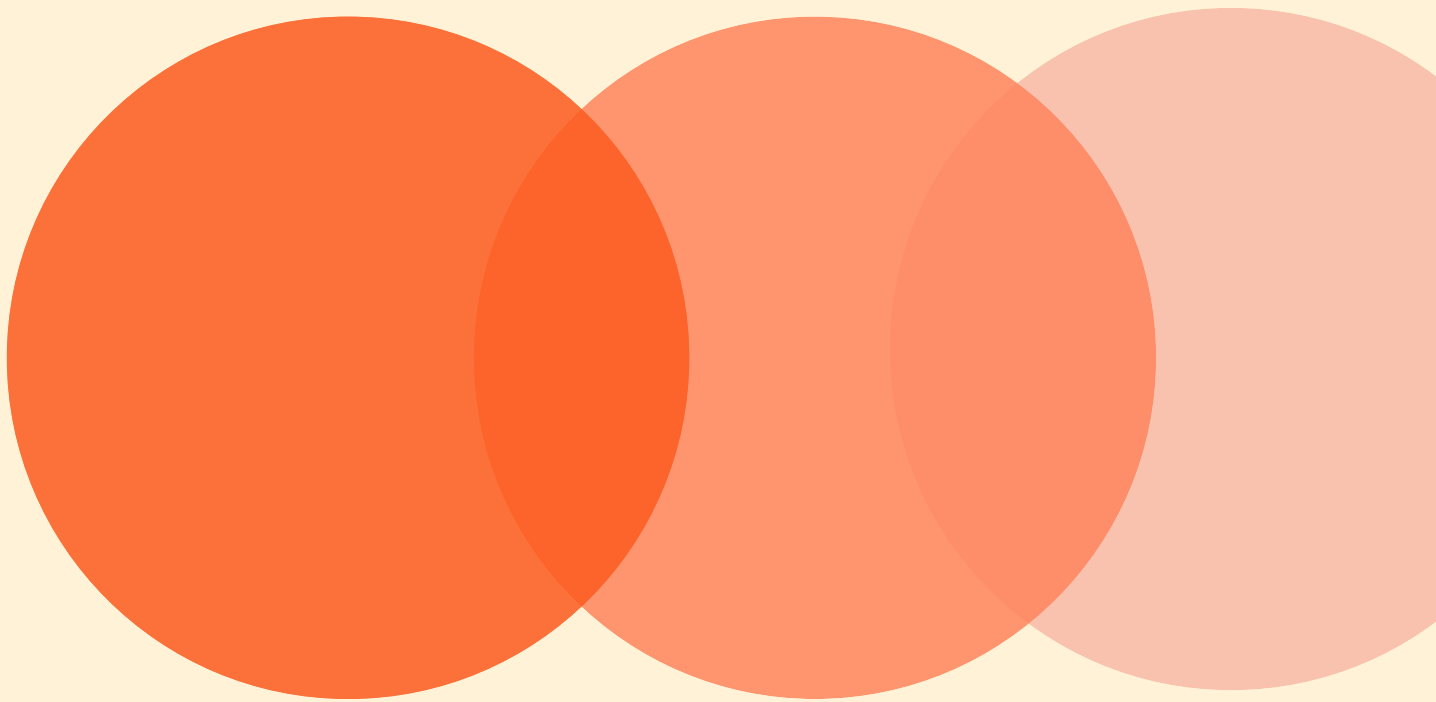


CLIMATE RESILIENCE ROADMAP FOR NON-PROFITS:

**FROM CRISIS TO COLLECTIVE
POWER IN VANCOUVER'S
DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE**



2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land acknowledgement

We respectfully and with gratitude work on the shared, unceded Traditional Coast Salish Lands of the Squamish (Sḵwxwú7mesh), Tsleil-Waututh (səl'íl̓wətaʔt), Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm) and Kwikwetlem (kʷikwə́ləm) Nations (in Vancouver and Burnaby respectfully) and the ḡíćəy̓ (Katzie), Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem (kʷikwə́ləm), Qayqayt, Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm), numerous Stó:lō Nations, Semiahmoo and Tsawwassen (in Surrey).

We acknowledge the sovereignty and equality of Indigenous nations and are guided by aspirations to remake Canada into a decolonial state comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who function with respect for one another. Given that the majority of higher education institutions in Canada are on unceded traditional territories of Indigenous peoples, and inequities from colonization are ongoing in Canadian society, we see community-engaged research as an actionable strategy for change that aims to make visible Indigenous ways of knowing that have traditionally been excluded across research settings and institutions.

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Jessie Lee

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Megaphone / The Shift Peer Newsroom

Our Thanks

We extend our sincere gratitude to the community partners (PHS Community Services Society, Hogan's Alley Society, Lookout Housing and Health Society and First United Church Community Ministry Society) who contributed their time, insights, and expertise to this report. Your knowledge and lived experience were essential in shaping the findings and ensuring they reflect the realities of service delivery and resilience in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

We also want to acknowledge and thank the DTES community more broadly. This report is grounded in the strength, creativity, and care that community members demonstrate every day. It is our hope that the work presented here contributes to building a safer, more resilient future for all who live, work, and gather in the DTES.

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FORWARD

For many years, we've had the privilege of working alongside many of the non-profit social service organizations that operate in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Working out of 312 Main, a centre for social and economic innovation that houses numerous social service organizations, every day we see the incredible work non-profits and community groups do to support the neighbourhood's residents — work rooted in care, resilience, and solidarity. But we can see the impact that increasing social challenges with decreased resources are having on these organizations and the people that run them — community members are struggling, workers are burning out, non-profits are cutting programs, and climate change is only making things worse.

The crisis doesn't just threaten ecosystems — it's already affecting health and safety. Seniors, people on low or fixed incomes, those with pre-existing conditions, and folks facing stigma and marginalization are least equipped to adapt, yet are the most exposed. Nowhere is this truer than the DTES, a neighbourhood already carrying the weight of housing insecurity, poverty, and the drug-poisoning crisis.

