Develop a Climate-Ready Business Resource

PENOBSCOT CLIMATE ACTION

GHG ↓↓

MODERATE POTENTIAL to achieve greenhouse gas emissions reductions

HIGH POTENTIAL to build community resilience

Description of the Action

This toolkit is intended to support the Greater Bangor region in developing a resource to help local businesses identify and implement actions that support regional greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals and build resilience to climate change. The Climate-Ready Business Resource, or "the resource" will contain a list of actions, of varying scales, that local businesses can pursue. This resource will highlight financial, environmental, and other relevant data that will help those businesses evaluate costs and benefits of implementation. Additionally, the resource will provide a clearinghouse of existing local, regional, state, and federal incentives, rebates, tax credits, subsidies, loans, grants, and other financial resources to support the implementation of included actions. A list of local contractors and service providers who can support the implementation of actions can also be linked to the resource to support implementation. A large part of this action will center on identifying existing guidance and resources (such as those available through Efficiency Maine), and packaging and delivering them to local businesses in a way that is accessible and meaningful to them.

To support uptake of actions listed in the resource, the Greater Bangor Region can work with local partners to develop a technical assistance program that will assist businesses in understanding options for increasing sustainability and resilience, completing more precise cost-benefit analyses, and making an implementation plan. Once this resource is available, municipalities would work with the Bangor Chamber of Commerce, other local business groups, educational institutions, and other partners to connect the resource to those who may benefit.

Steps for Implementation

PHASE 1

Foundation and Strategy

Identify a lead implementation partner(s) – The Climate Action Committee would identify a lead implementation partner or group of partners who will spearhead the implementation of this toolkit. The implementation partner(s) may be a regional organization, local nonprofit, and/or academic institute or center that focuses on economic development, sustainability, and climate resilience goals, and that has the capacity to lead toolkit implementation. The Climate Action Committee would work with the lead implementation partner(s) to discuss the toolkit vision, define a formal collaboration process, and identify pathways for funding. The partner(s) would not necessarily be responsible for implementing all actions of this toolkit, but would ensure that they are being carried forward. The lead implementation partner(s) may be the same as the lead implementation partner(s) for Toolkit #8; if not, coordination would be beneficial.

Conduct outreach to understand local business needs and priorities – Conduct outreach with the local business community to identify needs and priorities related to a

How This Action Supports the Goals of Penobscot Climate Action

⭐ **Equity and Environmental Justice.** This action will help expand access to resources and information that can support resilience and energy and cost savings for small businesses in the Greater Bangor region, including rural and economically disadvantaged areas. This action could address equity more deliberately by focusing outreach and technical assistance to minority-owned businesses, women-owned businesses, small businesses, and other similar designations.

⭐ **Environmental Health.** This action will support local businesses in adopting practices that reduce their environmental impact, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air and water quality, and reducing waste. The advising service will further help businesses integrate environmental health considerations into their decision-making.

⭐ **Community Resilience.** This action will compile information and resources to support businesses in building resilience to climate change. Many types of building and energy retrofits, for example, can help reduce the impact of extreme weather, keep employees safe, and avoid business interruptions.

⭐ **Regional Collaboration.** Because this is a regional resource, there will be a collaborative regional effort between municipalities, business groups, and regional organizations to develop, implement, and house the resource and associated technical assistance.

Photo in upper left: Solar panels on Mason's Brewing in Brewer • Photo by Matthew Dewitt

range of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or strengthen climate resilience. Conduct interviews and surveys to understand how the resource can be best designed to suit their needs. Explore attitudes about concept and intent of the resource, attitudes around potential actions, starting points, needs, motivations, design and format preferences, and barriers to implementing actions. This step can be combined with research initiatives in Toolkit #8.

Opportunity for Municipal Action

If municipalities want to get started on the development of climate-ready business resources independently, they could consider working with an academic partner at a local community college or university to design a course or a service learning project centered on developing a set of specific business resources. To ensure that the project is achievable within a semester, the project could zero in on a specific scope, for example: renewable energy installations on commercial buildings, green procurement practices for food service industries, or energy efficiency retrofits for small businesses. Students would conduct outreach to businesses, and work with partners, including the municipality, to identify and develop resources and information that would support business needs. The information gathered and resources developed would both support businesses independently, and could be shared with the Climate Action Committee, or the lead implementation partner(s) once established, to support the regional effort.

