Adapting Together

Considerations for Program Development & Collaboration

September 2024

Contents

*These appendices are organized and ordered according to type of resource. We recognize this is different from the customary practice of ordering them according to their appearance in the report. Our intent is to make resources in the Appendices section more accessible for different purposes.
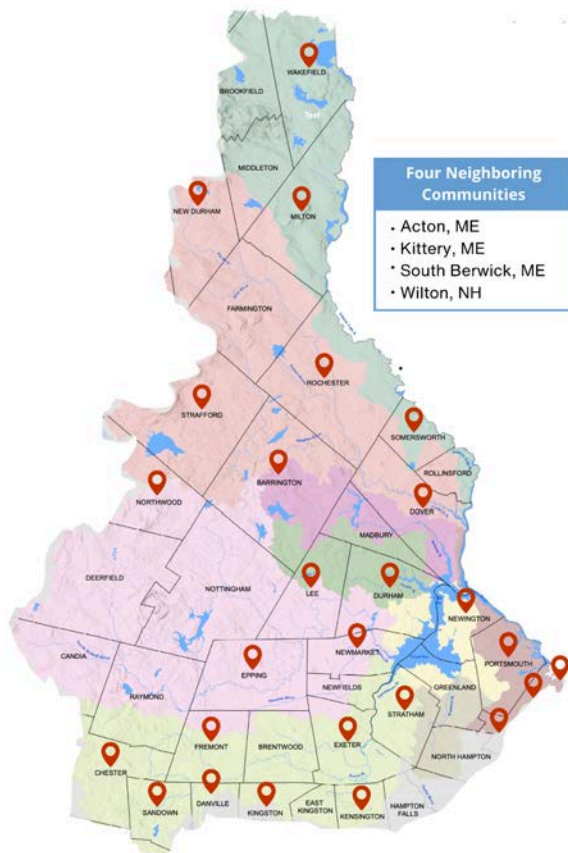
I. Executive Summary

This report offers considerations for *Adapting Together,* a collaborative effort to co-design a technical assistance program that advances community resilience to extreme weather and climate change in communities in New Hampshire's Great Bay Watershed. This report summarizes perceptions, priorities, and ideas that emerged from three workshops and one focus group held in the watershed in spring 2024. These forums were attended by 83 technical assistance providers, funders, residents, municipal staff, and representatives of nonprofits. Together, they represented 26 communities in the New Hampshire portion of the watershed and four neighboring communities (Figure 1). Collectively, they represented 59 organizations (see Appendix D2). Despite efforts to engage service providers of vulnerable communities in these conversations (see Appendix B1), these voices were less represented in this process, and Adapting Together organizers will work with the advisory committee on ways to involve them in future programs.

Participants reported that they attended these events because of their passion and commitment to the environment; to learn more about climate resilience work in the region; to discuss concerns related to climate change impacts; and to connect across different sectors on climate resilience (see Appendix C2b). Together, they identified resource needs, generated ideas for progress, made recommendations for how funders can be more effective allies for communities working toward climate resilience, and provided input on how to improve competitive grant programs in general. (See Appendix B2 for an overview of the approach to designing and implementing these forums.)

This report was developed by the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP) and the New Hampshire Climate Adaptation Workgroup (NH CAW), with support from Roca Communications; an advisory committee composed of technical assistance providers across multiple sectors, including regional and community planning, conservation, stewardship, the arts, and public health (see Appendix A2); and the Great Bay 2030 partnership.

Four Neighboring Communities
- Acton, ME
- Kittery, ME
- South Berwick, ME
- Wilton, NH

26 Great Bay Watershed Towns and Cities Reached

Figure 1: A map of the municipalities where Adapting Together forum participants live or work.

Considerations for Adapting Together Program Designers

- **Investment Opportunities**: Many participants spoke to the value of direct (non-competitive) funding in projects, public outreach, and the social network around climate resilience in the Great Bay watershed, in addition to providing input to improve a competitive funding program (which the workshops were designed to elicit).

- **Approaches to Investment**: Across the forums, participants called for the Adapting Together program to be flexible and trusting as future applicants set goals and budgets and implement projects awarded through a competitive process or by direct investment. Participants discussed the value of adaptive budgeting, outcomes-based grants, reducing or eliminating requirements to sustain project results after funding has ended, and the need to support different kinds of organizations (e.g., nonprofits and private sector organizations) and their administrations and staff time.