Residents face hotter temperatures but have access to less trees and green space to cool down in. When wildfire smoke pollutes the air, residents without air conditioning aren't able to close their windows. And those without access to housing are, and will continue to, endure increasingly extreme conditions without protection or access to resources. At the same time, the DTES is also a place of resilience, with peer-led networks, traditions of collective organizing, and non-profit and grassroots organizations that show up daily. Organizations are participating in build-your-own air filter programming, building cooling kits, checking in on friends during extreme weather alerts, and finding innovative ways to survive in an increasingly turbulent climate.¹

That's why the *Climate Resilience Roadmap for Non-Profits: From Crisis to Collective Power in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* was created: to strengthen the sector's ability to work together in more aligned ways with organizations and community members to anticipate, respond to, and recover from climate-related challenges.

At its heart, the Climate Resilience Roadmap is a practical, community-informed framework for action intended to support social service sectors in the DTES as well as in communities across Canada and beyond. Through co-creation workshops, the roadmap translates the lived expertise of DTES organizations into a collective plan for resilience. Beyond the DTES, the resources and tools offered through this roadmap can be shared across BC and Canada, and in other jurisdictions facing similar conditions.

This project begins with a simple truth: climate resilience must be built from within. The DTES is on the frontlines of multiple crises, but it is also home to enduring strengths and deep networks of care. The Climate Resilience Roadmap builds on that strength, offering a pathway for organizations, governments, and community members to work together for the challenges ahead in order to create a stronger and more resilient community.

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¹ For more information on resilience efforts funded or organized by the City of Vancouver see Resilient Neighbourhoods Program and Resilient Neighbourhoods Program 2022 Community-Led Extreme Heat Resilience Report in Appendix F

“ —

It was quite brutal. I had to keep taking a cold shower, almost every hour, or every 2 hours, because it got so hot in my room. I heard that they were having a big forest fire and it was taking longer to put out. You can smell the fire, even with the windows closed... I went through 3 puffers in one day. And that's way too much, the doctor said. By the time I got on the elevator, I collapsed. They found me lying on the floor. When I came to, I was like, 'How'd I end up in the hospital? How the heck did I get here?'

During the heatwave, it was hard for anybody to take care of themselves. A lot of these people are under addiction. Where I work, we had 15 overdoses within an hour. And non-stop, because none of these kids are drinking water or having something to eat before they use.

2

DJ O'Brian - an outreach and harm reduction worker in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and member of the Sts'ailes Nation

² Climate Disaster Project. (n.d.). "It was hard for anybody to take care of themselves" [Testimony]. Retrieved October 2, 2025, from <https://climatedisasterproject.com/testimony/it-was-hard-for-anybody-to-take-care-of-themselves/>

INTRODUCTION

Despite having substantial research on its impacts, years of intentional inaction have led to climate change being one of society's biggest challenges. Vancouver's DTES is among the city's most climate-vulnerable neighbourhoods. Residents face disproportionate risks from extreme heat, poor air quality from wildfire smoke, and intense rainfall and flooding. These environmental hazards compound existing social challenges such as chronic housing instability, poverty, and high rates of mental health and substance use issues.

The tragic events of the Summer 2021 heat dome is a devastating example. According to the 2022 Report to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia, 619 people died in BC – 91% of those who died were registered with a chronic disease, 67% were aged 70 or older, and a disproportionate number of fatalities were among residents of materially or socially deprived areas. Systemic inequities and historical marginalization deepen these risks, leaving many residents with a limited capacity to adapt.



Non-profit organizations – already operating with constrained resources – form the backbone of the DTES social safety net. A recent study showed that non-profits in BC are significantly strained for financial resources and capacity while trying to meet the demands from their growing clientele. As climate hazards intensify, these frontline groups are facing, and will increasingly face, even greater pressure to provide vital services, safeguard health and safety, and respond swiftly to crises. Strengthening their capacity is urgent and essential.

The *Climate Resilience Roadmap for Non-Profits: From Crisis to Collective Power in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* is a collaboration between Vancity Community Foundation, SFU's Community-Engaged Research Initiative (CERi), and ACT – Action on Climate Team, that responds directly to this challenge. Grounded in community-engaged research, the project convened frontline social sector organizations—including Hogan's Alley Society, PHS Community Services Society, First United Church Community Ministry Society, and Lookout Housing and Health Society—to co-develop practical, context-specific strategies for building resilience from strengths and gaps within the community. It examined how climate change is affecting the Downtown Eastside (DTES), to collectively anticipate how climate hazards may intensify in the future and impact the work of frontline organizations.

The resulting Climate Resilience Roadmap outlines strategies that support these organizations' ability to adapt, both now and over the longer term. The accompanying **Technical Report** provides detailed context, data, and policy analysis informing these strategies, while the **At-a-Glance** summary offers a concise overview of short- and long-term actions for implementation.

³ Vantage Point. (2025). *Stretched Thin: 2025 State of BC's Non-Profit Sector*.

CLIMATE ACTION = EQUITY ACTION

Climate action is equity action. Climate impacts are not experienced uniformly across a community. Vulnerable populations that are already experiencing poverty, health issues, and marginalization are more exposed to climate impacts such as heat, smoke, extreme weather, and flood, and therefore face more severe risk.

