



Together, we can create vibrant, sustainable and joyfully enriched communities in our neighbourhoods.

# GREEN BLOC TOOLKIT

*Introduction – About This Guide*



Working together to achieve a one-planet ecological footprint

# Introduction – About this Guide

## GREEN BLOC NEIGHBOURHOODS: VANCOUVER

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**Cities are buzzing with ideas for change. There is a shift to building cities that are resilient to changing climates, growing populations, and ever-increasing infrastructure costs.**

Many governments are keen to embed change into planning and policy, but need the support of their residents to make real change a reality. At the same time, the pressure to change your lifestyle as an individual can be overwhelming. That's where Green Bloc Neighbourhoods: Vancouver comes in.



This project toolkit sits at the intersection of individual action and community policy, providing direction for community groups and neighbourhoods looking for inspiration and to support one another in creating safer, healthier, more sustainable neighbourhoods that account for diverse values and needs.

No matter your level of experience with organizing, or environmental action, the resources in this toolkit can help you and your neighbours plan and build community projects to lower your ecological footprints in a way that works for you. This toolkit contains advice, practical tips and case studies drawn from our experience working with various organizations and program partners to create tangible change in neighbourhoods. Please use what you like from it and leave what you don't! Add your own ideas, flair and style!

## ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

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**In 1992, the University of British Columbia's Bill Rees and Mathis Wackernagel published their first article on the ecological footprint — a groundbreaking new way to measure human impact on the planet.**

Almost 25 years later, the ecological footprint is widely used by municipal and national governments, community organizations, and academics to evaluate resource use and human impact in a consistent and effective way.

The ecological footprint is a measure of the productive area required to provide the renewable resources we use and absorb our waste. In other words, it's a measure of how fast we consume resources and generate waste, compared to how fast nature can absorb our waste and generate new resources.

It includes all the components of day-to-day life, including food, buildings, consumables, waste, transportation and water. Behaviour that produces no footprint is not counted (e.g., biking does not increase or decrease your footprint so it is not counted). Ecological footprint is measured in global hectares (gHa)—about the same size as a football field. If we divide the whole surface area of the Earth by the total population, we get the theoretical maximum ecological footprint that each individual should have—and that’s 2 gHa, or “one planet living”.

Currently, humans are using roughly 1.5 planets, or 3 gHa per person globally to provide the resources we consume, and to absorb our waste. According to the UN, with current population and consumption trends, by the 2030s, we will need two planets.

The Canadian footprint average is 7.1 gHa per person. The average ecological footprint for a Haligonian is 8.4 gHa. The average for a Calgarian is 9.4 gHa. The average for a Vancouverite is 6 gHa. That means that the average Vancouverite lives three times beyond their fair share. Or in other words, if everyone in the world lived like the average Vancouverite, we would need 3 Planet Earths.



### **What’s the alternative? Lighter footprint living!**

So, what can we do about this? How can we go about reducing our footprint? Strategies to reduce our footprint not only will benefit our planet, saving resources for future generations, they will also improve your quality of life in many ways. If you haven’t watched it yet, check out [The Story of Stuff](#). Small and simple changes in our day-to-day lives can help slow the effects of climate change and move us to have a smaller ecological footprint. These can include reducing our energy consumption, choosing to travel sustainably, and being conscious of what we purchase.

Let’s work together — imagine what our lives could look like if we transformed our thinking and behaviour on how we consume and produce things. Instead of thinking of doing more with less as a negative, let’s conceive of lower footprint living as making choices that could enrich all aspects of our lives — our ecologies, economies, and social life. What would it take to make this happen and what would that look like? Participating in a Green Bloc Neighbourhoods project is a chance to experience this in real time!

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT – CHAMPION ROLE**

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**There is an important truth to creating neighbourhood-level change: People are way more likely to take the time to listen to someone who is their neighbour as opposed to a complete stranger.**

Seems obvious, right? Champions actually live in the communities they are representing. Which is why the champion plays a more important and more central role in making a collaborative neighbourhood project happen than you might realize. Personal connection to residents is key.



### What is your role?

Put simply, the role of the champion is to motivate their neighbours and act like the glue to keep the whole thing together. No small feat! The champion acts as a steward for the project, and keeps it and its collaborators on course. This could include helping to educate your neighbours on all things to do with their ecological footprint in order to help them lower it; emailing and knocking on doors to find those neighbours that need a little more motivation to join in a project; hosting fun and inviting events to engage people; organizing small-scale projects; providing easy-to-implement action ideas; and answering questions that your neighbours are bound to have!

The idea is that by getting the community involved as a group, a sense of accountability is created. This leads us to another idea: When people around you are engaging in a certain behaviour, you're way more likely to do it yourself.

People can be incentivized to engage or not engage in behaviours in any number of ways, but ultimately it is seeing their peers, friends, or in this case neighbours, act in a certain way that will encourage them to do the same. All it takes is one champion to start the trend to organize inclusive events to simultaneously connect neighbours and lower a community's footprint.

### Over the course of a project, champions will:

- » Connect with neighbours and educate them about the Ecological Footprint
- » Organize a launch event
- » Encourage neighbours to measure their ecological footprint through surveys and provide them with the tools to do so. We are pleased to share our Microsoft Excel templates for a:
  - [One-week survey](#)
  - [Two-week survey](#)



- [One-month survey](#)

- » Organize workshops or other skill-building events with a sustainability focus
- » Organize a project or event to build a sense of community

## Burnout Happens

We're not going to lie to you, there are going to be times when a champion, and likely other participants, will ask themselves why they are doing this; why should they care so much when others around them don't seem to care at all. But, truly, and sincerely, we promise that engaging in a project that helps to reduce their ecological footprint is worth the time and energy.

And, if you're still feeling discouraged, here are a few more things to remember:

### ***We are all a part of something bigger***

There are people like you all over the place, and without people like you, the world will never change for the better.

### ***You started this for a reason***

Even if you can't put into words why you decided to do this, there was something inside of you that led you to this project.

### ***The end result is worth it***

There are few things better than knowing that your community is a leader in terms of only using its fair share of the Earth's resources, and your neighbours feel more connected to each other than they ever have before. They couldn't have done it without each other.

### **Words of encouragement**

You started this for a reason, and the end results are worth it. We promise!

Collaborating to realize the Greenest City Lighter Footprint goal:  
Centre for Sustainability Whistler, Evergreen, SFU Public Square with support from  
One Earth Initiative, and the City of Vancouver.



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