- **Funding Focus Areas**: Through a series of iterative discussions, participants identified priority climate impacts of concern, described how these manifested in the communities they worked with or lived in, and brainstormed ideas for progress toward addressing these problems (Figure 2).

PROJECT FOCUS AREAS

Land use and behavior related regulations (26)

Conservation (13)

Natural buffers (10)

Support local food producers (10)

Increase community capacity through engagement (7)

Infrastructure Improvements (32)

Education and outreach (29)

Land management (17)

Enhance community Spaces (13)

Adapt fishing markets to warming waters (4)

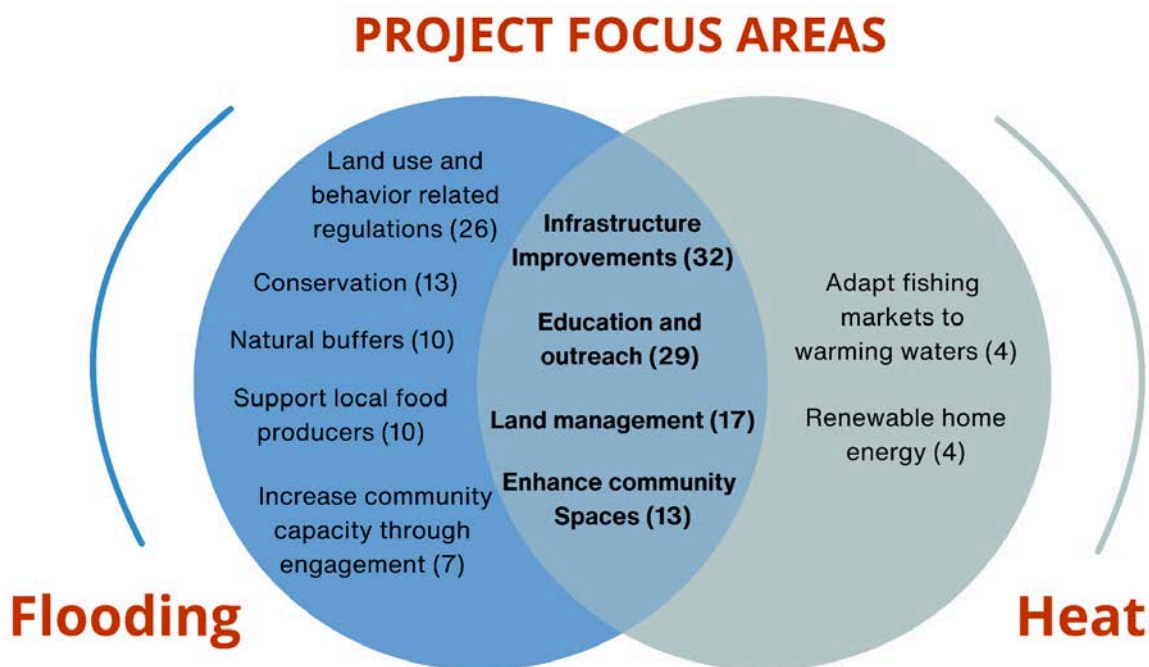Renewable home energy (4)

Flooding

Heat

Figure 2: A comparison of project focus areas between the top two prioritized climate change impacts: flooding and heat. Each number represents how many participants mentioned these project focus areas.

- Competitive Grants Program Design and Management: When asked how funders could improve competitive grants programs, participants provided a range of detailed input on program design, promotion, and management (summarized in Figure 3). In particular, they called on funders to significantly simplify the application process; to help build applicant capacity to create project teams, engage interested parties, and develop proposals; to better coordinate and promote related funding opportunities; and to streamline reporting to reduce inefficiency and burden on grantees.