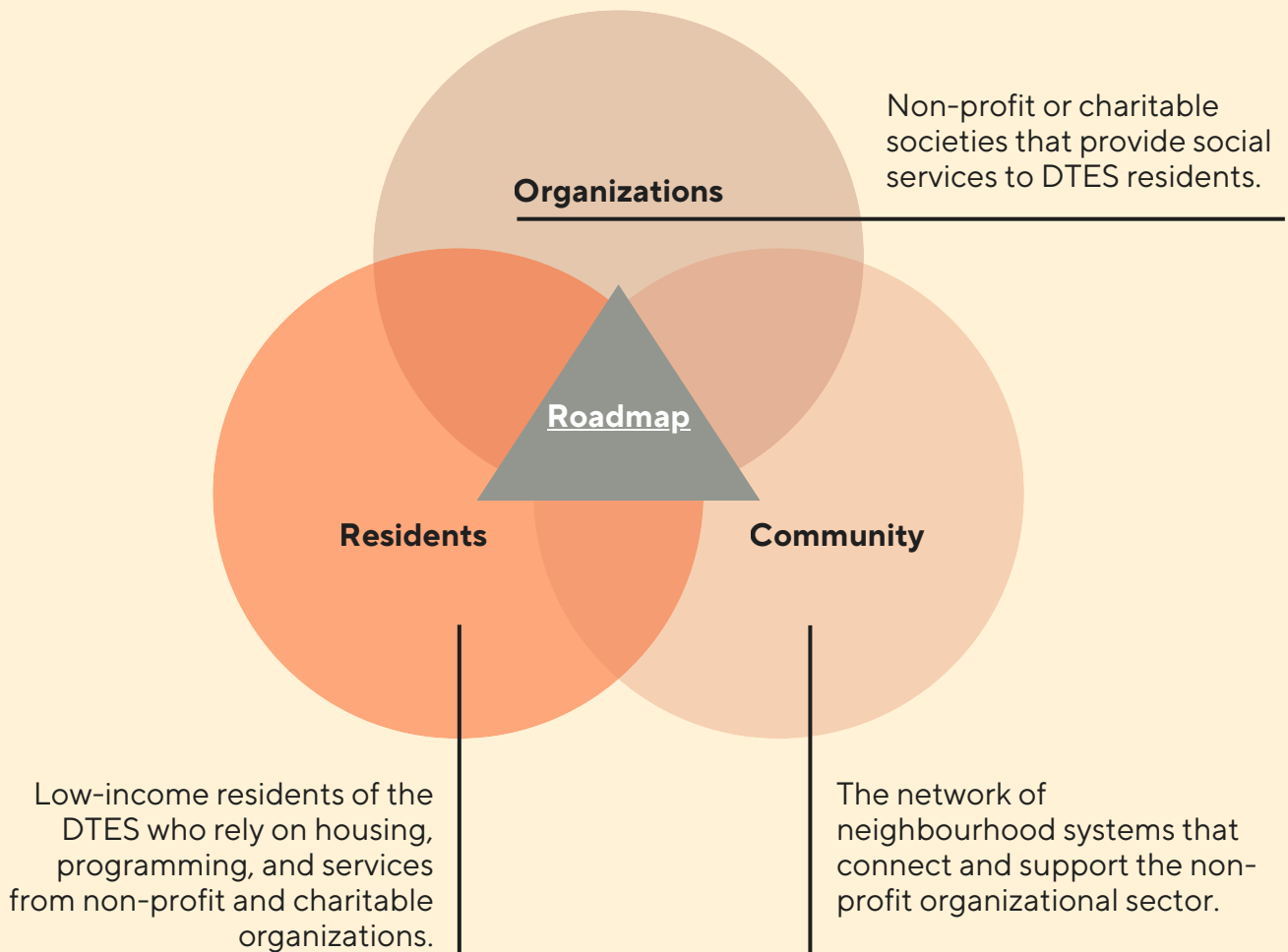
Public sector organizations that support these residents are also at risk under a changing climate. Increasingly pinched budgets and services used to accommodate more frequent climate-related emergencies (e.g. heat and wildfire smoke), year upon year, threaten their organizational survival and ability to provide the much-needed and life-saving supports to the residents they serve.

The following graphic highlights the strategic and intersecting areas of this roadmap. We worked with non-profits to identify strategic short and long-term interventions that can support climate-ready non-profit organizations, so that they can strengthen resilience among the residents they serve, while also contributing to overall community health and resilience.



KEY PRIORITIES

This roadmap prioritizes transferable strategies aimed at strengthening the public service organizations that already support residents most harmed by climate impacts, and that also play a strategic role in advancing broader community resilience.



