

THE RURAL CLIMATHON TOOLKIT

A step-by-step guide for bringing your community together to take local climate action



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WHAT IS A CLIMATHON?

Climathons bring communities together to take practical local action to tackle the climate crisis. At Climathon events, different people from across a community discuss climate challenges and potential local solutions, and agree on practical actions they will take together.

These events work because they connect and inspire communities, encouraging citizens, business leaders, subject specialists, local knowledge holders, and decision-makers to work collaboratively. Communities not only envision a climate-resilient future together but agree on climate-positive plans to bring that future to life. By hosting a Climathon, you can join a global movement of people working locally to accelerate our transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient society.

“It was great to be able to get together with a wider group of people to collaborate on the sustainability problems that I’m thinking about all the time” - Participant feedback

The global Climathon movement is led by [Climate KIC](#), and you can find out more about Climathon events [HERE](#).



See the map on page 7 for links to Rural Climathon case studies.

WHO'S THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit is for people in rural communities who are wanting to work together to tackle a local climate-related challenge. Here are some examples of challenges that previous Climathon organisers worked on:

How might we collaborate to reduce waste, promote circularity, and enhance connections within the Forest of Dean's food system?



LEARN MORE

How might local businesses, community groups, and organisations work together to make Tadcaster more economically, ecologically, and socially resilient to the impacts of climate change?



LEARN MORE

How might we improve the offer and uptake of inclusive, sustainable visitor transport to leisure destinations in the North East?



LEARN MORE

A Climathon is best run by a small, dedicated team of people who, together, can engage their local community, ensure the event runs smoothly, and coordinate follow-up actions.

"I've met lots of different people. I think that expands what you're thinking, because you tend to sit with people who have similar thoughts. So I think it's good to push you and challenge you."

- Participant feedback

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A RURAL CLIMATHON?

Find out about the Cotswold Food, Farming and Land Use Rural Climathon.



HERE

WHY RUN A CLIMATHON?

Communities across the world have recognised that urgent action to respond to the climate crisis is now a top priority. Indeed, according to a recent study in [Nature](#), nine out of ten people worldwide want to see intensified political action to address climate change. In the UK, the overwhelming majority of councils at local government level have now [declared a climate emergency](#).

Climathons work on addressing the global challenge at a local level, across a range of sectors including transport, energy, and food and land use. The events focus attention on practical solutions to local challenges in an inspiring and engaging way that brings people together to spark action. Climathons can also improve local outcomes for biodiversity, tourism, housing, energy, and health - helping communities and the natural environment to flourish.

“it’s fun - you get the slightly random element which creates new thought processes”

- Participant feedback



CLIMATHONS CAN CREATE MEANINGFUL CHANGE AT A LOCAL LEVEL BY:

- Building strong networks of people who are passionate about acting to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon society
- Raising awareness of local climate challenges and current solutions
- Informing action to support the transition to low-carbon solutions across a range of sectors, including transport, energy, and food and farming

Hear more about participants' experiences of the Forest of Dean Energy Climathon!



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT RURAL CLIMATHONS?

Originally, Climathons were designed as 24-hour events that took place in cities. Rural Climathons adapt the original method to better suit the needs of rural communities by:



IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY
of events to enable wider participation



FOCUSING ON COLLABORATION
through using deliberative methods and consortium building to enable diverse viewpoints to be heard



STREAMLINING EVENT STRUCTURES
to support engagement and teamwork



ALIGNING WITH EXISTING LOCAL INITIATIVES
to maximise potential for a long-term positive impact

DEVELOPING RURAL CLIMATHONS

To enable rural communities to join the Climathon movement, the **Countryside and Community Research Institute** (CCRI) team at the University of Gloucestershire adapted the Climathon method to better suit the needs of those communities. Funded by the British Academy, the CCRI first organised Rural Climathons in two livestock-farming regions and demonstrated that the method can be effective in helping rural communities come together to generate locally relevant low-carbon solutions. Since then, the CCRI team has worked with local councils in Gloucestershire and with colleagues at Newcastle University, through the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE), to deliver several more events. You can learn more about these events and how they are contributing to low-carbon solutions for communities via the map on the next page.