Program Design

- Be flexible about grant size and purpose
- Fund long-term projects that build connections
- Offer consistent or rolling deadlines
- Coordinate with other funders

Application Process

- Simplify application (use checkboxes over narrative writing)
- Encourage sincere engagement with interested parties during proposal development
- Enhance capacity to build teams and apply

Program Outreach

- Increase awareness of the program among potential applicants
- Conduct outreach with communities to further catalyze ideas and inspire new applicants and collaborators

Project Reporting and Management

- Reduce management requirements
- Substitute reports with outreach products that advance project goals

Figure 3: Improvements to competitive funding process suggested by participants. For more detail, see the section on Competitive Program Design & Management.

II. Investment Opportunities

Five potential areas of investment emerged during the Adapting Together forums. Many participants spoke to the value of direct (non-competitive) funding of projects, public outreach, and the social network around climate resilience, in addition to providing input to improve a competitive funding program (which the workshops were designed to elicit). This raises the question of whether a competitive grants program is the most effective strategy to reach the program's overarching goal of advancing the resilience of communities and natural resources across the Great Bay Watershed, including places beyond the Seacoast and among communities who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

A. Competitive Grants Program

Across all forums, participants provided detailed feedback to improve a competitive grants program's outreach, application, grants management, and reporting processes (see page 11). They also identified priority concerns with regard to climate impacts and generated many project ideas (see page 9) to inform the focus areas of such a program. Given that the workshops were designed to elicit input on competitive funding opportunities—and that many participants may have more experience with this kind of funding than with direct or non-competitive approaches—the amount of information shared on this topic should not be taken as an endorsement for prioritizing this approach to investment over others.

B. Direct to Project Investment

Some participants suggested that time spent administering a competitive process might be better spent in providing direct support for grantees to develop and execute ideas. The program could, for example, *pick four sites and work with them to get where they need to go*. This would alleviate the stress of *wondering if a project was better than others* and operate under the assumption that there is a *mutually set bar and everything above the bar gets funded.* (All italicized text paraphrased from participants in May Workshop.)

Participants also cited examples of funding program staff and grantees collaborating on project development, e.g., the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund. One noted this *takes the stress of grant programs off people* (paraphrased from a participant in May Workshop). The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was cited several times as a successful model for program/grantee collaboration. NRCS specialists work closely with applicants to collaboratively set goals and design a plan to reach them. Though some mentioned that *getting into the program is challenging, the process leads to long-term (sometimes generational) relationships* with successive investments (paraphrased from a participant in June Workshop).

C. **Climate Resilience Network Building**

Many participants appreciated the opportunity provided by the Adapting Together forums to become more familiar with others concerned with climate resilience in the region. Several suggested ideas to build the capacity of existing networks, for example, by having similar forums more frequently in different locations; keeping people up to date on issues, programs, and activities; and fostering connections with new partners. Participants identified organizations that could play an important role in these exchanges, including regional planning commissions, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Coastal Program, and NH CAW.

Some participants encouraged grants programs to treat grantees as a cohort with opportunities to exchange knowledge and build partnerships among project teams. (One cited the [Knight Foundation](#) as a potential model for this.) Another suggested that the Adapting Together program focus on funding existing networks in which multiple organizations were collaborating on shared goals.

D. **Funder Coordination**

A recurring discussion theme was frustration over the inability to keep track of the many funding opportunities available, eligible projects, and their deadlines. Participants offered several suggestions for Adapting Together to address this directly, including the creation of a roadmap that connects issues and related needs to appropriate funding programs, a simple website that lists all of the opportunities and their deadlines, a Great Bay 2030 specific portal for funding, and the hiring of staff who can help potential applicants identify appropriate programs, build project teams, and help with proposals. They also wondered whether funders could better coordinate their deadlines and take the need for interagency review into account when designing Requests for Proposals (RFPs).

E. **Public Outreach**

A few participants underscored the importance of building awareness of the need for climate resilience work among the general public. Broadening requests for proposal outreach—for example through festivals, educational events, or with high school sustainability clubs—would provide opportunities for more people to come together and participate in the solving of complex problems. One participant expressed the need to *loudly and publicly support good efforts as a way to counter the loud voices of opposition and misinformation,* and another noted that *communities don't have a local newspaper* and lack of understanding as their biggest obstacle. (All italicized text paraphrased from participants in May Workshop.)

III. Approaches to Project Investment

Across the forums, and particularly in the Kingston workshop and Wakefield focus group, participants called for the program to be flexible and trusting as teams set goals and budgets and implement

projects, whether they are awarded through a competitive process or by direct investment.