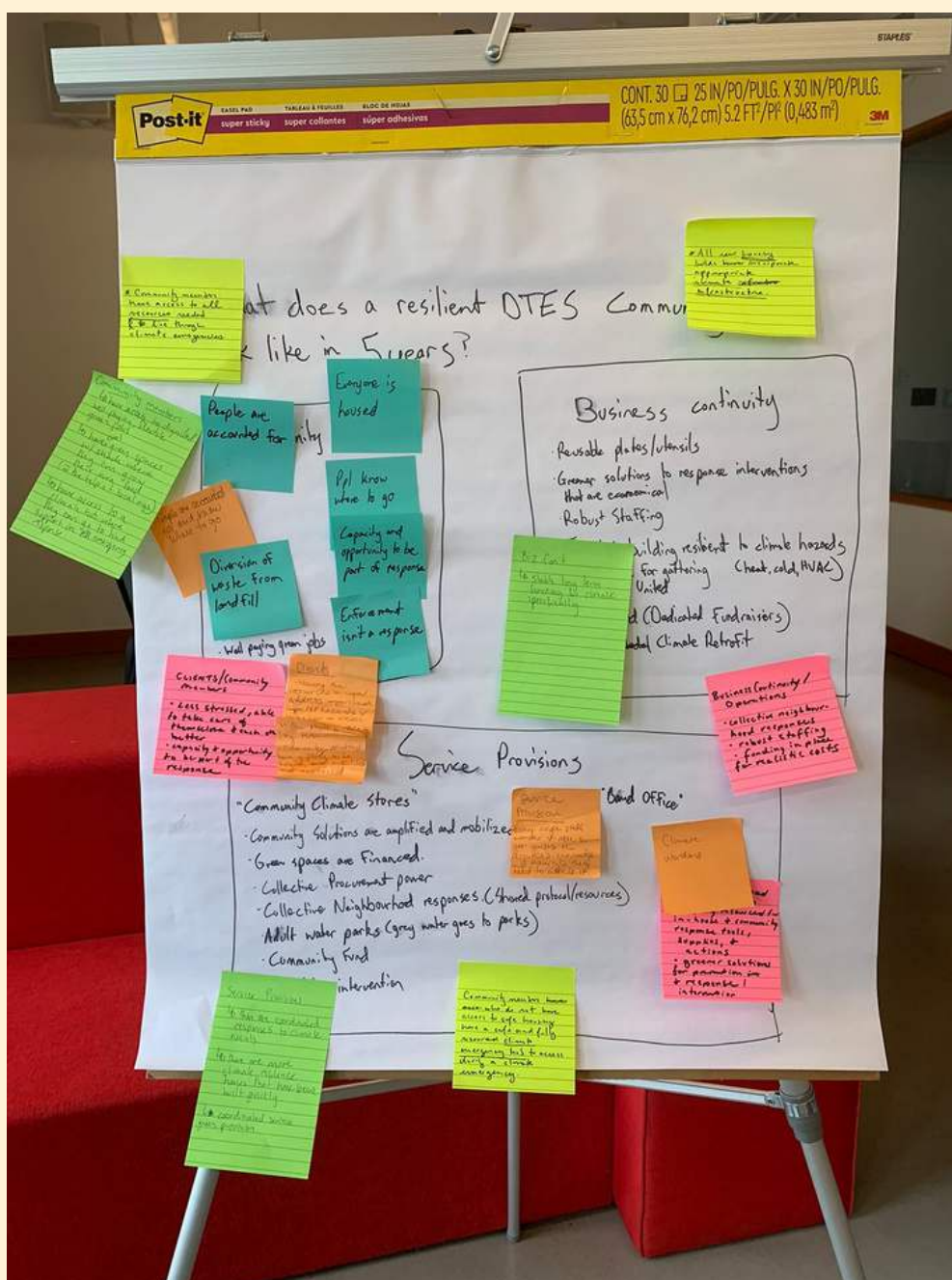
Strategic Focus Areas

- **Organizations:**
These organizations provide direct services (housing, health, employment, programming) to constituents in the DTES and must adapt their operational and funding models during climate emergencies.
- **Residents:**
Residents of the DTES have different needs and vulnerabilities that need to be accounted for in an equitable climate response.
- **Community:**
This community of networks (both formal and informal) includes funders, government, front-line workers, health organizations, businesses, community centers, resident/advocacy groups, and more.

CO-CREATION WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

PHS Community Services Society, Hogan's Alley Society, Lookout Housing and Health Society, and First United Church Community Ministry Society were core partners in co-creating the Climate Resilience Roadmap, contributing essential insights and lived expertise that shaped its direction and findings. We heard from them that building climate resilience in the DTES requires a multi-layered approach that strengthens organizations, residents and the community alike. Effective adaptation cannot rely on ad-hoc projects or piecemeal measures; it must be embedded into the structures that sustain community life.

Through the workshops, partners shared their hopes and aspirations on what a climate-resilient DTES could look like in five years. This vision, emphasizing equity and justice, helped define what success would mean for organizations, residents and the broader community.



VISION FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations are confident and collaborative, equipped with climate-adaptive infrastructure and environment-friendly emergency materials.

Organizations are supported by stable, long-term funding that allows them to be proactive in planning for emergencies. Rather than operating in silos, organizations are working from a shared climate vision, aligned in strategy and equipped to respond effectively to emerging challenges with clarity and resilience. There is more peer organizing and involvement in times of emergencies that organizations collaborate with and leverage in these circumstances.

VISION FOR RESIDENTS

Residents feel empowered, supported, safe and connected.

Residents have access to safe shelter, crisis support, and fulfilling jobs that contribute to a sustainable world and reflect their skills and needs. With access to better training and more resources, people have the capacity to care for themselves and one another. Community gardens and green spaces are thriving, offering places to grow food, build relationships, and gather in joy and solidarity. Timely and accurate information on emergencies is communicated effectively to residents through multiple channels and formats. A central climate hub anchors these efforts, providing consistent, trusted access to resources and support.

VISION FOR COMMUNITY

The DTES community is building a resilient, connected future rooted in shared care and climate justice.

The broader community functions as a unified, responsive network. Knowledge, tools, and resources flow freely through collective systems that prioritize equity and inclusion. There are spaces for collaboration to spark new ideas and mobilize collective action. Collective emergency plans are in place and ready to activate, with frontline staff and local leaders trained and empowered to guide the way.



ADVANCING A CLIMATE RESILIENT DTES

Based on needs, gaps, and opportunities, Figure 5 builds on the strengths and addresses the weaknesses needed to support non-profit social service organizations to be climate ready so that they can continue to support the residents they serve, while also advancing overall community health and resilience. Short-term strategies focus on practical approaches that could be undertaken in the next 12-18 months; longer-term strategies span over 2 to 5 years.

Short-term strategies range from sharing climate budgeting tools and storage space for supplies such as fans, water bottles, sunscreen, and wildfire smoke masks, to leadership training among informal networks. Long-term strategies range from establishing a neighbourhood climate hub to creating more green spaces and empowering community-led initiatives. Table 1 gives an overview of the different audiences and how the roadmap will be of use to each of the groups.

