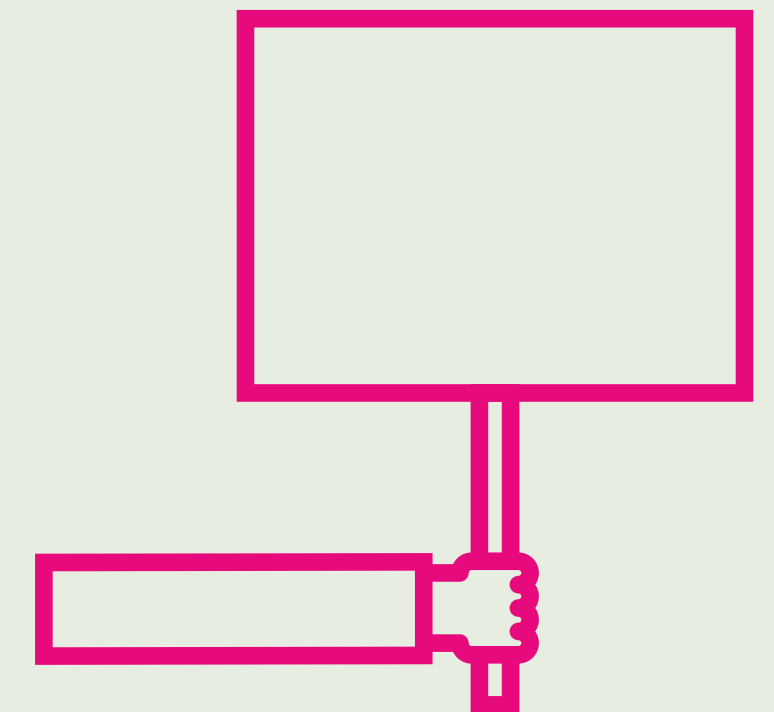
Change in number of people participating in local activities
Change in number of people using green spaces

What can I do now?

The Benefits Framework aims to help CAF grant holders and others involved in community-led climate action to consider the full range of benefits that may emerge from project activities. These benefits may be built purposefully into project design, development, monitoring, evaluation and communications. This approach not only supports clearer measurement and stronger storytelling for different audiences, but it also helps to ensure a broad range of benefits are achieved throughout a project's lifecycle.

CAF grant holders and others can use the framework to:

- Visualise and plan benefits: At the start of an activity, or during a project review, identify all the potential benefits your project could deliver; not just the obvious or intended ones. This helps in designing for wider impact, engaging new stakeholders and making the case for support.
- Refine your theory of change: You may already have a theory of change, or you may be thinking of developing one. Your theory of change will set out the outputs, outcomes and indicators associated with your project activities. A fuller view of the range of potential benefits can help you to sense check your theory.
- Measure what matters: Select measurable indicators that are meaningful for your community and the stakeholders you want to influence. This could include both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Make sure you have a plan for when and how you are going to measure and evaluate impact, and how learnings will be fed back into the project.
- Adapt for local context: Every community is different. Use the framework flexibly, adapting categories, benefits, and indicators to fit your local needs and priorities.
- Tell your story: Climate action doesn't resonate with everybody. By tracking a broader range of benefits, you can demonstrate the full value of your project to funders, partners and the public, and you can tailor your story to the interests of each audience. This can help secure future funding and build wider support.
- Connect and share: Collaborate with other CAF grant holders and community groups to share experiences, indicators and lessons learned. This collective learning can help refine the framework and improve practice across the sector.
- Send us your feedback! We'd love to hear how you've used the framework and what resonates most for your project.



About the Climate Action Fund

The Climate Action Fund (CAF) is a ten-year, £100 million funding programme that inspires and enables communities across the UK to take action on climate change. The programme was set up in 2019 by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. CAF supports a range of community-led projects that focus on reducing carbon emissions, enhancing climate resilience, and fostering sustainable practices at the local level. The grant holders of the CAF are diverse community groups that receive funding to implement community-led projects aimed at addressing climate change. They often work collaboratively with local authorities, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to deliver impactful community-led climate action.

About the CAF Learning & Support Partnership

In 2024, The National Lottery Community Fund commissioned Arup to lead the Climate Action Fund (CAF) Learning and Support Partnership, working with Innovation Unit, Creature & Co., and the University of Leeds. This research was carried out by researchers in the University of Leeds, in collaboration with Arup.

If you have any questions about the content of this report, or if you'd like to share examples of how you're using the benefits framework, please contact: CAFSupport@arup.com. To read the full research report, search for 'The Benefits of Community-led Climate Action - Full Report' in the [Fund's Evidence Library](#).