A. **Adaptive Budgeting**

Some participants noted how daunting it can be to design a budget, particularly if the funds are tied to actions of residents, e.g., if funds are needed to support their participation in a project. They asked for greater flexibility in determining how money is spent once the project begins, the ability to get money up front or be reimbursed quickly, the elimination of match, access to seed money to help inform larger budgets, and the opportunity to collaborate with funders to determine how to spend unused funds.

B. **Outcome-based Grant Making**

A few participants encouraged the program to explore outcome-based investments, rather than the traditional approach of asking teams to set goals and develop specific plans for reaching them. One praised the New Hampshire Children's Health Foundation's direct giving approach in which the funder and applicant work together to identify outcomes and a timeframe for reaching them. This gives the team freedom to determine and adapt their plans to effect change. This process, they noted, *fostered more honesty about challenges* and allowed teams to *flex with new unknowns.* (All italicized text paraphrased from participants in June Workshop.)

C. **Project Sustainability**

Many funding programs ask applicants to describe how they will maintain or build on project products after funding is complete. Several participants noted how difficult it was to project how that would happen without continued funding, particularly given the reluctance of many funders to directly support administrative costs and staff. They felt strongly that the ability to articulate how or if this would happen *should not make or break the grant* (paraphrased from a participant in June Workshop.)

D. **Support People and Organizations**

A recurring discussion topic was the lack of funding for organizational administration and staff. Without sufficient funding for staff time and overhead, team members must add sponsored project work on top of their workloads or hire a consultant, which they have to manage. Several noted this led to a financial loss and fueled the need to constantly fundraise to stay afloat. It also, they said, promotes a tendency to build programs around grants, rather than focusing on the outcomes they want to achieve as an organization. To be more responsive to a community's resources and particular demographics, several encouraged widening eligibility to include nonprofits, for-profit groups, and community groups not established as a 501(c)(3), as well as increasing flexibility around who could be a partner or end user on the project.

IV. Funding Focus Areas

Through a series of iterative discussions, participants prioritized climate impacts of concern (Figure 4), described how these were manifesting in the communities they supported or identified with, and brainstormed specific ideas for progress toward addressing these problems.
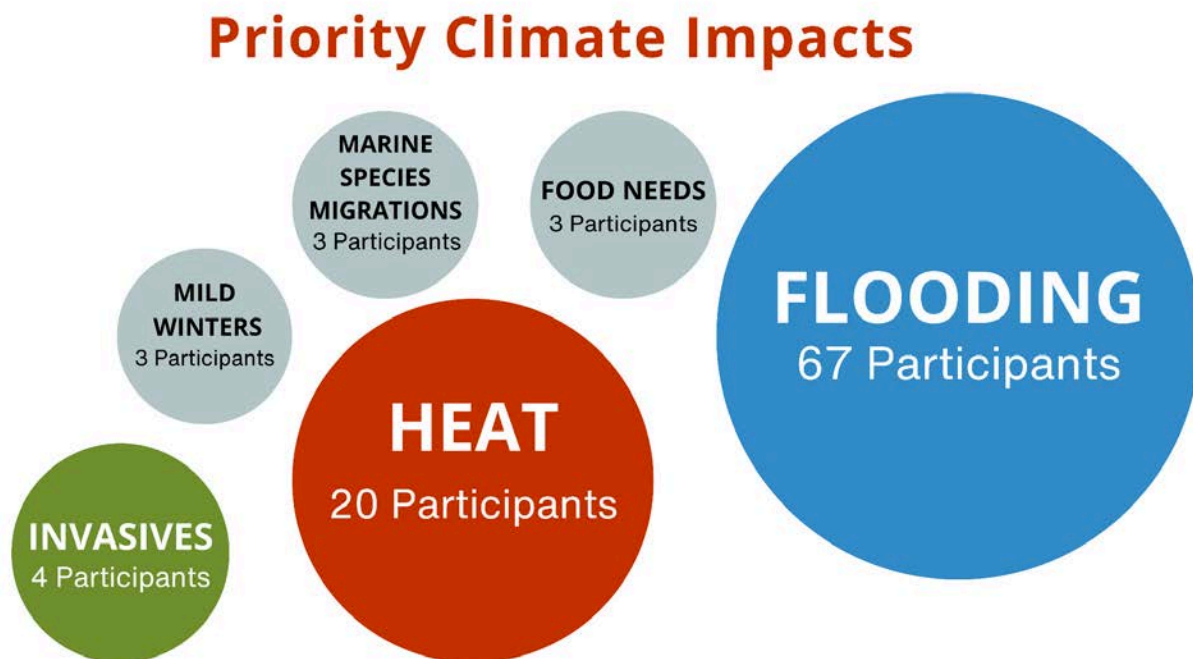
Priority Climate Impacts