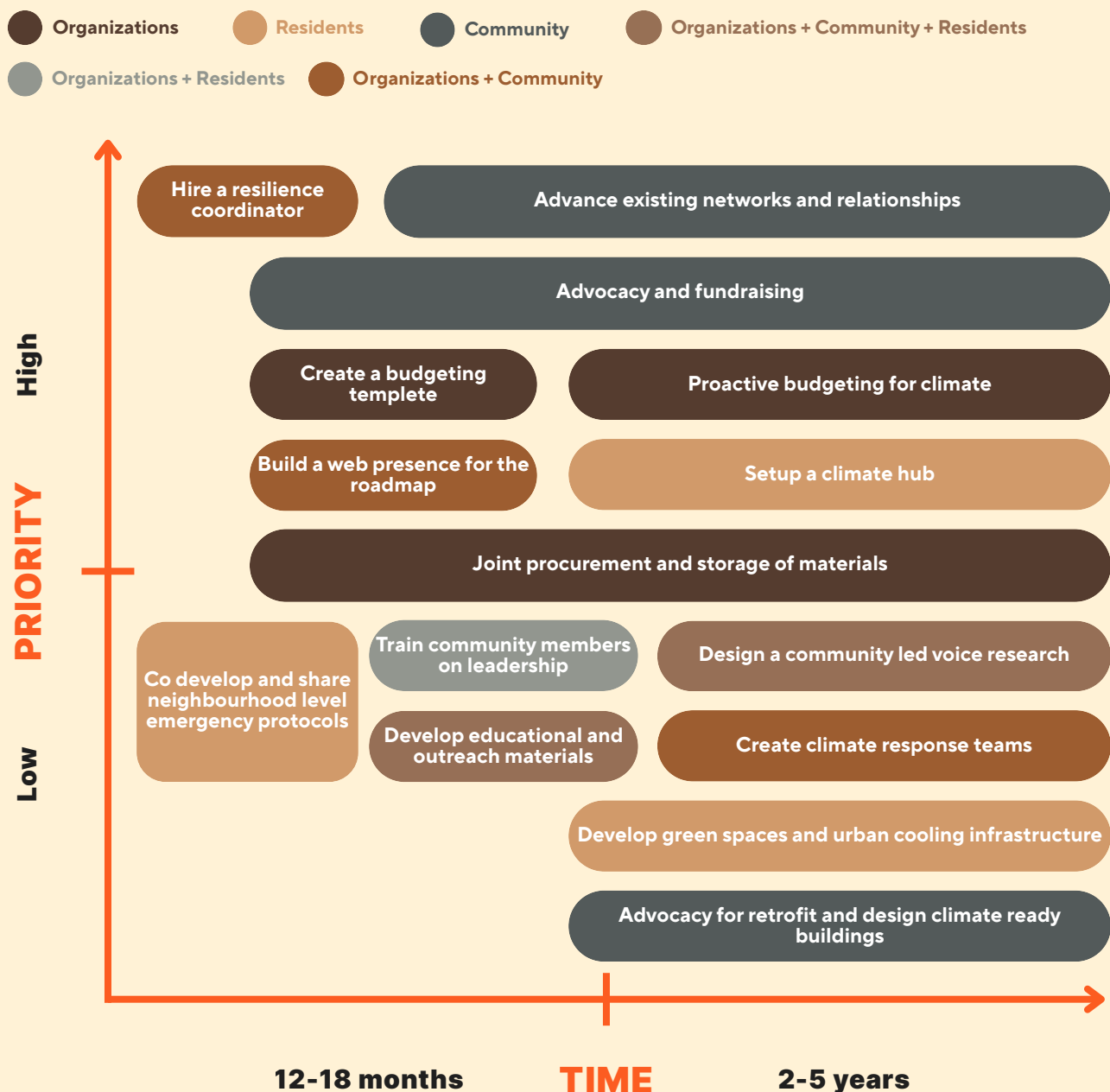


Figure 5: Prioritized strategies for long term and short term climate resilience.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE ROADMAP FOR NON-PROFITS

We must centering strengths and voices of DTES in climate action. Engaging peer workers, dedicated volunteers, health communicators, frontline staff, outreach workers, and trusted community leaders who already have strong relationships in the DTES, is critical for the effective implementation of this work. Building on existing networks and assets within the community can enhance communications and rapid response during emergencies. For instance, embedding climate strategies into the existing structures of community networks, and integrating peer-to-peer training sessions on strategies to communicate and build resilience to seasonal climate risks (heat, smoke, flooding) into their agendas and processes, can support crucial outreach to frontline staff across organizations. In addition, public infrastructure like St. Paul's Hospital, which is already a key centre in the community, have the potential to function as climate safety hubs for the community.

How could this roadmap be utilized? Audience and Use Cases

<u>Primary Audience:</u> <u>DTES Community</u> <u>Partners</u>	<u>Secondary Audience:</u> <u>Local Government &</u> <u>Institutions</u>	<u>Tertiary Audience:</u> <u>Broader Public &</u> <u>Funders</u>
Roadmap serves as tool to help align efforts, share strategies, and strengthen collaboration.	The roadmap provides community-grounded insights to inform policy, funding, and service delivery, ensuring resilience planning reflects DTES realities	The roadmap communicates the DTES's vision, strengths, and needs, making the case for investment and broader solidarity
• Housing providers • Non-profits • Service providers • Community organizations • Resident-led groups • Indigenous organizations • Peer networks based in the Downtown Eastside	• City of Vancouver • Metro Vancouver • BC Housing • Vancouver Coastal Health • Emergency management agencies, and local universities (SFU, UBC, etc.)	• Philanthropic foundations • Granting agencies • Journalist • Allies in other neighbourhoods and jurisdictions

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES & ACTIONS (NEXT 12–18 MONTHS)

Below are **ready-to-launch** climate resiliency strategies and actions that span across service provision, business continuity, and residents, require few resources, and have relatively short implementation timelines (~1.5 years). Existing strengths and resources have been identified that help to advance the strategy in practice.



STRATEGY: ADVOCACY AND FUNDRAISING FOR CLIMATE

Non-profits play a critical role in frontline climate response and community care, yet existing strategic planning and funding mechanisms are often inadequate for sustained climate action. This makes it difficult to hire and retain staff, plan ahead, or invest in long-term resilience. Strengthening advocacy and access to sustainable funding is essential for ensuring that non-profits can prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate emergencies.

Action:

Create an open, collaborative platform that compiles climate funding opportunities and supports collective advocacy for equitable, long-term community investment.

- Build a cross-sector coalition to coordinate advocacy, map funding gaps, and develop an open-access directory of climate adaptation and emergency-response grants for non-profits.
- Maintain a shared communication channel for timely updates and collectively advance equitable, long-term government and philanthropic investment in community climate resilience.

Existing resources:

Climate Change Resource Guide (Vantage Point) – This resource guide from Vantage Point provides a non-exhaustive list of grant funding streams and other relevant resources available to BC non-profits.

Heat Responses in Vancouver (Women Transforming Cities) – This open source database provides a list of funding and grant streams at city and provincial levels that can be accessed by non-profits in times of heat emergencies.





STRATEGY: PROACTIVE BUDGETING FOR CLIMATE

Non-profit organizations already absorb the costs of climate mitigation, preparedness, and emergency response, but these expenses are often folded into overstretched program budgets, reduced due to limited funding, or reallocated during crises. There is a lack of funding structures and templates that explicitly allow, resource, and normalize climate-related costs. Funders must recognize climate response as a core operational need rather than an add-on. Long-term, flexible core funding with explicit climate-related line items would prevent organizations from having to “recreate” emergency funding streams every season and would acknowledge advocacy, preparedness, and mitigation as essential components of service delivery.

Action:

Develop a shared budgeting template that makes visible the climate-related costs organizations are already carrying (preparedness, response, mitigation, advocacy) so funders can clearly see what is currently hidden inside program budgets.