RURAL CLIMATHON CASE STUDIES

Click on each Climathon title to explore the case studies

COTSWOLDS

FARMING AND LAND USE



FOREST OF DEAN

FOOD AND FARMING CLIMATHON

ENERGY CLIMATHON

TRANSPORT CLIMATHON



CORNWALL

SUSTAINABLE FOOD FUTURES

NORTHUMBERLAND

COASTAL STREAMS CLIMATHON

SUSTAINABLE VISITOR TRANSPORT CLIMATHON

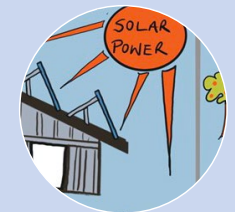


CUMBRIA

SUSTAINABLE FOOD FUTURES

TADCASTER

SUSTAINABLE TADCASTER CLIMATHON



GLOUCESTERSHIRE & WARWICKSHIRE BORDER

FARM OF THE FUTURE CLIMATHON

WHAT IS A DELIBERATIVE APPROACH?

A deliberative approach is designed to support thoughtful discussion and decision-making through the exchange of ideas. It is a structured process where participants share information, consider multiple perspectives, and talk together to develop their understanding of a topic.

WHY IS A DELIBERATIVE APPROACH IMPORTANT?

Rural Climathons bring people who may hold divergent views together. Using a deliberative approach creates dedicated spaces for discussion, understanding, and collaborative decision-making on key issues for rural communities, such as renewable energy generation, food systems, and nature recovery. Events also complement other ways of involving people in decisions that affect them, such as Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Juries.

You can read how the team explored the value of a deliberative approach to support rural communities through Rural Climathons



and you can find further details:



“I tell you what was useful was walking around a real landscape. You know, because if you're looking at a farmed landscape ... it's nice to be shown around the farm by the farmer himself. I think it's quite a brave thing to do.”

- Participant feedback

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

The people your team chooses to involve as event partners will depend on the Climathon challenge you wish to explore. A Climathon challenge is a question which will guide your work during the event – you can find examples of Climathon challenges on page 4 above. The potential partners you approach should have a real interest in the challenge – they may have a direct role in addressing it, or they may already be affected by it.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS INCLUDE:

- Local councils and public sector bodies
- Charities and voluntary sector organisations
- Local knowledge holders and subject matter specialists
- Entrepreneurs with an interest in climate innovations
- Businesses with an interest in investing in climate solutions
- Local education providers
- Local climate action groups
- Local community groups / citizens

Climathon participants should be local citizens and/or people with expertise in the challenge.

“Climathons bring together different people who might not normally be together in a room.”

- Participant feedback



HOW DO WE RUN A CLIMATHON?

The Rural Climathon Playbook is made up of four phases, shown below, for you to follow when planning your event. This guide includes the core elements of a Rural Climathon, plus details of our approach, which can add value if they align with your Climathon's goals.

Watch the CCRI team explain the process of organising and delivering a Rural Climathon

