

The Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT)



Principle 10



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Transformation at a local level is achieved through genuine collaboration and inclusivity. The Clayoquot Biosphere Trust demonstrates that we can effectively address socio-environmental challenges and foster sustainable development by uniting diverse voices — Indigenous communities, local residents, youth, and various organisations. It is through this collective engagement and respect for cultural and ecological values that we build resilient communities and ensure a thriving future for both people and the environment.

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About the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust

The [Clayoquot Biosphere Trust \(CBT\)](#) is a community foundation dedicated to fostering sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation in the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region. As a catalyst for positive change, CBT promotes reconciliation and empowers communities through strategic partnerships and grassroots initiatives. The organisation supports projects that integrate nuučaañuł (Nuu-chah-nulth) values, addressing critical issues such as climate action, biodiversity conservation, and youth engagement. By uniting diverse stakeholders, CBT ensures the long-term resilience and well-being of the region's ecosystems and communities.

What was the challenge?

Indigenous Peoples in Canada manage approximately 14 percent of the land area, but many communities still face challenges in asserting their land rights and participating in sustainable land management. Only about 9 percent of Indigenous communities are involved in formalised land management or stewardship programmes despite their crucial role in preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage ([IPAC](#)). Furthermore, in 2021, nearly one in six households in Canada (15.9 percent) experienced some level of food insecurity, affecting over 5.8 million people, including 1.4 million children. Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected, with [food insecurity rates as high as 50 per cent in some regions](#).

In addressing the challenges of sustainable development and conservation in the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region, the CBT faces the critical task of balancing economic development with thriving ecosystems. This unique region is not only characterised by its rich biodiversity and cultural significance, but also by competing interests in forestry, tourism, and Indigenous rights. The Trust's challenge lies in fostering collaboration among stakeholders with diverse perspectives and interests, including Indigenous peoples, members of equity-deserving communities, youth and marginalised communities, while promoting initiatives that support both ecological integrity and local livelihoods. Through strategic partnerships with government, academia, and local businesses and community engagement, the Trust aims to find innovative solutions to complex socio-environmental issues, ensuring the long-term resilience of this precious ecosystem.

What was the response?

The [Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Centre](#) is a transformative initiative that integrates cultural, environmental, and social initiatives to foster reconciliation, connect communities to habitat restoration by learning about actionable steps to mitigate the triple planetary crisis, youth empowerment, climate action, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development within the Tla-o-qui-aht Territory and surrounding communities. Established in 2000, the mission of the CBT is to provide funding and logistical support for research, education, and training initiatives that promote conservation and sustainable development within the UNESCO Biosphere Region. This culturally safe knowledge hub unites people through grassroots initiatives and place-based experiential learning. It promotes nuučaañuł (Nuu-chah-nulth) values such as iisaak (respecting), qwaa?akqin tiičmis (it is how we live; it is our culture), and hišuk?iš čawaak (everything is one). Programmes administered by the CBT, like the [Coastal Family Resource Coalition \(CFRC\)](#), facilitate collaboration among health and social service providers, addressing community needs and advocating for health promotion efforts. [The West Coast NEST \(Nature. Education. Sustainability. Transformation\)](#) promotes education tourism, diversifying the region's economy and enhancing environmental education. The Centre's initiatives aim to build strong, united cultures and empower communities for a sustainable future.

The establishment of the Centre was considered the best response by CBT due to the collective desire from the communities for a space that fosters collaboration, education, and sustainable development. Key ideas from the consultation process with the local communities, experts and stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples, members of equity-deserving communities, youth, and marginalised communities, included the need for a dedicated space to address socio-environmental issues, promote cultural heritage, and support local livelihoods.

CBT has continually engaged with residents, ensuring that the Centre's development aligns with community needs and aspirations. These consultations have ensured that the project reflects the collective vision of living sustainably in a healthy ecosystem with a diversified economy and strong, vibrant cultures.

The CBT faced several challenges during this consultation process, especially in addressing diverse perspectives. They overcame these challenges by engaging in continuous dialogue, building trust through transparency, and incorporating culturally appropriate practices and ceremonies to involve Indigenous communities.

