# Municipal Program Design:
# Common mistakes to overcome

January 2021

**Featured speakers:**
Patricia Lightburn, Senior Consultant
Laurent McNutt, Consultant

"No one likes a climate plan that sits on a shelf." In this installment of Energy Transition Insights, Dunsky Senior Consultant Patricia Lightburn and Consultant Lauren McNutt discuss how municipalities can avoid common pitfalls when designing programs, including: not using a cookie-cutter approach based on what worked in other communities (1:05 mns), setting realistic climate goals grounded in real-world evidence (3:02 mns), and co-creating climate plans through active stakeholder engagement (4:14 mns).

# Transcript

**Patricia Lightburn:**

Welcome to Energy Transition Insights. My name is Patricia, and I'm here with my colleague Lauren. We're here to talk to you today about some of the common pitfalls and challenges faced by communities as they seek to tackle the climate crisis.

Local governments are undoubtedly at the heart of climate action in Canada with more than 400 declaring climate emergencies. Successful climate plans can play a huge part in reducing emissions and offer important public engagement opportunities. But at the same time, we often hear that communities face common challenges and issues as they seek to develop plans and strategies.

So in this video, we'd like to discuss some of those challenges with you today in the hopes that we can help communities avoid some of these challenges in the future as they seek to develop climate plans.

So Lauren I'll hand it over to you. What are your thoughts on the first challenge?

**Lauren McNutt:**

I would say the first challenge is really assuming "what works in one community will work in yours". You know, certainly there's much to learn from others, but markets can dramatically differ from region to region, and a cookie cutter approach is just not going to work because each municipality is unique. We like to say don't fall in love with solutions, fall in love with solving your unique issues.

What I think we really try to encourage municipalities to do is really be empowered. Take an idea and a concept, but make it your own. Identify best practices, including lessons learned. And then I think it's really important to have open transparent communication up front about your local context. You know, we really try to encourage our clients to have those tough conversations up front. Ensure everyone is on the same page about their goals, what's important to them, and in key considerations that they need to to factor in. Like who are the key decision makers? What kind of background information and data is available? Who are the broader community and the stakeholders that need to be engaged?

And I think really important is to be prepared to iterate. Program design has lots of turns in the road. You'll uncover new things along the way, like how to adapt an existing solution and develop new ideas you know, and I'll give you a concrete example. We helped to develop Montreal's 2020-2030 climate plan, and that included a pretty comprehensive economy-wide GHG modeling and impact analysis of different actions that they can take. We want to make sure that we have defensible results, but we understand that municipalities may not be able to undertake such a significant project like that, so we can scale our work to balance out right level

of rigor, design strategies considering the resource and budget constraints of smaller communities face.

So Patricia, let me hand it over to you. What do you think is the second key issue?

**Patricia Lightburn:**

So the second challenge that we often see is communities setting unrealistic goals and targets. So while it's important to be ambitious, and we know that local governments understand the urgency of the climate crisis, at the same time it doesn't help anyone to set targets that are unattainable.

So the solution here is really to set targets that reflect real world evidence that shows what's actually achievable in them. So we use modelling and best practices and experience from other jurisdictions to work with local governments to design programs and strategies and targets that reflect real world conditions about not only what is theoretically possible, but what is actually realistically achievable. And this helps set a common understanding within the community about the path that we need to follow to get to our climate goals. And how do we know that what we're doing works? Well we incorporate program evaluation into our work to make sure that there is regular check-ins, to make sure that we're actually making the progress that we set out to make, and this helps keep everyone on the same page and achieve our goals in the long run.

**Lauren McNutt:**

I absolutely agree, and I'd say the last main issue that municipalities face is confusing stakeholder management with stakeholder engagement.

I think municipalities can no longer choose if they want to engage with stakeholders. It's really a matter of when and how successfully they engage. I think lack of limited or ineffective stakeholder engagement can result in municipalities being inefficient, reactive, defensive, which could erode their reputation; it could delay or derail programs if they lose support and buy-in. And it could end up resulting in missed opportunities for better program design, establishing key partnerships, to support program design and delivery. So what we try to encourage municipalities to do is to engage meaningfully. And by that I mean engaging the right stakeholders at the right time and making best use of stakeholders time by asking the right questions.

You know, we're asking a lot of stakeholder's for them to volunteer their time. We want to make sure that we maximize the time when we do engage with them, and I think by deploying creative and effective communication tools can really help to encourage open dialogue, and out-of-the-box thinking. And I think we need to allow for multiple viewpoints to provide an opportunity to challenge assumptions. You know, we bring a wealth of expertise and experience, but we always remain curious to find the right solutions to help achieve our client's goals and really to identify what's going to best serve the market.

**Patricia Lightburn:**

I know, no one likes a climate plan that sits on the shelf and working with stakeholders to co-create a climate plan is often one of the best ways to guarantee success, so I couldn't agree more.

Well, thank you everyone for listening, we hope you found this helpful. Feel free to check us out on LinkedIn or at our website, and don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.