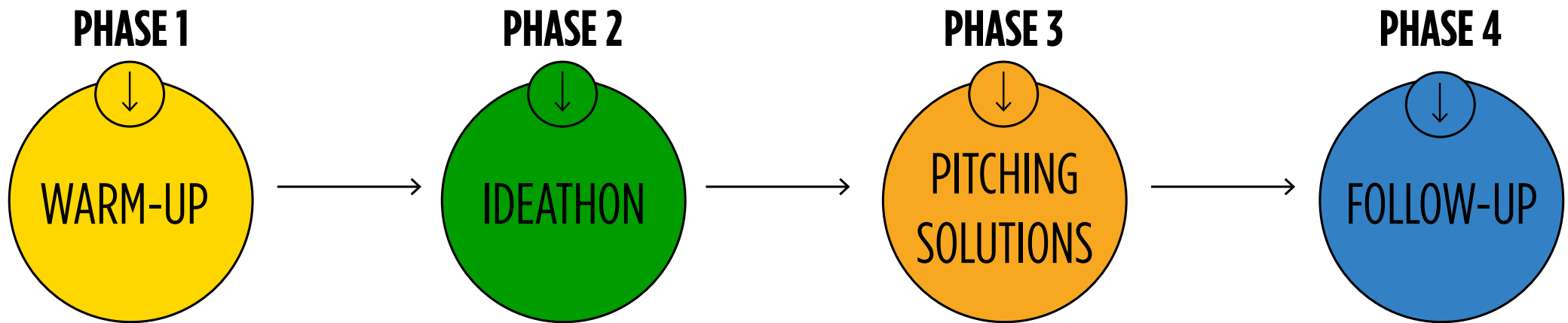


HERE

Download a Climathon Organiser's Checklist for the whole Climathon process



HERE



1 — STAY SUPPORTED

2 — CONSORTIUM-BUILDING

3 — ALIGNING WITH LOCAL INITIATIVES

4 — PROMOTION

5 — STREAMLINED STRUCTURE

6 — LEARNING FROM EXPERTS

7 — IDEATION & TEAM CREATION

8 — DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS IN TEAMS

9 — TEAM PRESENTATIONS

10 — CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

11 — STAYING CONNECTED

12 — TAKING SOLUTIONS FORWARD



PHASE 1: WARM-UP – 3+ months

In this phase, you'll build partnerships to create a consortium and align the plans for your Climathon with local initiatives. This phase will take around three to six months to complete, so make sure to plan well ahead of the date you choose for your event!

Think strategically from the outset about how funding might be accessed for delivering solutions in Phase 4. For example, working from the start with an anchor organisation that is relevant to your Climathon challenge, such as a local council or business that can fund Follow-Up projects via Environmental Social Governance (ESG) policies, could help maximise the impact of your Climathon.

STAY SUPPORTED THROUGHOUT

If you'd like support with running an event, please email ccri@glos.ac.uk with the subject 'Rural Climathon'. You can also visit the [Rural Climathon website](#) to find out more about other events taking place across the UK and to connect with other event organisers. We also strongly encourage you visit the Climate KIC website to [learn more about the Climathon approach](#) and the wider movement: <https://climathon.climate-kic.org>

CONSORTIUM-BUILDING

Identify and engage with potential partners and organisations who may be able to support your event. For example, they could promote the Climathon in their newsletters, on social media, or even provide a venue. Involving local partners early helps to avoid duplicating existing climate action and makes them more likely to be engaged and enthusiastic about your event.

ALIGNING WITH LOCAL INITIATIVES

To maximise the impact of your event, it's important to align your Climathon with existing local programmes of action. Creating a suitable Climathon challenge – which can guide your preparation and work during the event, and which is aligned to local action – will be key to success.

You might also choose to co-design your Climathon challenge with the partners you have identified.

Now is also the time to consider if there might be key strategies or plans the Climathon can feed into and identify any key documents which might inform your event – for example, a local food strategy or transport plan. This will allow you to make sure the solutions developed during the event complement existing work - or offer informed and constructive alternatives.

You can find examples of Climathon challenges on page 4

WHAT IS A CLIMATHON CHALLENGE?

A Climathon challenge is a question which will guide participants' work during the event. It should be clear and easy to understand, as it will guide solutions towards the desired outcome.



PHASE 1: WARM-UP – 3+ months



If there are individuals or groups that you'd like to participate in the Climathon but who are likely to find it difficult to attend, you may wish to create Digital Stories with them. These short films are co-produced with participants and allow their voices to be included, as well as offering an insight into existing work on climate challenges in your local area.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING EXAMPLES

Digital storytelling enables stakeholder voices to be heard even when they are unable to attend in-person events. You can listen to examples of farmers' digital stories



HERE

PROMOTION

During the Warm-Up phase, you will also need to promote your event to ensure a diverse range of local people attend. This could be on your website, on social media, on community notice boards, through a newsletter, a local ambassador, and/or via personal invitations. You can find tips on how you might promote your event [here](#).

We have found that the best way to manage registration for events is to use a free ticketing platform such as [Eventbrite](#) or [Humanitix](#).

As anyone living in a rural area knows, transport can be a challenge when it comes to getting to meetings and events. Previous Climathon organisers have made their events accessible by hiring a minibus to enable participants to get to and from the event, utilising platforms to organise car sharing, and offering a bursary for groups who may struggle to afford transport, such as young people and older adults.

Our ethos is that events should be free for participants and not for profit. However, we note that some similar events promote attendance by charging participants a small deposit, which is refunded after they attend. You may wish to offer a small monetary incentive to attend, which can enable those in financial hardship to engage with the event. These are approaches you could try if you have experience of them working well in your community previously.



“Good that people can use the expertise that they have – that has been really really useful.”

- Participant feedback

PHASE 2: IDEATHON

The “Ideathon” phase is the main event of a Rural Climathon, where people come together and develop solutions for their local community. It is fast-paced, busy, and fun! It includes four core components: streamlined structure, learning from specialists and local knowledge holders, coming up with ideas and team creation, and developing solutions in teams. This phase is immediately followed by Phase 3: Pitching Solutions.

