BACCC
Bay Area
Climate Change
Council

CENTRE FOR
COMMUNITY
BASED RESEARCH

High Performance and Low-Carbon Buildings in the Bay Area: Designing a Regional Implementation Team

September 16, 2026
Joyce Centre for Partnership & Innovation, Mohawk College

Event Snapshot

The Bay Area Climate Change Council (BACCC) worked with the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR), with funding from the Atmospheric Fund, to co-design and co-facilitate a collaborative workshop to identify practical, collective actions that could address market barriers and capitalize on opportunities to accelerate high-performance and low-carbon buildings across the Bay Area. The event brought together 36 builders and developers, design professionals, skilled trades, researchers, economic development representatives, suppliers, and policymakers involved in reducing emissions and advancing innovation within the building sector (Figure 1).

Event Goals:

- Surface real stories of market innovation already underway
- Build relationships and connections focused on climate
- Identify opportunities for local collaboration and continued dialogue with BACCC's support

Cross-Sector Participation

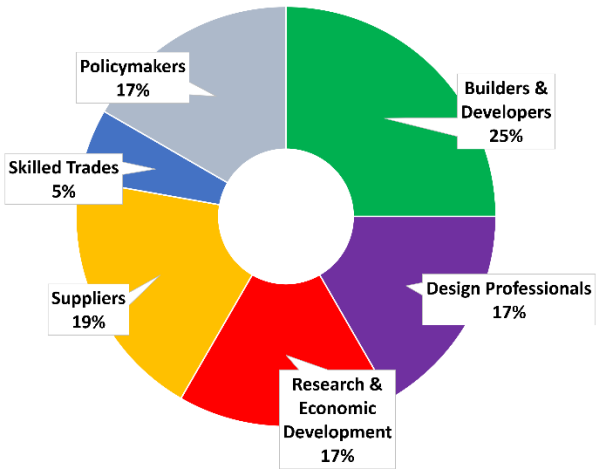


Figure 1: Event participants by sector

Our Collaborative Process

The morning began with networking activities and presentations showcasing local projects. Then, small-group discussions explored key barriers, opportunities, and collaborative actions needed to accelerate high-performance and low-carbon buildings in the Bay Area.

Information was collected through:

- Facilitator notes on flip chart paper
- Participant-generated sticky notes identifying priority opportunities
- Theme clustering and validation
- Recorded audio conversations of full group report backs and discussions
- Slido-based prioritization and voting
- Follow-up expressions of interest for future dialogue

Event Agenda

1. Welcome & Framing
2. Icebreaker
3. Storytelling: Market Innovations Already Underway
4. Morning Break
5. Group Discussions: Market Barriers, Opportunities & Collaborative Actions
6. Networking Break
7. Clarify and Prioritize Opportunities Identified
8. Next Steps & Closing

Identified Opportunities for Cross-Stakeholder Collaboration

In small groups, participants discussed barriers and opportunities for advancing high-performance, low carbon buildings in the Bay Area. Each group identified up to 3 priority opportunities and explored immediate collaborative actions. Ideas were recorded on sticky notes and clustered by BACCC and CCBR into common themes. Participants then reviewed and ranked the themes through a poll to validate and prioritize them. The vote totals indicate the opportunities participants viewed as most actionable, impactful, and relevant to their work and sector.

1. *Create locally relevant design prototypes + specs with real numbers on costs and performance (48% - 17 votes)*

Participants identified a key opportunity to work with builders, designers, and industry partners to co-develop and publicly share high-performance building design specs tailored to Bay Area conditions. By creating prototype designs with real-world cost and performance data, the sector could reduce the need to start from scratch, accelerate adoption, and focus on cost reduction. Participants also highlighted the importance of leveraging the region's existing expertise, workforce, transportation networks, and manufacturing capacity to localize production of key technologies, strengthen supply chain resilience, and support broader deployment of high-performance buildings.

2. *Accelerate waste heat recovery, district energy integration, and other low carbon technologies (43% - 15 votes)*

Participants identified significant opportunities to capture and reuse waste heat through thermal networks and district energy systems, and to deploy other low-carbon technologies like heat pumps. Potential actions included convening the right stakeholders, such as utilities, developers, building owners, and public agencies, to explore implementation pathways and build partnerships. Participants also suggested holding focused discussions and pilot initiatives, particularly within the affordable housing sector, to demonstrate the benefits of energy-efficient buildings and district energy solutions and support broader adoption.