Identify a set of actions to include in the climate-ready business resource – Based on information generated through research efforts, identify and select a set of actions businesses can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or support climate resilience that will be included in the resource. Consult and collaborate with relevant partners (e.g., Efficiency Maine, Maine DEP, EPA, green technology providers, organizations working in waste reduction innovation, utility and energy companies, industry associations, and others) to home in on specific actions and to identify existing and new resources (e.g., technical information, funding streams, advising services, etc.) that would best support businesses. Work in conjunction with municipal staff during this step to identify ways actions could dovetail with new or existing programs offered by the City or Town (e.g., bulk buy programs for energy-efficient heat pumps). Include a range of actions, ranging from simple to more complex, and from low-cost to larger investments.

Design approach to the advising service – Identify an approach for delivering the advising service component of the resource. This may include building out capacity or capabilities within municipalities or within a regional organization, or funding a new regional position to serve as a dedicated technical assistance service provider. For this step, the advising service role should be able to serve across municipal boundaries when possible.
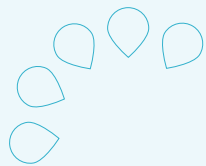
PHASE 2

Resource Design and Content Development

Develop the content of the climate-ready business resource – The content of the resource will depend on the needs identified by local businesses and the actions identified. Components will likely include a) financial,

Connections Across Existing Work and Other Climate Action Strategies

This action is likely to draw on and expand on the resources provided by Efficiency Maine, which are geared towards supporting Maine businesses (as well as homeowners and municipalities) in increasing energy efficiency and installing renewable energy technologies. Efficiency Maine currently offers a suite of informational resources, energy cost calculators for different technologies, connections to certified vendors and contractors, technical assistance, as well as rebates, loans, and incentives for energy efficiency and renewable energy investments.

This action is also intended to complement the implementation of Toolkit #8 Design and implement a green trades training and subsidy program. The resource should include links to local contractors and service providers participating in the Green Trades and Subsidy Program Together, Toolkit #7 and Toolkit #8 provide knowledge and resources for local businesses to implement green, sustainable, and resilient actions.

operational, and environmental data to help businesses make strategic decisions about investments; b) a clearinghouse or list of relevant local, regional, state, and federal funding sources, financing resources, or technical assistance to support the actions in the resource; and c) connections to certified local contractors and service providers who can support implementation of actions (e.g., Efficiency Maine

certified vendors, or custom referral networks developed for the resource). Consider opportunities for alignment with Toolkit #8, which includes efforts to strengthen green trades training and job pipelines.

Create case studies of local businesses that have implemented actions – Identify a range of local businesses (different sizes, different products/services) that have already implemented actions in the resource. Interview them to generate stories about their motivations and the benefits their businesses have seen as a result of those actions. Additional case studies can be built out as more businesses use the resource.

Design and produce the resource – Use stakeholder feedback to determine the format of the resource (e.g.,

website, app, physical booklet, etc.). Once format(s) are determined, work with a graphic designer/web-designer to design and put together resource content (i.e., actions, cost-benefit data, financial resources, local contractor and service provider list, case studies).

Define role for municipalities to support Climate-Ready Business Resource uptake – Municipal staff can support the uptake of actions in the Climate-Ready Business Resource in a variety of ways (e.g., direct outreach, posting information on municipal websites, events). For this step, explicit ways that municipalities can contribute should be defined in coordination with municipal staff. Because municipalities across the region will have varying degrees of capacity to encourage local businesses within their municipalities to implement practices in the Climate-Ready Business Resource, a range of options should be identified.

PHASE 3

Resource Implementation

Build out the advising service – Identify and secure funding, training or capacity development, or staff or operational needs to support the advising service.

Pilot test the resource implementation – Pilot test the resource with a select group of local businesses to test the effectiveness of the resource, referral networks, funding mechanisms, and advising service. Make necessary adjustments to improve the initiative.

Launch the resource and advisory service – Roll out the initiative to all local businesses in the region. Work with a range of partners (e.g., municipalities, business groups, sustainability groups, etc.) to host events, conduct outreach, and widely spread information on the resource and program.