STREAMLINED STRUCTURE

In urban settings, Climathons often take place over an intense, non-stop period of 24-48 hours, during which teams sometimes stay awake for long periods to develop their ideas! This obviously isn't very accessible for people with caring responsibilities and work commitments, so the structure of Rural Climathons has been adapted to be more inclusive.

There are different ways you can make this work for your community. You could run the Climathon over two sessions: an online webinar and a full-day in-person event. However, you could also consider organising two shorter in-person days, or several evening sessions over the course of a week. You can find details of a suggested approach at the end of this section for inspiration, but the structure of your event is best agreed with your consortium of local partners.

“A real crucible of ideas and expertise”

- Participant feedback



LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Climathons provide a space for people to share and develop their ideas. They are also about sharing different sets of knowledge, skills, and experience, so everyone can be well informed when they start working in teams. The early stages of the Ideathon often involve presentations from local people with expertise related to your Climathon challenge. Some useful background topics to include are:

- How climate change is affecting your local area.
- What the emissions profile of your local area looks like.
- Specific information relating to your Climathon challenge: for example, if you are focusing on transport, what kinds of vehicles and journeys generate the most emissions in your area.
- What solutions are already planned and being implemented locally.
- What is happening in other locations that could provide inspiration.

It is also useful to allow participants to ask questions at this stage. You could consider having local or specialist knowledge holders participate in the event, either as team members or as advisors who teams can consult if they have questions while developing their ideas.

PHASE 2: IDEATHON


IDEA CREATION AND FORMING TEAMS

Idea creation sessions use a method called “[Ideation](#)”, which is a structured way to come up with lots of ideas. Structure is important here - if you just give people a blank piece of paper and ask them to come up with something innovative, you are likely to get a lot of blank looks! There are a lot of free resources available online for planning structured ideas sessions, and we share our approach to idea creation in the following pages.

The trick with creating ideas is to go wide - no idea is too silly or fanciful at this stage. Next, you will start narrowing ideas down to what people want to work on for the day and start getting them into teams.

DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS IN TEAMS

A big chunk of the time available during your Climathon is for teams to work together to develop their solutions. Again, structure is very helpful here. On page 16 we share the tools we use to help people decide which solution to prioritise, and to define their solutions clearly (including how it might be funded). Having coffee and snacks available is also a good idea!



The rest of this section details our approach to running a Rural Climathon, which you are welcome to draw inspiration from.



We run our Climathon events over two sessions: an online webinar and an in-person workshop.

SESSION 1: WEBINAR

The webinar is a space for learning from local and specialist knowledge holders and an initial idea creation session. We recommend a 90-minute webinar, but you can change the timings to suit your event. Our webinars include the following:

- An introduction to the Climathon process
- An overview of background information and existing work relating to the Climathon challenge - this usually takes the form of 2-4 presentations
- An idea creation session in break-out rooms
- Feedback from the break-out rooms
- An introduction to the in-person workshop plus time for questions

We allow at least 20 minutes for people to discuss their ideas in break-out rooms. You can use a [Miro Board](#), [Teams](#), or [Zoom Whiteboard](#) to collect these ideas using the notes function.

PREPARING FOR THE WEBINAR

We suggest that the organising team creates a timed agenda, shares this with speakers in advance, and, if possible, arranges a brief pre-meet or ‘dress rehearsal’ to review the agenda and check screen-sharing. You may also wish to decide which team members will facilitate the break-out sessions and check that people enter break-out rooms as expected.

PHASE 2: IDEATHON

“The Climathon process is really good because it’s so interactive.”

- Participant feedback

TOP TIPS FOR HOSTING A WEBINAR

- Test the platform you choose to use
- Have two members of the team host the webinar to manage the risk of connection issues.
- Test screen sharing functionality
- Test breakout room functionality
- Check that you can record – and remember to tell people that you are recording – to make sure you have an accurate record of the discussion.
- Ensure you have enough facilitators for the number of break-out rooms you have planned. We recommend a maximum of 8 attendees per room.

You might like to ask the following questions in the break-out rooms:

- Have you seen any examples of solutions in other areas of the UK, or in other countries, which may work here?
- Are there existing solutions or tools which we could combine in a new way to address this challenge?



FOLLOWING THE WEBINAR

We recommend that the organising team meets to discuss the key themes arising from the session. These themes will be used again in the morning of the in-person workshop, to remind people of the webinar discussions and to inform the development of solutions.