3. *Designing meaningful and predictable incentives from government (40% - 14 votes)*

Participants emphasized an opportunity to advocate to the government to drive adoption of high performance and low carbon buildings through a mix of financial and non-financial incentives. Suggested actions included advocating to streamline tax credits and incentive programs, open funding for feasibility studies, offering fee waivers and grants, and creating faster permitting and development approval pathways for high-performance projects. Participants also called for collaborative engagement with municipalities, developers, and other stakeholders to identify and expand local incentive opportunities, particularly around fast-tracking approvals for projects that meet ambitious performance standards. Participants also acknowledged that banks and other financial institutions must support high-performance low carbon buildings and identified an opportunity for government to enable financial institutions to prioritize projects that may have lower pro former returns due to higher green standards.

4. *Cross-collaboration between municipal planning department and developers across multiple sites (macro planning) (26% - 9 votes)*

Participants discussed opportunities to improve planning and permitting processes through stronger collaboration among municipalities, developers, and other stakeholders. Suggested actions included leveraging regional climate partnerships to align policies across jurisdictions, advocating for consistent provincial policies that support low-carbon development and thermal energy systems, and building municipal staff capacity on high-performance building standards. Participants emphasized strengthening knowledge sharing between developers and municipal planning departments, with BACCC serving as a regional convener to support standards review, share best practices, and foster collaboration across municipalities.

5. *Peer to peer knowledge sharing (17% - 6 votes)*

Participants highlighted the opportunity of continuing forums like this workshop to support a "coalition of the willing" which could advance shared goals towards collective impact. This forum could involve knowledge sharing across the industry on topics such as mechanical systems, passive house design, feasibility studies, and Research & Development. Key actions included sharing case studies, data, and publicly available resources, fostering relationships across sectors, and creating collaborative tools such as guidebooks and research resources. As a result, this cross-sector engagement can break down silos, build industry connections, and cultivate leadership.

6. *Inspiration and Education (17% - 6 votes)*

Participants emphasized education as a key strategy for addressing misconceptions, demonstrating long-term benefits and costs, and encouraging a shift from short-term to long-term thinking. Suggested actions included showcasing successful regional projects, developing educational resources and procurement guides, delivering workshops and lunch-and-learn sessions, and sharing practical concepts such as building envelope performance. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging diverse audiences, including the public, youth, elected officials, trades workers, building operators, and educators, through schools, community events, industry conferences, and cross-sector partnerships. By collaborating on education and outreach efforts, stakeholders can build awareness, inspire action, and strengthen support for high-performance buildings across the region.

7. *Benchmarking and accountability (14% - 5 votes)*

Participants identified opportunities to benchmark building performance using utility and energy consumption data, with suggestions to begin with municipally owned buildings in Hamilton. Key actions included establishing performance baselines, developing a database of case studies, and piloting energy performance reporting for homes, schools, and other building types to inform decision-making and track progress. Participants also suggested using design review panels to strengthen accountability and promote best practices.

8. *Evaluating and De-Risking Greater Electrification (9% - 3 votes)*

Participants discussed a range of actions to support electrification, including pilot projects, stronger business case analysis using clear cost and return-on-investment data, harmonized codes and standards, and improved access to low-carbon products and technologies. They emphasized the importance of engaging energy advisors early in the design process and allowing sufficient time for planning, as early-stage decisions can significantly reduce costs and avoid redesigns. Participants also suggested showcasing publicly funded demonstration projects, such as schools and community facilities, to provide real-world examples of successful electrification and build confidence among developers, building owners, and industry stakeholders. These efforts could begin with early adopters in the private sector and help drive broader market transformation over time.

9. *Cultivate Visionary Leadership (6% - 2 votes)*

Participants highlighted an opportunity for stronger visionary leadership to complement the Bay Area's existing commitment to climate action. Suggested actions included creating forums and other opportunities for leaders to learn from successful high-performance, low-carbon building projects, share ideas, and build confidence in ambitious approaches. Participants emphasized the importance of inspiring government and industry leaders to adopt a proactive, solutions-oriented mindset, raise performance standards, and champion a "yes in my backyard" approach to innovation and sustainable development.

Next Steps

At the end of the event, participants were invited to express interest in continuing the dialogue on the prioritized opportunities by filling out a brief form.

As its core mandate, BACCC convenes working groups called implementation teams, which are made up of local leaders who know their sectors and communities best, helping them to work across organizations to turn shared priorities into coordinated action toward decarbonization.

Using the information collected from the workshop, BACCC will design its next buildings implementation team, ultimately inviting participants from the workshop and the broader building sector to continue to work together on the identified priority actions.

Thank You

Thank you to The Atmospheric Fund (TAF) for their financial contribution to this important work.

TAF

Co-Authorship

Event report co-authored by the Centre for Community Based Research with the Bay Area Climate Change Council.