



Proposal for Scaling-up Social Mobilization in our neighbourhoods

The R.E.A.C.H. Program

(Resilience through Education, Action & Capacity-building in the 'Hood)

Imagine a neighbourhood where students and local residents are empowered to act as agents of change leading climate preparedness on their block – influencing parents and friends, engaging neighbours, and showing what climate-friendly solutions look like on the ground – all while having fun, building neighbourliness, and improving resilience on their street. This proposal lays out a roadmap for rolling out 'cool tools' for local action, including the **Citizen's Coolkit**, through a **community-led** R.E.A.C.H. Program, backed by a partnership of agencies, organisations, and volunteers.

Background

Many people feel overwhelmed by the enormity of climate change and other challenges, are not prepared for their own local futures, and are unsure what they can do to mitigate or adapt to climate threats. [Research](#) shows that **collective action which is local, visible, and fun, involving peer pressure, training, and government support**, can transform attitudes and deliver rapid solutions & changes in behavior. Successful precedents such as [Cool Block](#) and [Green Bloc](#) have shown evidence of improved neighborliness and social cohesion within a community by connecting with the 'silent' neighbours and inspiring discussions about the things they all share & care about (hot summers, cooling, floods, recreational spaces for multi-generational use, etc.) in a fun, social, engaging way.

Emerging research on social innovation around climate awareness and behaviour change shows that reaching ambitious climate targets and mobilizing communities for the coming transition will require:

- wider social learning programs and innovative tools & resources for **youth** and **community** to foster collective action;
- encouragement of **'bottom-up' ideas** that can be initiated and implemented by local citizens in coordination with local government;
- **visible action on-the-ground** in neighbourhoods to inspire further action, social change, and policy support.

The R.E.A.C.H. Program

The proposed R.E.A.C.H. Program is designed to scale up community-led climate preparedness and urban forest stewardship through a **structured, multi-pronged community-led program**, coordinated through a partnership of agencies, support organisations, trained volunteers, and students. The proposed program will **recruit, train & empower local champions** using the [Citizen's Coolkit](#) at the city-block & neighbourhood scales, with an outcome of establishing engaged, resilient, healthy, inclusive and thriving neighbourhoods. The Coolkit has been shown to provide an attractive, fun-to-use 'one-stop-shop' with a menu of 'do-it-yourself' activities and practical steps that people can take in their own homes, gardens, streets, and parks, working together with their neighbours, local government and support organisations.

Building on the success of Coolkit, R.E.A.C.H. will leverage the role of neighbourhood champions, teachers, high school students, and UBC Urban Forestry students to build climate literacy, kick-start local engagement and scale up citizen-led initiatives across multiple residential blocks over a 3-year pilot period. The process will focus on **practical climate actions** for adaptation or mitigation (such as tree-planting for cooling, home energy conservation & upgrades, rain gardens for stormwater management, local food gardens, etc.), while addressing **co-benefits** including emergency preparedness, improved health & happiness, air quality, and neighbourliness.

Implementation

The R.E.A.C.H. program is planned for roll-out in local pilot neighbourhoods ('hoods) with schools and local service hubs (like community centres, parks, libraries, and places of worship) playing a key role in implementation and dissemination. The focus will be initially on 'hoods with relatively low canopy levels, high vulnerability to various climate risks, and related concerns for community building, in accordance with city policies or community initiatives.

The Program will have the following components:

- **Build capacity of local residents as neighbourhood champions** to prepare and mobilize citizens on climate change resilience and stewardship of trees
- **Train high school teachers as educators/influencers for youth** to teach climate change with confidence
- **Engage high school students as climate ambassadors** leading discussions and change within their families and communities
- **Prepare UBC students to be youth mentors** on how to engage, support and empower high school students to be Climate Ambassadors in their own 'hood
- **Implement visible community projects** led by youth in schools and/or residents in the 'hood.