KEY PARTNERS

- **Local business groups and industry associations** (e.g., Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Bangor, Maine Small Business Development Center – Bangor)
- **Educational institutions and centers within academic institutions** (e.g., UMaine, Husson University, Eastern Maine Community College, UMaine Cooperative Extension, Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions)
- **Municipal staff** (e.g., Municipal Economic and Community Development Departments)
- **Regional environmental and economic development organizations** (e.g., EMDC)
- **Efficiency Maine**
- **Local businesses and landlords**
- **Green construction sector,** (e.g., contractors, service providers, green technology providers)
- **Utilities and energy companies**

Opportunity for Municipal Action

Another opportunity for municipalities to contribute to this toolkit independently is to support the generation of case studies. Identify and list local businesses in the municipality that have implemented green actions. Additionally, municipalities could have conversations with those businesses about the green actions and benefits to their businesses they've seen as a result. The list and notes from these conversations can be shared with the Climate Action Committee or lead implementation partner(s).

Downtown Hampden • Photo by Matthew Dewitt

Develop evaluation and maintenance plan – Establish a system for regular documentation and reporting of the initiative's progress, achievements, and challenges. Additionally, establish a system to regularly maintain and update the resource, for example with new actions as they become relevant, with updated data and case studies, and with new contractors and service providers. This evaluation process would be a great opportunity to collaborate with local academic researchers.

Celebrate success – On a regular basis, identify opportunities (at regional and municipal levels) to celebrate and showcase local businesses that implemented actions from the resource. These celebrations can be used to

further promote the resource, and also create pathways for other local businesses to learn first-hand about the benefits of implementing actions that support sustainability and resilience.

PRECEDENTS

- **Sustainable Business Guide from the Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia** – A guide targeted towards local businesses, outlining different actions that businesses can take to advance sustainability goals. The guide offers a variety of actions in the categories of water, energy, waste, transportation, and social impact.

- **Greening Your Organization Toolkit from Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility** – Two toolkits to support green actions by local organizations in the categories of 1) waste, energy, water, or toxics and 2) transportation. These toolkits offer frameworks for thinking through organizational transitions to green practices.

- **Raleigh Sustainable Business Toolkit** – A collection of resources and programs to support Raleigh businesses in reaching sustainability goals and goals of the Raleigh Community Climate Action Plan. Categories include building improvements, commuting and transportation, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and stormwater and water quality. An easy-to-digest slideshow of the information is also provided.

RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

- **Questionnaire to Assess Green Business Practices** – This is a questionnaire used by researchers at Ohio University and Loyola University Chicago to explore drivers and barriers to the adoption of green business practices of Small and Medium Enterprises. A revised version of this questionnaire may serve as a good starting point for conducting research with local businesses. The peer-reviewed research article that details the results and interpretation of the findings from the implementation of the questionnaire is available here.

- **Efficiency Maine** – Efficiency Maine offers a significant suite of resources and programs for businesses in Maine, including rebates and incentives, financing resources, technical assistance, connection to certified vendors and contractors, and more.

- **Mainers' Guide to Climate Incentives** – A resource developed by the Maine Climate Council that details financial support from state and federal programs to help Mainers make smart, climate-friendly investments for their business or home.

- **Database of State incentives for Renewables and Efficiency** – The DSIRE includes links to programs and incentives, searchable by state.

- **Maine DEP Green Business Certification** – A certification program offered by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection that awards businesses for being "environmental leaders," based on adopting a variety of environmental policies and practices.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

- The cost of the project will depend on the capacity of implementation partner(s), the amount of funding that the partner(s) would be needed to lead this work, and whether a consultant is brought on to help facilitate the process. This budget may range from $75k to $250k, depending on scope.

- A budget for the advising service may be equivalent to one full-time staff person, annually, with variability depending on the scope of services and programs offered.

- If a municipality decides to work directly with an academic partner on a smaller, specific set of business resources, project costs may include staff time; Make sure that any student and faculty time is valued accordingly through direct funding, academic credit, and/or learning opportunities.

POTENTIAL SOURCES FOR FUNDING

- **Maine Community Action Grants** – Funding for climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, including capacity building, planning, and implementation projects.

- **Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program (EECBG)** – Federal funding designated to assist states, local governments, and Tribes in implementing strategies to reduce energy use, to reduce fossil fuel emissions, and to improve energy efficiency, including developing and launching programs that will support those goals.

- **EPA Sustainability Research Grants** – Federal grants geared towards supporting the development of research, methods, programs, or tools that support sustainability.

- **USDA Energy Programs, USDA IRA Programs** – Funding for agriculture and rural businesses to complete energy audits, make energy efficiency improvements, and install renewable energy systems.