SESSION 2: IN-PERSON WORKSHOP

We suggest allowing a full day for the in-person workshop and including the following activities:

- Outdoor activity / ice-breaker
- Solutions voting
- Reminder of local context
- Solution discussion
- Agreeing ground rules
- Team development
- Ideas session
- Solution development

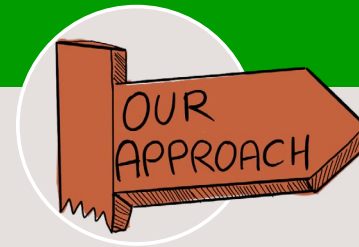
Our approach to the in-person workshop is very “offline”, given potential challenges with Wi-Fi, and to avoid excluding participants with fewer digital skills.

Example webinar and workshop facilitation plan here:



HERE

PHASE 2: IDEATHON



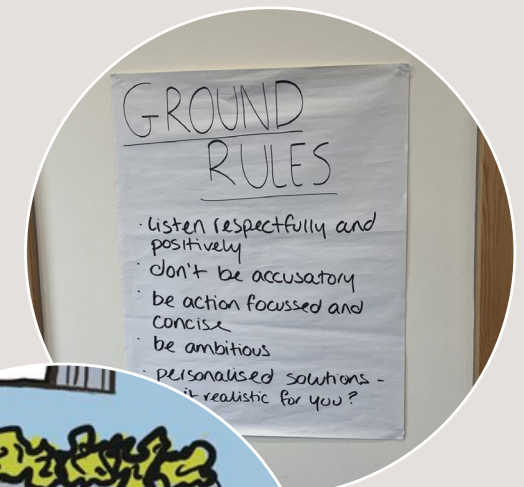
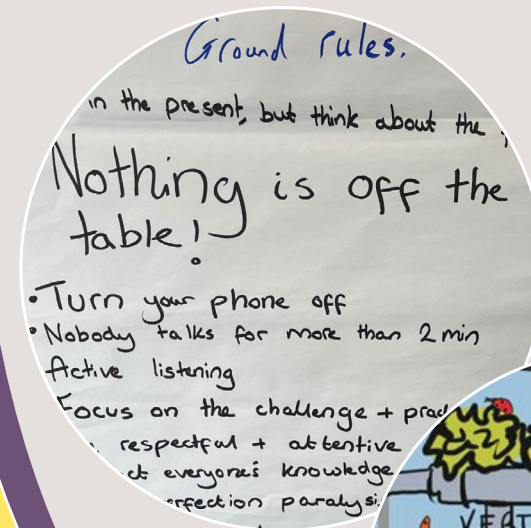
TOP TIPS FOR PLANNING A WORKSHOP

- Check participants' accessibility / dietary requirements
- Print all your materials - use this checklist to help you!
- CLIMATHON PREP LIST → **HERE**
- VOTING DOCUMENT → **HERE**
- SOLUTIONS TEMPLATE → **HERE**
- Know the space you will be using - does it have the tech you need and the number of tables/chairs you are expecting? Can you access the venue, or do you have the contact details of someone who can let you in?
- If you have a PowerPoint to share, ensure there is a projector and an HDMI cable.
- Check with the venue to see if there are areas in which you can pin/stick up flipchart paper/posters.
- Set up tables for groups of between 6 and 8 participants.
- If you are providing lunch, is there space to set this up, or will you require an additional room?
- Make sure participants know how to get to the venue, parking details, and accessibility arrangements.

MORNING SESSION

Some Climathon events may benefit from a morning activity outside - for example, a farm walk, or a visit to a solar array. These activities provide participants with an opportunity to start getting to know one another, ahead of working together on more focused tasks later in the day.

Once everyone has been reminded of the Climathon challenge and the local context, we suggest you include time to set some ground rules. These are key to ensuring constructive discussion throughout the day. Each table should be invited to share one rule which they'd like to guide the day.



PHASE 2: IDEATHON



MORNING SESSION CONTINUED

Once ground rules are agreed, we recommend revisiting the ideas suggested during the webinar, considering how these might contribute to addressing the challenge in more detail. Participants can then generate additional ideas and discuss them in groups. Next, we suggest asking participants to identify two ideas they would like to see developed into solutions, which they write on post-it notes to be shared with the room. Participants then vote for the proposed solutions to be developed in the afternoon session. We recommend agreeing on a maximum of six solutions. For voting, you can use sticky dots or an online tool such as [Slide](#). Participants receive two votes and can indicate which of the proposed solutions they would like to develop further. You might like to include some time for discussion, to ensure different views are shared on the solutions that are chosen.

