

SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MODULE

Strategies for Community-Centric Planning

PURPOSE

This module equips community leaders, Extension professionals, and partners to **identify, train, and support grassroots leaders** who can drive climate resilience efforts from within their communities.

Core Principle: Sustainable climate action is led by trusted local champions—not external organizations alone.

Outcome: Participants will identify potential leaders, design leadership development strategies, and create mentorship pathways to support long-term community resilience.

WHAT GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP MEANS

Grassroots leaders are individuals who: - Are trusted within their communities - Understand local challenges and priorities - Influence others through relationships, not formal authority - Are motivated to create positive change

WHY IT MATTERS

Without local leadership: - Initiatives lose momentum - Community trust weakens - Programs rely too heavily on outside organizations

With strong grassroots leadership: - Efforts are community-driven and sustained - Engagement increases - Solutions are more relevant and effective

SECTION 1: IDENTIFYING LOCAL LEADERS

FACILITATED ACTIVITY (30 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions: Ask participants to identify individuals who are already influencing or supporting their communities.

Prompt Questions:

- Who do people trust for information or guidance?
 - Who brings people together?
 - Who is already taking initiative on community issues?
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WORKSHEET 1: POTENTIAL LEADERS

Name	Community Role	Strengths	Level of Influence	Opportunity for Engagement

SECTION 2: BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

KEY SKILL AREAS

- Climate literacy (basic understanding of risks and solutions)
 - Communication and outreach
 - Facilitation and group engagement
 - Project planning and coordination
 - Advocacy and decision-making
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WORKSHEET 2: TRAINING PLAN

Skill Area	Training Method	Who Provides Training	Timeline

SECTION 3: MENTORSHIP & SUPPORT SYSTEMS

STRATEGIES

1. Pair Leaders with Mentors

- Connect emerging leaders with experienced professionals
- Use Extension, universities, and partner organizations

2. Create Peer Learning Networks

- Facilitate regular meetings among leaders
- Encourage sharing of experiences and strategies

3. Provide Ongoing Support

- Offer check-ins, resources, and feedback
 - Recognize and celebrate contributions
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WORKSHEET 3: MENTORSHIP PLAN

Leader	Mentor	Support Type	Frequency of Engagement

SECTION 4: EMPOWERING LEADERS TO ACT STRATEGIES

- Involve leaders in decision-making processes
 - Provide opportunities to lead projects and initiatives
 - Offer small grants or resources to support their work
 - Build confidence through early wins
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WORKSHEET 4: LEADERSHIP ACTION PLAN

Leader	Initiative	Support Needed	Timeline	Outcome

SECTION 5: FACILITATOR GUIDANCE – WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Do This:

- Invest in relationships with emerging leaders
- Provide practical, hands-on learning opportunities
- Recognize informal leaders, not just formal ones

- Build leadership gradually over time

Avoid This:

- Overloading leaders with responsibilities too quickly
 - Assuming leadership skills already exist
 - Limiting opportunities to a small group of individuals
 - Failing to provide ongoing support
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SECTION 6: COMMON CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Challenge

Limited capacity

Burnout

Lack of confidence

Strategy

Start small and scale leadership roles

Share responsibilities and provide support

Offer mentorship and early success opportunities

SECTION 7: REFLECTION

Reflection Questions

- Who are our strongest emerging leaders?
 - What support do they need to succeed?
 - How can we sustain leadership over time?
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ACTION COMMITMENT

Within the next 30 days, we will:

SECTION 8: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Leadership Development

- Extension Foundation – Leadership Programs <https://extension.org> *Training and capacity-building resources for Extension professionals*
 - Community Tool Box (University of Kansas) <https://ctb.ku.edu> *Comprehensive guidance on community leadership and engagement*
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Climate Leadership & Engagement

- NOAA Climate Stewards Education Project <https://climate.gov> *Training resources for climate communication and leadership*
 - USDA Climate Hubs <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov> *Regional resources and training opportunities*
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Facilitation & Community Engagement

- National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation <https://ncdd.org> *Tools for facilitating community conversations*
 - Liberating Structures <https://www.liberatingstructures.com> *Methods for engaging and empowering groups*
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FINAL NOTE

Strong communities are built by strong leaders.

When local leaders are equipped, supported, and empowered, climate resilience efforts become more sustainable, trusted, and impactful.

Your role is to **identify potential, invest in people, and create pathways for leadership to grow.**

(End of Module)