Figure 4: Participants identified priority climate change impacts for their communities.

A. Impacts of Highest Concern

Across the forums, 67 participants identified flooding as the primary climate impact of concern. "Flooding" was used as an umbrella term for sea level rise, extreme weather events, heavy rain, and coastal or inland flooding. Twenty identified excessive heat, which included warmer seasons and waters and periods of extreme heat. Miscellaneous impacts cited included invasive species and pests, milder winters, marine species migrations, and food security.

They also provided detailed descriptions of how flooding and heat affects people and natural resources in their communities and/or the ones they support (see Appendix C2B). The most frequently cited flooding concern was infrastructure damage (Figure 5).
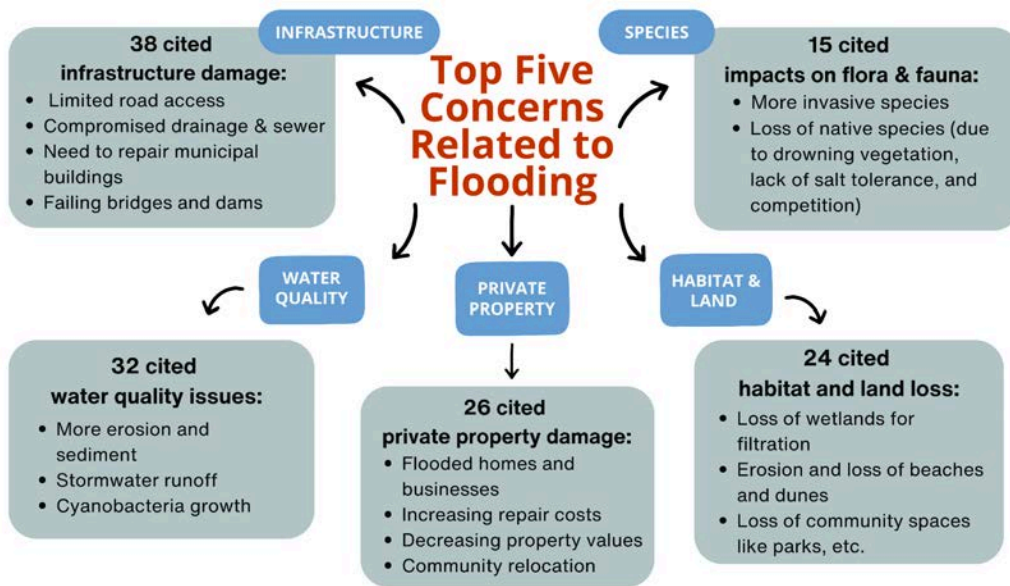
Top Five Concerns Related to Flooding

INFRASTRUCTURE

38 cited infrastructure damage:
- Limited road access
- Compromised drainage & sewer
- Need to repair municipal buildings
- Failing bridges and dams

SPECIES

15 cited impacts on flora & fauna:
- More invasive species
- Loss of native species (due to drowning vegetation, lack of salt tolerance, and competition)

WATER QUALITY

32 cited water quality issues:
- More erosion and sediment
- Stormwater runoff
- Cyanobacteria growth

PRIVATE PROPERTY

26 cited private property damage:
- Flooded homes and businesses
- Increasing repair costs
- Decreasing property values
- Community relocation

HABITAT & LAND

24 cited habitat and land loss:
- Loss of wetlands for filtration
- Erosion and loss of beaches and dunes
- Loss of community spaces like parks, etc.