Once you've agreed on several solutions to develop further, it's time to build some teams. Assign each solution to a table, and invite participants to join the table of the solution they most want to work on. Teams can have some time to discuss their interests and expertise to ensure that they have the capacity to build on the solution. Following this, teams can further develop the ideas related to their solution, and vote for their favourite, which they can develop further in the afternoon using the A3 solution voting template found on page 16.

“The table discussions were very useful as issues could be problem solved live rather than over days/weeks.” - Participant feedback



We've always found that now is a good opportunity to stop for some lunch! Encourage participants to chat with someone they haven't yet met - it's a great chance to develop new connections.



**TEAM BUILDING
INSPIRATION**



PHASE 2: IDEATHON



AFTERNOON SESSION

After lunch, participants return to the same teams to work through the [A3 solution development template](#), answering each of the six questions and developing their narrative.



The final 90-minutes
of the day should be
reserved for Phase 3



PITCHING
SOLUTIONS

Each table should also have some flipchart paper and coloured pens for creating their final presentation.

Inspiration for final presentations can be found in the NICRE event reports, which can be downloaded



HERE

PHASE 3: PITCHING SOLUTIONS

Phase 3 sees teams presenting their solutions and receiving constructive feedback. You might like to choose a set order for these presentations, or more simply, pick teams at random. We have used a few different formats for this phase, including having teams pitch their ideas to the other teams and receive peer-to-peer feedback, or having teams pitch to a “Dragon’s Den” panel of those with relevant knowledge who can offer informed feedback. Pitching can therefore be more or less formal, depending on what works best for your event.

Each team should have a set time (usually 5 or 10 minutes) to present their ideas before receiving feedback.

It is useful to record each of the teams’ presentations, as this content will be helpful in the follow-up phase.

Finally, it’s time to close the in-person event with a summary of the key messages, congratulate all the teams for their hard work on some excellent solutions, and thank everyone for contributing.

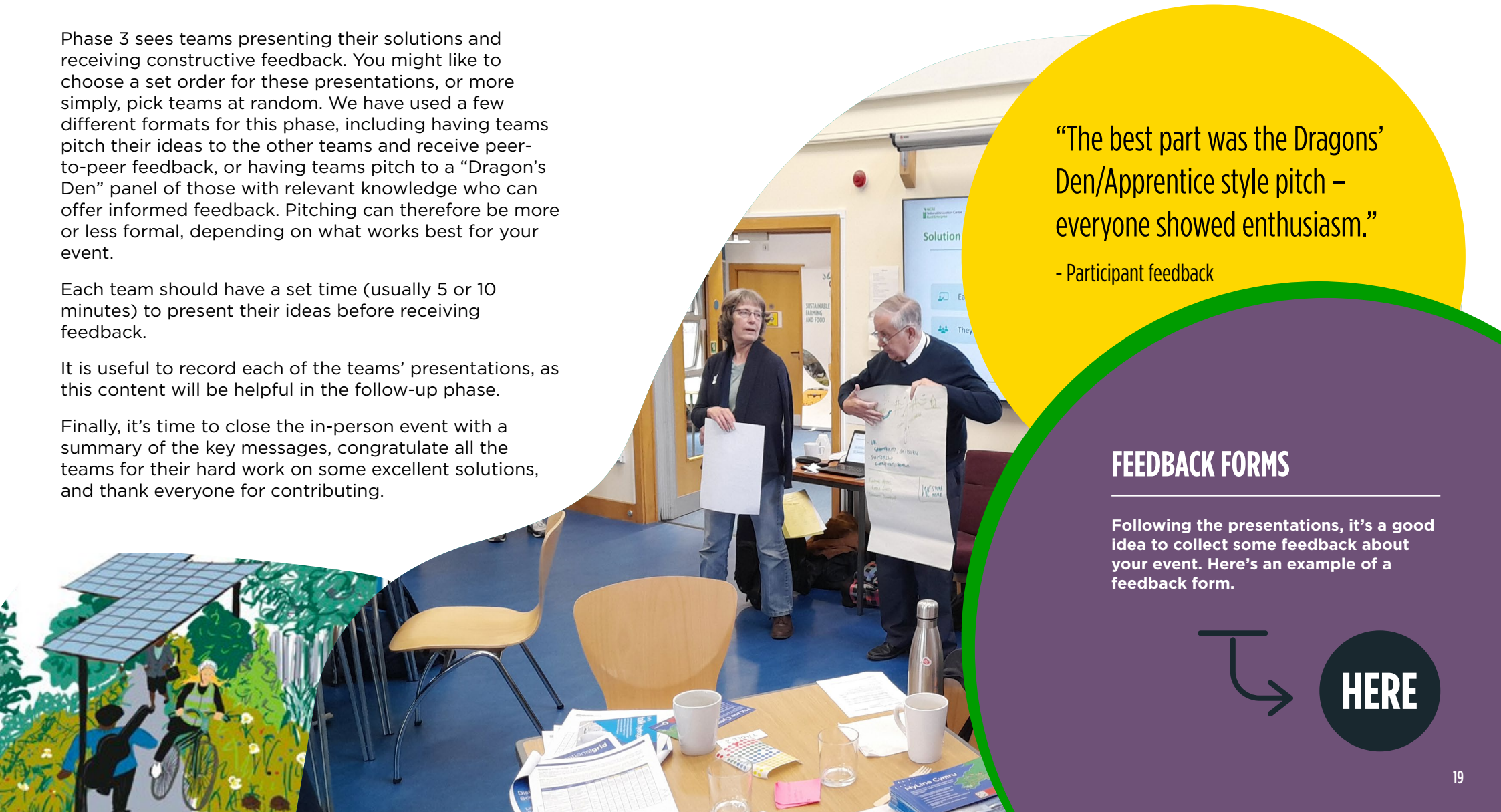
“The best part was the Dragons’ Den/Apprentice style pitch – everyone showed enthusiasm.”