- Advocate collectively for funders to adopt climate line items within core funding agreements.
- Create a sector-wide communication channel to share existing templates, protocols, and examples that show how climate work is currently embedded but under-resourced.
- Establish a peer support process to help organizations align climate budgeting practices and strengthen collective advocacy for funder-level change.
- Position advocacy as an essential budget category, emphasizing that without explicit funder endorsement, organizations are forced to scale back or eliminate this critical work.





STRATEGY:

ADVANCE EXISTING NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Some of the biggest assets and shared resources in the DTES are the existing networks, both formal and informal, that support the community. Building on these networks and relationships and strengthening their capacities is a key action, both in emergency response as well as long-term climate adaptation.

Action:

Embed climate resilience into peer-to-peer training and coordination circles

- Document existing practices for climate resilience within partner organizations that are not codified
- Share protocols and best practices from partner organizations
- Establish a virtual climate hub for compiling and sharing resources, protocols and best practices for nonprofit organizations.
- Create training manuals and workshops for staff to prepare for climate emergencies
- Present the roadmap to community networks and governmental partners

Alignment with existing policies and strategies:

- *Resilient Vancouver Strategy* (2019) 1.4.B: Create a Capacity Building Action Plan and Non-profit Partnering Framework
- *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* (2024) E.17: Continue to work with partners and expand networks. Collaborate with Vancouver Coastal Health on a forum for regional adaptation practitioners and with the Resilient Vancouver Strategy team on a regional hub for practitioners
- *Vancouver Plan* (2022) 8.3.6: Work with community groups to identify actions to decrease the risk of heat related illness. Actions could include identification of community or building cool refuges, volunteer heat registries, patrols and improving access to drinking water

Existing resources:

Non profit template for climate adaptation and emergency preparedness

The template developed by Public Health Association of British Columbia and Vancouver Coastal Health, provides a strong starting point for organizations. These could be customized specifically for DTES organizations, mapping current partnerships and assets and ensuring the tools are practical for groups with limited staff and resources. Training and facilitation could be offered to help organizations apply the templates in real time, building both organizational and neighbourhood-level readiness.





STRATEGY:

JOINT PROCUREMENT AND STORAGE FOR SUPPLIES

Density and space constraints is another key concern in the DTES. During climate emergencies, lack of reliable storage spaces for relevant supplies such as fans, water bottles, sunscreen, and air conditioners constrain the ability to deliver proactive services in a timely manner. From an environmental perspective, reactive emergency response tends to be more wasteful (e.g. investing in water bottles rather than water urns). Shared storage would allow for more proactive and less wasteful solutions, and privilege more local suppliers.

Action:

Invest in joint procurement and storage for proactive responses and more environmentally-friendly and cost-effective emergency supplies

- Identify and partner with social enterprises providing eco-friendly alternatives for response materials and disposal
- Draft a policy for collectively procuring emergency response materials among social service non-profit organizations
- Map existing storage facilities and practices in the DTES that can be used as shared space for storing supplies. This would include existing storage facilities of the partner organizations, as well as informal or makeshift storage areas in the neighbourhood that can be utilised

Alignment with existing policies and strategies:

- Spaces to Thrive (2021) 1C⁹: Support capacity of social non-profits to plan, secure, and manage spaces and resources
- Spaces to Thrive (2021) 3C: Support non-profit applicants to renovate and maintain social-serving spaces
- Spaces to Thrive (2021) 6A2: Identify, retain and build on spaces, amenities or infrastructure that could strengthen networks and support community response to and recovery from emergencies or disasters
- Downtown Eastside Plan (2014) 10.1.2: Promote a social procurement policy for the DTES in partnership with key stakeholders

Existing resources:

City of Vancouver storefronts report

According to the vacant storefronts study by the City of Vancouver, the DTES has a high concentration of persistent vacancies (5+ years) compared to the rest of the city.¹⁰ Utilising these storefronts could be a positive way of ensuring that nonprofits in the DTES have a space for the procurement and storage of response materials.

⁹ City of Vancouver. (2021). Spaces to thrive: Vancouver Social Infrastructure strategy

¹⁰ City of Vancouver. 2025. Storefronts report. Vancouver





STRATEGY: **HIRE A CLIMATE RESILIENCE COORDINATOR**

A lack of capacity is one of the key issues most DTES social service non-profit organizations face. The Climate Resilience Coordinator will be supported by Vancity Community Foundation and SFU CERi and will be a shared resource across the different DTES organizations. The coordinator will help organizations with identifying funding, compiling best practices, mapping strategies, and coordinating across organizations. They will also support the implementation and progress monitoring of the roadmap action items.

Action:

Hire a Climate Resilience Coordinator to organize climate strategies across different organizations

- Create a job description and workplan for the role
- Source matching funds and grants for hiring
- Ensure coordinator attends meetings with organizations and find cross-organizational synergies



STRATEGY: **NEIGHBOURHOOD-LEVEL EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS**

Concurrent crises in the DTES, including short term (e.g. COVID-19, extreme heat), and ongoing (e.g. opioid epidemic, homelessness) crises, intensify under climate hazards like heatwaves and smoke, disproportionately impacting already vulnerable populations in the neighbourhood. There is a need for proactive and coordinated emergency responses at a neighbourhood level.

Action:

Develop protocols for collective and coordinated neighbourhood responses during climate emergencies

- Share protocols for extreme weather response across organizations and look for opportunities to align protocols
- Conduct regular calls among organizations before and during heat and smoke seasons to check-in on the needs and challenges faced by community

Alignment with existing policies and strategies

- Spaces to Thrive (2021) 6A3: Strengthen the non-profit network of food infrastructure, including spaces for growing, preparation and distribution of food in day-to-day programming by community organizations and during disaster response recovery, and beyond.
- Resilient Vancouver Strategy (2019) 1.2.B: Support a community-led Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Disaster Response and Recovery planning process.

Existing resources:

Resilient Neighbourhoods Toolkit

A toolkit designed for community organizations looking to support their neighbourhood and improve the resilience of their respective neighbourhoods during emergencies.



STRATEGY: EDUCATIONAL AND OUTREACH MATERIALS

Inclusive and accessible communication of awareness materials are essential to help community members to prepare for climate emergencies. In a neighbourhood as diverse as the DTES, outreach in multiple languages and physical formats are important to enhance the climate resiliency of the community.