Figure 5: The top five concerns related to flooding. (See Appendix D2A3 for heat concerns)

B. Project Ideas

For each impact, participants described what progress would look like and then brainstormed project ideas to discuss with their groups. With regard to flooding and extreme heat, the most common ideas focused on infrastructure improvements, education initiatives, regulations, conservation, and land management. (To see how project ideas for each impact overlapped, see Figure 2.) Figure 6 below provides additional detail on the types of projects identified to address flooding; for similar information about excessive heat, see Appendix D2b2.

Top Five Project Focus Areas to Address Flooding

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS 28 Participants	Increase/resize culverts	Improve underground drainage and sewage systems	Reduce impervious surfaces in new development	Target stormwater management on private property
EDUCATION INITIATIVES 26 Participants	Incorporate environmental studies into school curricula	Create flooding toolkits/options for homeowners	Run environmental appreciation public education campaigns	Educate people to reduce their own footprint
REGULATIONS 26 Participants	Regulate development with building permit parameters	Enforce regulations targeting littering and pesticides	Expand and update flood hazard zones	Support municipal staff advancing climate adaptation
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL BUFFERS 23 Participants	Protect strategic lands for climate resiliency	Enable marsh migration with natural buffers	Buy back coastal homes programs for landowners	Preserve wetlands and maintain riparian wetlands complexes.
LAND MANAGEMENT 14 Participants	Promote organic landscaping practices and softscapes	Remove invasive species	Identify and encourage natural drainage pathways	Plant more flood-resilient trees

Figure 6: The top five focus areas for projects to address flooding. Focus areas are further broken down into four categories, each with additional detail about relevant projects.

V.   Competitive Program Design & Management

A.   Program Design

Think Creatively

Some participants encouraged program designers to think *beyond the incremental project-based approach* (paraphrased from a participant at May workshop) and be as creative as possible within the competitive framework. Some emphasized flexibility, e.g., allowing grantees to use funds to prepare for other, larger opportunities or offer a mix of big and small grants. Others emphasized collaboration, e.g., awarding fewer, larger grants for bigger, boundary crossing teams and multi-year projects. (A few noted that one-year projects were inherently limiting.)

Timing of Funding Opportunities

Many participants shared that the timing of different RFPs often does not line up with their needs or calendars (e.g., municipalities and farmers) or that they tended to cluster around similar deadlines. They described the application window as often too short, particularly if a public hearing or state review is needed. Many encouraged the program to be predictable in its offerings and consider rolling grant deadlines that allowed for the continuous process of application. Some called for better coordination among funders.

B.   Application Process

Simplify It

A majority of participants strongly encouraged a simple application process that significantly reduces the time needed to apply and provides greater clarity about the program's goals, criteria, and an applicant's odds of success. Ideas to support that included 1) eliminating the justification section in the narrative section of proposals or asking people to use check boxes to comply with that requirement; 2) creating a two-tiered process where stage one is very simple (e.g., a letter of interest or concept one-pager) and stage two is only offered to projects with a strong chance of being funded; and 3) allowing applicants to submit a short video or have a meeting instead of writing a proposal.

Promote Sincere Engagement

There was concern that program requirements for the engagement of interested and impacted parties in proposal development often becomes a "box checking" exercise. A few felt funders should encourage applicants to contact interested or impacted parties early in the application process and to be courteous and authentic in this outreach.

Build Applicant Capacity

It was clear that lack of capacity to develop and submit a proposal was a major obstacle for many participants. Many felt funding programs could help by allowing more time for proposal development, creating opportunities for applicants to ask questions, and/or, providing a suite of resources and ideas that could be used across different projects. Others wanted funders to connect them with technical assistance providers, grant writers, and other potential partners. Technical experts, like environmental engineers, were described as "in short supply." A few wanted direct application assistance for larger grants and guidance on how existing grants could be leveraged for future funding.

C. Program Outreach

Several participants encouraged the funding program to invest more in outreach to make potential applicants aware of the opportunity and its capacity to help meet their needs. (One participant cited NHDES Coastal Program as a model for supporting grantees.) They suggested holding short workshops, information sessions, or office hours. They also called for more outreach with communities to help catalyze ideas and inspire new applicants and collaborators. A few thought writing newspaper articles or press releases that elicit community conversations would be helpful.