What set this process apart as transformative for the Trust was the emphasis on inclusivity and genuine engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. The CBT established strategic collaborations by forming partnerships with local leaders, elders, youth, and various community organisations. The programmes they offer cater to attendees to educate different groups. [Youth workshops](#) are designed to be dynamic and engaging, incorporating various elements such as technology, storytelling, and peer-led sessions. Unlike the sessions for existing community members, which focus on more established practices, youth workshops are tailored to their unique perspectives and needs. These workshops also differ from the tourist education tours that focus on broader awareness. By involving youth in hands-on activities and allowing them to learn from and collaborate with their peers, these sessions foster a deeper connection to the topics discussed and empower them to take an active role in their communities.

CBT faced significant barriers, such as limited resources, but overcame these challenges by fostering mutual respect, particularly between local Indigenous communities, environmental organisations and other stakeholders. They built this respect through ongoing dialogue, inclusive decision-making processes, and by honouring traditional knowledge. To leverage existing networks, they tapped into regional conservation groups, educational institutions, and international biosphere reserves, which brought added value through shared expertise, resources and a broader platform for advocacy. They demonstrated the long-term benefits of collaboration, secured funding through grants and donations, and built strategic partnerships with local governments, which helped to ensure sustained support and resources. By focusing on a collaborative approach across various sectors and intergenerationally, the Trust has created a model for inclusive and sustainable development that serves as an example for other regions facing similar socio-environmental challenges.

The projects developed by CBT are deeply rooted in community engagement and the understanding of local needs. They chose to focus on specific initiatives after conducting thorough consultations with diverse stakeholders, including local Indigenous communities, environmental groups and residents. These conversations revealed the unique challenges and opportunities within the region, allowing the Centre to identify gaps that existing programmes and services were not addressing. An example is the Eat West Coast programme, which addresses food access challenges and promotes healthy and affordable food choices, involving local communities in food security initiatives. CBT also promotes youth engagement and leadership development through various programmes and facilities, such as the Empowering Youth Education Awards, which grant annual awards based on community involvement, academic achievement and proposed education plans.

These programmes establish a balance between economic development and environmental protection through several key strategies. Community involvement is central to the Eat West Coast programme, fostering a sense of responsibility towards sustainable practices. This ensures that economic development does not come at the expense of environmental health. Programmes are designed to promote sustainable practices, such as sourcing food locally, uplifting traditional knowledge, reducing the carbon footprint, and preserving local ecosystems while supporting local economies.

CBT's emphasis on education and awareness through initiatives like the Empowering Youth Education Awards encourages youth to pursue education and careers that balance economic and environmental considerations. Youth are the leaders of today and tomorrow and their participation in developing a sense of environmental stewardship is crucial for a sustainable future. CBT recognises this as an integral part of its work and curates environmental workshops for youth and youth-led project grants emphasising youth participation. Cultural competency training for staff and collaboration with cultural advisors enable respectful and effective engagement with all community groups, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern practices for a holistic approach to development.

Over time, CBT faced challenges in maintaining meaningful engagement with diverse communities while balancing resources for ongoing programmes and the new Centre's development. Completing time-consuming processes related to land use and funding was also significant. To address these issues, CBT employed strategic advocacy through initiatives, collaboration with stakeholders, and an adaptive management approach. Decision-making was inclusive, involving extensive discussions to ensure all voices were heard. Strategic partnerships with Indigenous communities, educational institutions, and other organisations were vital for securing funding and support, which helped navigate these challenges.

These efforts have allowed CBT to foster strong community connections and implement successful programmes in reconciliation, youth empowerment, climate action, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, ultimately building a resilient and socially responsible community.

What have they learned?