Action:

Coordinate seasonal campaigns on smoke, heat, and emergency resilience

- Contextualize alerts and preparedness guides from the City and province to the needs of the DTES community. This would involve distributing information in multiple languages and physical formats, with an emphasis on the impacts on specific vulnerable groups
- Explore how capacities in existing campaigns and programs can be utilised to include seasonal resilience

Alignment with existing policies and strategies

- Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2024) E3.2: Enhance public communications around each of the climate-related hazards to improve the reach and relevance of City messaging by leveraging community partners and translating materials
- Resilient Vancouver Strategy (2019) 1.3.C: Apply an intersectional lens to revise emergency and resilience education and engagement materials
- The City of Vancouver conducts seasonal readiness calls to share information with community organizations and support them in taking necessary actions

Existing resources:

The City of Vancouver has fact sheets and preparedness guides in multiple languages available for the different hazards impacting the city. The City also has pre-recorded emergency preparedness workshops accessible through the Vancouver Public Library.





STRATEGY: LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Vulnerable neighbourhoods and residents are often portrayed as passive or unable to co-create responses due to housing insecurity, social stigma, resource constraints, and gaps in emergency preparedness.

Action:

Design and implement programs to empower community members in climate response roles

- Develop training and paid leadership roles within organizations for residents to step into during crises
- Advocate for low-barrier jobs/roles for community members
- Connect with pre-existing community leadership and advocacy projects (e.g. DTES SRO Collaborative, Climate Equity Action and Resilience)
- Collaborate with social service non-profit organizations about how to best empower their community members

Alignment with existing policies and strategies

- Vancouver Plan (2022) 10.4.1: Create employment (especially low-barrier jobs) through inclusive, social impact hiring and local employment opportunities
- Resilient Vancouver Strategy (2019) 2.1.B: Leverage resiliency initiatives to strengthen civic literacy and access for underrepresented groups



Climate Resilience in Practice

SRO Extreme Heat Preparedness and Response Initiative

The heat preparedness project by DTES SRO Collaborative is a key example of coordinated heat response among Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel tenants, the City of Vancouver, and other community organizations. The initiative focused on heat preparedness and response for tenants in 30 privately owned SROs and 10 Chinese Benevolent Society buildings across the DTES. Through the project, volunteer tenants were given training in providing first aid, distributing water and cool kits, and conducting wellness checks.

2022 Community-Led Extreme Heat Resilience

This report from the City of Vancouver is a compilation of some of the key community-led initiatives for extreme heat resilience under the Resilient Neighbourhoods Program. Some of the actions include wellness checks, distributing cool kits, distributing fans and evaporative coolers, setting up cooling stations, assistance in transporting people to cooling centres, training of community members, and awareness campaigns.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS (2–5 YEARS)

These projects require substantial investment, coordination and policy shifts (~3–5+ years to implement), but require groundwork for implementation to begin within a year.



STRATEGY: FORM CLIMATE RESPONSE TEAMS

In the long term, there is a need for organizations to have internal dedicated response teams and have the capacity to collaborate across organizations during emergencies. Organizations should have more flexibility and agency in using funding for long-term climate adaptation programs and strategies.

Action:

Build internal teams in organizations dedicated to responding to climate needs

- Create a list of capacities and resources required for setting up response teams within organizations. This involves listing existing capacities and staffing that can be integrated
- Support mandatory emergency preparedness onboarding training for staff
- Institute regular drills for staff to prepare for emergencies
- Support peer-leadership training, mentorship, stipends, and skill-building for community members so they can be part of the response teams



STRATEGY: ESTABLISH A CLIMATE HUB

The DTES does not have a response centre specifically designed for the community's needs. A climate hub would be a one-stop-place where different supports for the community to cope with climate change can be consolidated. It would also act as a centre where people can go to be trained, eventually contributing to capacity building in the community.

Action:

Establish a DTES climate response and resilience hub for sharing resources and information, coordinating response and providing services in safety for community members

- Conduct a feasibility study for the potential locations for the climate hub
- Map out existing physical and natural assets that community members and organizations can access for climate support
- Map potential hub partners and spaces
- Advocate to all levels of government for capital and operational investments
- Provide training for residents to be community response personnel



STRATEGY:

GREEN SPACES AND URBAN COOLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Lack of green cover and accessible open spaces is a key issue faced by the DTES community. The neighbourhood has the lowest canopy cover in the city.¹¹ Insufficient access to safe cooling and ventilation spaces also leads to displacement risks and isolation. Green spaces and parks are key community infrastructure that provide respite to residents during emergencies, especially heatwaves. These spaces also work as important community infrastructure for mobilising communities.

Action:

Invest in park development, greenspace, and natural shading

- Advocate for developing existing parks and open spaces that can be used within the community
- Design and implement contextual nature-based shading solutions in the neighbourhood
- Engage community members in an ongoing participatory mapping to crowdsource community/informal spaces which can be used for activation in response and resiliency efforts

Alignment with existing policies and strategies:

- Urban Forest Strategy (2025) Action 23: Enhance the sustainability of the park stewardship programs by securing funding, pursuing grants, resourcing, and measuring success through volunteer engagement and goal setting

Existing resources:

VanMap Viewer from the City of Vancouver maps urban forest covers, green spaces and trees in the city. *Urban Forestry Strategy (2025)* also maps existing and potential ecological corridors within the city.



STRATEGY:

ADVOCACY FOR RETROFIT AND DESIGN CLIMATE-READY BUILDINGS

Aging infrastructure and its maintenance are key issues in the DTES. Most of the buildings are not equipped to handle the impacts of climate change, especially in terms of heating and cooling.

Action:

Join the existing efforts in retrofits (such as those led by Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre (TRAC) to implement mandatory requirements for climate responsive building design and HVAC in new social and supportive housing¹²

- Incentivise contractors and landlords to do collective retrofits to older DTES social and supportive housing
- Access subsidized cooling programs to respond to the needs of older buildings and SROs

- Advocate to the government to fund retrofits in older buildings and address the need to manage the potential for retrofits to cause renovictions. Update emergency systems in older buildings
- Develop detailed templates from preexisting projects that have built climate response design and resident well-being into their buildings

¹¹ City of Vancouver and Vancouver Park Board. 2025. Urban Forest Strategy: 2025 Update.