D. Reporting and Management

Many participants encouraged the Adapting Together program to weigh the need for grantee accountability against the sunk costs associated with project management and reporting. One noted that up to 20% of a project's time could be wasted through compliance. Several underscored that compliance often made small grants too much work to consider applying to, and many agreed it was difficult to stay on top of reporting requirements. A few noted that no-cost extensions should be welcomed always, but particularly during climate emergencies.

There were several specific ideas for alleviating the reporting burden on grantees (and potentially funders). These included substituting written reports for an outreach product or event that would contribute to the goals of the project, interviews with community members impacted by the work, or having grant outcomes be the report. One suggested the funder could *contract third party support to help with reporting, or allow any project partner to take on that role and be resourced for that* (paraphrased from participant at May workshop).

VI. Appendices

A. About Adapting Together
1. <u>Project One-sheet</u>: Adapting together brief, which explains project goal and approach
2. <u>Advisory Committee Charter</u>: Collective working agreement that specifies the committee's charge, approach to decision making and communication, tasks, timeline, and deliverables
3. <u>Outreach Flier</u>: Pdf distributed to potential workshop participants.

B. Community Forums
1. <u>Approach to Outreach</u>: How potential participants were identified and contacted
2. <u>Approach To Forums</u>: How forums were designed and managed
3. <u>Evaluation Data</u>: Aggregated post-forum evaluations and index cards, with a list of suggestions for the funding program and for future forums
4. Forum Worktools
   a) <u>Sample Participant Agenda</u>
   b) <u>Project Ideas List</u>: Generated by the advisory committee to help spark ideas about types of projects the program could fund during workshop conversations
   c) <u>Worksheet 1</u>: Asked participants to identify their primary community, whether it be municipal or professional and for their number one reason for attending
   d) <u>Worksheet 2</u>: Asked participants to identify the primary and secondary climate impact affecting their community. They were then asked to write down how it affects people and natural resources, and how progress may look when addressing the climate impact
   e) <u>Worksheet 3</u>: Asked participants to brainstorm project ideas to address a climate impact, guided participants to think about resources they have and need for the project
   f) <u>Bingo</u>: Ice breaker tool that encouraged participants to network throughout workshop
   g) <u>Evaluation Form</u>: Collected participant feedback on the workshops and funding program anonymously

C. Data
1. <u>Analysis Method</u>: Detailed explanation of the transcription, coding, and aggregating processes used to synthesize participant input collected in Adapting Together forums
2. Meeting data
   a) <u>Pre Workshops Surveys</u>: Responses collected from participants across in-person forums
   b) <u>Aggregated Coding Sheet</u>: A master spreadsheet of input collected on worksheets 1, 2, and 3 across all forums (see <u>methods analysis</u> for more details)
   c) <u>Combined Flip Chart Notes:</u> Aggregated notes for discussions on funding process design from all forums

D. Figures, Maps, and Charts

1. Figure 1: (Participant Map) map that identifies where participants live or work.

2. Organizations: A list of the organizations of participants

   a) Climate Impacts

      (1) Figure 4: (Priority Climate Impacts) Participants identified priority climate change impacts for their communities.

      (2) Figure 5: (Top Five Concerns Related to Flooding) Participants identified the top five ways flooding affects people and natural resources.

      (3) Top Five Concerns Related to Heat: Participants identified the top five ways heat affects people and natural resources.

   b) Project Focus Areas

      (1) Figure 6: (To Address Flooding) The top five focus areas for projects to address flooding. Focus areas are further broken down into four categories, each with additional detail about relevant projects.

      (2) To Address Heat: The top five focus areas for projects to address heat. Focus areas are further broken down into four categories, each with additional detail about relevant projects.

      (3) Figure 2: (Venn Diagram for Flooding and Heat Project Focus Areas) A comparison of project focus areas generated to address the top two climate change impacts: flooding and heat. Each number represents how many participants pushed for the project focus area.

   c) Figure 3: (Competitive Program Design and Management Advice) Input to enhance the competitive funding process suggested by participants.

   d) Slide Deck PDF and Canva Slide Presentation Link: A compilation of visuals from the report in slide form.