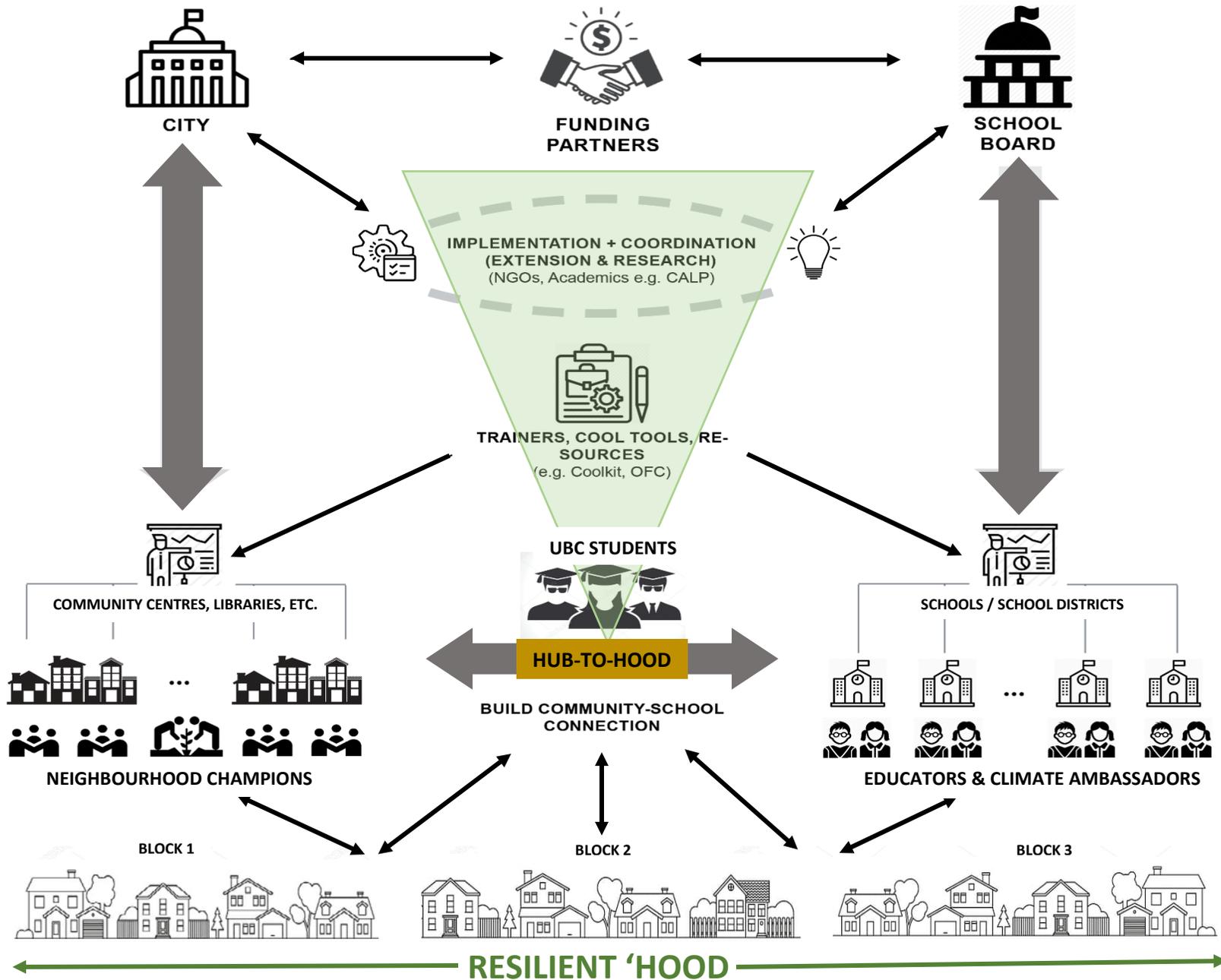
R.E.A.C.H will involve regular check-ins and advice from Parks Departments, other City experts, School Board, teachers, UBC team and other partners/collaborators to evaluate the efficacy of the program through quantitative and qualitative feedback. Potential ways to expand the Program beyond the selected 'hoods and disseminate materials to other neighbourhoods and schools for broader, on-going community engagement will also be explored. After the 3-year pilot period, a wider extension program would be launched with appropriate media buzz to scale-up to more 'hoods each year, recruited through a competitive invitation process.

The following diagram helps explain the structure of the R.E.A.C.H. program. It proposes a unique collaboration between key actors/partners already known to CALP or the local community, including:

- **Anchor Organizations** (e.g. Cities, school boards, community-oriented businesses, NGOs) that provide sustained support and funding for development and implementation
- **Neighbourhood Champions and Student Ambassadors** as catalysts in communities to prepare, plan and advocate local climate solutions, coordinated through community centres, libraries, neighbourhood houses, places of worship, etc.

A unique aspect of this approach is to foster the **community-school connection** through a joint delivery of school and community programs in each 'hood – leveraging the power of youth to influence parents and drive **real-life projects** and behaviour changes that are visible and impactful.

Framework diagram of R.E.A.C.H. Program



Benefits / Impact

We anticipate the R.E.A.C.H. program will provide a **training opportunity** for educators, students/youth and local residents to develop a **'sense of care'** for their neighbourhood, and learn about **solutions** for climate change (including the often ignored role of urban forestry in adaptation and mitigation); but also a **friendly space** where residents can interact with their community to build new **relationships**, share **knowledge** and ideas, and engage in shared **activities** and discussions.

Expected outcomes of the R.E.A.C.H. program include:

1. Increasing awareness of teachers, students, youth and local residents on climate change, **civic agency**, community engagement, and **climate justice** issues;
2. Building capacity and skills of these groups in preparing for **local mitigation and adaptation** alternatives in their community;
3. Building **climate leadership skills** among youth and residents;
4. Improving **community resilience** and reducing carbon emissions over time, through implementation of actual **on-the-ground initiatives**;
5. Fostering wider awareness and **support for local climate and preparedness policies** among local citizens;
6. Adding value/content to **teaching programs and materials**;
7. Accelerating progress towards meeting **municipal and provincial climate change targets**;
8. Transformation for many high school students in how they **see their own future** and their key role in it;
9. Providing a **precedent process** for wider engagement of youth and communities on climate resilience.

R.E.A.C.H. Partners to-date

UBC: CALP and Climate Hub	Vancouver School Board
Evergreen	City of Vancouver Parks Board
Society Promoting Environmental Conservation	ESRI Canada
Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions	

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has"

- Margaret Mead

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