- Participant feedback

FEEDBACK FORMS

Following the presentations, it’s a good idea to collect some feedback about your event. Here’s an example of a feedback form.

HERE



PHASE 4: FOLLOW-UP

This phase is where the solutions that you've developed are refined and implemented. Typically, a small group of stakeholders, including an anchor organisation that has been involved from Phase 1, carries forward solutions identified in Phase 3. We recommend establishing a relationship with an anchor organisation early on. If you are working, for example, with a company that is willing to fund prototyping one or more solutions, or with a local authority developing a new climate strategy, implementing solutions flows easily from Phase 3. The implementation timescale will vary depending on the type of solution; for example, the timing of local policy cycles will influence the adoption of solutions included in climate emergency strategies.

This phase also offers opportunities to continue to develop the network of engaged and committed citizens who attended the event and raise wider awareness to establish community support. You may wish to liaise with local news organisations to share stories of solutions as they are implemented. The key thing is to keep in touch with people and offer opportunities to stay connected.

A core component of the Follow-up is to prepare a short report for participants, summarising what happened during the Climathon and detailing the proposed solutions.

An approach we often use is to commission a local artist to capture the day's discussion in illustrated notes, such as in the illustration below:



EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP INCLUDE:

- Ongoing dialogue with national stakeholders - a team arranged meetings with National Grid to work on the accessibility of information on local grid connections.
- Locally relevant solutions included in climate emergency strategy and local plan updates by council officers.
- Funding applications developed to explore the feasibility of solutions - for example, in the Forest of Dean, local stakeholders applied to conduct a community heat network feasibility study.

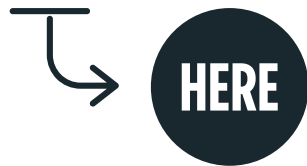
You can use this logbook to keep track of your solutions and any changes that have happened as a result of these



KEEP IN TOUCH

Every Rural Climathon event is an opportunity to try out new ways of doing things and share successes and learning. If you're holding an event in your area and would like support, or to share your ideas and experiences with others, please get in touch using the contact form on our [website](#).

We'll continue to update [the Rural Climathon website](#) and add new case studies and resources to the Rural Climathons Innovation Portal module following publication of this toolkit.



If you would like to access a Word version of this document, it is available [here](#).

This resource is a part of the public commons and can be freely used. Events held using this resource should be made freely available to all participants.



The CCRI would like to extend their gratitude to the following organisations for their valuable contributions towards the development of the Rural Climathon methodology.

The CCRI would also like to thank all those who gave their time to attend Climathon events and to those who have helped co-design this Rural Climathon Toolkit. Your contributions are greatly valued and appreciated.