- ✓ **Don't be afraid to adapt to new strategies and plans:** The CBT recognised the need for a flexible approach to developing their programmes, facing challenges like changing funding and construction issues. They implemented a system for adjusting project plans and timelines based on new information, including regular reviews and flexible deadlines by consulting with the internal team and all participating stakeholders. This shift required promoting a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, encouraging team members to embrace change. Key lessons included the importance of building a resilient and adaptable organisational culture, continuously engaging stakeholders, and maintaining strong monitoring and evaluation systems. These elements are crucial for managing uncertainties and ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of their projects.
- ✓ **One size does not fit all:** Working with different target audiences and local communities highlighted the need for tailored communication and engagement strategies. When working in an intergenerational setting, it is important to design workshops, programmes or topics discussed based on the relevant audience. Youth engagement was effectively driven through interactive, technology-enabled platforms like social media campaigns and workshops, whereas older community members preferred face-to-face interactions and traditional forms of communication. This required unique approaches to outreach and programme delivery, respecting the distinct cultural and social contexts of different groups. The Trust diversified their internal ways of working, enhancing digital capabilities for younger audiences while maintaining traditional communication for older demographics. Flexibility and responsiveness with youth have been key and CBT used different approaches such as adapting timelines, connecting through the means that work best for them – often texting or in person, rather than email. Showing appreciation for their time and knowledge by hosting meetings with food and providing honoraria have also been important to continue their engagement. All of these approaches led to meaningful relationships with youth groups within the region. Building trust-based relationships through long-term commitments and consistent community presence was crucial. The process highlighted the importance of cultural competency and continuous learning. These lessons have strengthened the Trust's ability to foster sustainable development that aligns with the diverse needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.
- ✓ **Create a long-term vision while engaging participants in current programmes:** Balancing resources for ongoing programmes and the new Centre's development was complex, requiring meticulous planning. The team had to prioritise based on immediate programme needs and the Centre's stages, with regular budget reviews to ensure sustainability. The Trust consulted communities, incorporating feedback into programming and design. Challenges included aligning stakeholder expectations and managing limited resources. Decisions were made collaboratively with community representatives and internal teams, ensuring transparency. The Trust embraced a flexible management approach, introducing new programme formats, enhancing digital engagement, and diversifying funding strategies and government relations. These changes addressed challenges and ensured the Centre's success while maintaining strong community connections.

What have they learned?

- ✓ **Embrace diversity:** The quality of a network is not determined by the size of a group but by the diversity of voices around the table. Including diverse perspectives helps create an inclusive vision, fosters innovation, and ensures that various needs and perspectives are involved in driving change. In the context of CBT, it is crucial to involve representatives from different community groups, including Indigenous peoples, youth, LGBTQ+ and other marginalised communities. This diversity not only enriches discussions but also ensures that the initiatives are inclusive and equitable. By prioritising diversity, CBT better addressed the complex challenges of sustainability and conservation.
- ✓ **Set clear and shared objectives:** Establishing clear and shared goals is essential to bring different actors together for a common purpose. This involves working closely with stakeholders to develop and communicate these objectives effectively. For CBT, this means regularly engaging with community members, local businesses and governmental agencies to ensure everyone understands and aligns with the mission. Clear communication also helps to manage expectations, fosters trust and promotes a collaborative environment where all parties feel invested in the success of the projects.
- ✓ **Promote cross-sectoral innovation:** Encouraging innovation across different sectors can drive progress and uncover new solutions to environmental challenges. CBT can foster this by creating platforms where stakeholders from various fields, such as tourism, education and conservation, can collaborate and share ideas. When tackling a challenge like the climate crisis, it is important to remember the intersectionality of the problem and design initiatives centred around climate resilience and adaptation versus sole mitigation from one lens.
- ✓ **Harness local knowledge and expertise:** Leveraging local knowledge and expertise can significantly enhance the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. By involving community members who have a deep understanding of the local environment and cultural practices, CBT developed more context-specific solutions. Engaging with local experts and traditional knowledge holders, like Indigenous Peoples, ensures that projects are grounded in the realities of the region, leading to more sustainable and culturally appropriate outcomes. Each region is different and requires different mitigation and adaptation efforts. This approach not only builds trust within the community but also enriches the projects with valuable insights that might otherwise be overlooked.

Key outcomes and impact indicators

\$25K+ in Youth Education Awards

CBT annually awards two grants of \$14,000 each to recognise youth for their community involvement, academic achievements and educational plans.

30+ local food security champions engaged

Coordinated the Coastal Agriculture Roundtable, bringing together over 30 farmers and stakeholders to discuss sustainable food production practices.

500+ food boxes distributed

Provided more than 500 food boxes to families in need, addressing food insecurity within the community.

2,000+ participants in educational tourism

Facilitated over 100 events and workshops, engaging students, educators and tourists in educational tourism.

20+ business partnerships

Collaborated with over 20 local businesses and organisations to create educational opportunities for the community.