¹² There are already several initiatives addressing various facets of retrofits like the BC Housing Energy Efficiency Retrofit program and Rental Apartment Retrofit Accelerator (RARA) program. There is also research from organizations like Tenant Resource and Advisory Council (TRAC) on the impacts of retrofits, including renovictions. While retrofits are time and resource intensive measures that might be outside the purview and capacity of this work, joining with advocacy efforts can become the base for equitable actioning of retrofits and climate responsive design of buildings.



STRATEGY: COMMUNITY-LED VOICES

A key aspiration for community-led research is that it convenes residents to share their ideas on making the neighbourhood more resilient. As a community that is often over-researched, while at the same time being underrepresented, it is imperative that residents have more control over the narratives shaping the neighbourhood.

Action:

Develop resident-led research to take leadership roles on climate resilience

- Develop a ground-up strategy for amplifying DTES voices in policy advocacy

Leverage current actions like political organizing and roundtables with peers, non-profits, and governmental agencies (including health authorities). Advocate for the adoption of ideas and strategies that effectively translate resident voices into policy and action.

Existing resources:

Support ongoing engagement mechanisms like resident advisory circles and peer-led storytelling; like the **Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study (VIDUS)** project.

A Climate Justice Charter for Vancouver is an important resource that provides a high-level vision for the City and the wider community on the pathways to achieve climate justice. The Charter's framework was proposed by the Climate Equity Working Group (CEWG), which consisted of people who have lived experience with systemic inequities and work to address racial and climate justice. Additionally, interviews and further engagement was conducted to include diverse perspectives.



COMMUNITY PARTNER REFLECTIONS

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I had a great experience participating in the Climate Resilience Roadmap process. It was a thoughtful and respectful space that brought together diverse perspectives and made meaningful connections between climate justice, housing and racial equity. The conversations recognized that the climate crisis cannot be understood or addressed in isolation from the social and economic conditions people face every day. For the DTES community, this integrated approach is essential. It acknowledges both the disproportionate impacts of climate change and the resilience that already exists within our neighborhoods. I look forward to seeing how the roadmap continues to guide collaborative, justice-centered action across Vancouver, leading to practical solutions that serve the community's current needs while preparing for the challenges ahead.

Amanda Burrows, Executive Director, First United

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The experience of participating in the process of developing the roadmap has been an important step in bringing frontline community organizations together with academic researchers and other stakeholders as we look to establish effective measures to address climate change related issues in the DTES. By sharing experiences of delivering extreme weather supports to vulnerable community members, service providers in the nonprofit sector have been able to inform the importance of research and collaboration on developing best practices and resources for immediate and ongoing solutions for addressing the impact of climate change for people in the DTES and other marginalized communities.

Tanya Fader, Interim Director of Programs, PHS Community Services Society

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The development process of the roadmap was deeply collaborative and informed by the experiences of social service operators and our guests. Every step of the way, the challenges and opportunities identified were heard, analyzed, and used as the springboard to collaboratively imagine a better, climate-proof future for one of the most hard-hit yet resilient neighbourhoods and determine realistic, actionable steps to implement this vision.

Alicea Yiu, Development Manager, Lookout Housing and Health Society

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We are excited to take this first step in creating a roadmap that supports accountability for the flourishing of the DTES—its residents and diverse community. The reality is that climate mitigation and emergencies are now unavoidable and will continue to disproportionately impact the most vulnerable. We hope this roadmap creates space for innovative and cost-effective solutions for and by the DTES residents most in need.

Crystal Chu, Director Finance and Operations, Hogan's Alley Society



photo: DTES

EXPANDING THE VISION: INSPIRING CHANGE BEYOND THE DTES

The *DTES Climate Resilience Roadmap for Social Service Sector Organizations* has the potential to become a blueprint for other communities across Canada. The social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the DTES are similar in nearly all of the country's under-resourced neighbourhoods. And the impacts from climate change will be equally devastating to these communities if appropriate and sustainable action isn't properly organized, funded, and implemented. Its broader influence could include:

- **Scalability:** Providing a flexible framework that can be adapted to other urban environments grappling with intersectional social and climate challenges.
- **Informing Policy:** Shaping the way governments and funders support and partner with non-profit led climate action.
- **Sectoral Leadership:** Positioning the non-profit sector at the forefront, and on the frontlines, of community climate resilience planning.
- **Narrative Transformation:** Placing equity-deserving and historically marginalized communities at the centre of climate planning and action, shifting the broader conversation toward justice and inclusion.

IMPLEMENTATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This roadmap is not a prescriptive document with fixed actions to achieve climate action, but rather a collaborative live document that will be updated as pathways of implementation emerge going forward. The immediate next steps in implementation will be to:

- Publish the roadmap in community-friendly formats
- Secure funding for, and hire, a Climate Resilience Coordinator to support the implementation of the roadmap
- Advance the creation of virtual resource library for nonprofit organizations
- Advocate for the creation of Climate Hub to support the DTES community
- Launch relevant working groups to advance the short-term strategies
- Advocate and find funding for priority strategies
- Convene with partner organizations to finalise their levels of involvement



CONCLUSION

Climate change is no longer a threat for some distant future of humanity but a reality that requires urgent action. Rather than seeing it as a stand alone issue, it is imperative that we approach it as something that impacts our day-to-day lives in a number of ways. When intersecting with the multiple and increasing disparities in our communities, climate change and its impacts are felt much more by residents who are already struggling with finances, health, and marginalization. A justice-centered approach is crucial to address climate change in community and neighbourhood contexts.

The Climate Resilience Roadmap is a step towards building the long-term empowerment and resilience for DTES non-profit organizations and residents as they confront severe climate challenges in their community. While there are limitations on how this roadmap addresses equitable climate action, it works to provide an entry point towards building climate justice, emergency preparedness, and enhancing public safety. By centering the community and its strengths, this document outlines practical pathways to mobilize proactive responses and collaboration that strengthens resilience across service provision, operational continuity, and residents. This roadmap aims to showcase how a neighbourhood confronting complex and interacting challenges can still advance toward building greater climate resilience.

The Climate Resilience Roadmap articulates a shared vision of what a climate-ready future looks like for the DTES: one where organizations are equipped, residents are supported, and networks and systems are collaborative and just.