



SUMMARY

Energy Innovations & Cross-Sector Partnerships in Northern Wisconsin

*Wisconsin Climate Action Navigators (WI-CAN) Network
July 14 & 15, 2026 at Vaughn Public Library*



Overview

On July 14 & 15, 2026, over 55 attendees from more than 40 organizations gathered at the Vaughn Public Library in Ashland for a Northern Wisconsin regional gathering of WI-CAN (Wisconsin Climate Action Navigators). The event was jointly hosted by Cheq Bay Renewables, and OSCE (Wisconsin's Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy).

The event was designed to: (1) Generate shared understanding of the landscape and successful strategies for climate action in Northern Wisconsin, including opportunities, projects, barriers, cross-sector partnerships, and solutions; (2) strengthen connections among climate practitioners in Northern Wisconsin; (3) invite more northern/rural climate practitioners into WI-CAN; (4) strengthen regional event structure for WI-CAN.

Over the two days, attendees heard from a moderated panel of community leaders representing organizations in the not-for-profit, for-profit, and government (tribal, local and state) sectors. These leaders shared multiple success stories of partnering to build microgrids and EV charging stations in Northern Wisconsin. A microgrid is a small-scale power grid that operates with or without the main public electric grid, providing power from several types of sources, such as solar panels, battery energy storage systems, and backup generators. Attendees also toured microgrids and EV charging projects at the Bayfield County Highway Department, Bayfield County Forestry Department, and Red Cliff Transportation Building.

Themes

Key themes and takeaways emerging from the gathering included:

- **Spread hope: Share clear, relevant stories of success and opportunity.** Share information that is relevant and useful to your audience. Bust climate myths, offer energy tools to homeowners and renters, highlight green energy job opportunities, connect youth to climate action, and celebrate gains in local sovereignty and community resilience.
- **Build capacity: Strengthen relationships and civic engagement over time.** Build trust through building projects. Create a vision and communicate the specific, compelling benefits – including dollars saved. Connect with stakeholders – including utilities, technical experts, local residents, nonprofits, and funders. Serve on boards. Run for local office. Use community planning processes to create a vision and engage stakeholders.

Apply for grants; even the ones you don't get will give you stronger understanding, stronger partnerships, and shovel-ready plans.

- **Build projects: Invest in visible, practical, effective infrastructure.** Visible local projects like microgrids, EV charging, solar energy, building efficiency, electrification, and resilience hubs will reduce energy costs and emissions, increase community resilience, and serve as practical reminders of investment value. Nature-based solutions like restoring wetlands, preserving green space, and increasing the urban canopy will also mitigate the impacts of warmer, wetter weather.

Closing & Evaluation

Structured events, activities, breaks, and meals throughout the event were designed to connect and strengthen relationships among attendees. Underlining the importance of the Navigators' work, Ashland faced unusually high temperatures on Tuesday, as well as air thick with wildfire smoke on Wednesday. The event closed with gratitudes and lessons from participants – as well as an announcement from OSCE celebrating the June 2026 release of [Wisconsin's Emissions Reduction Roadmap](#).

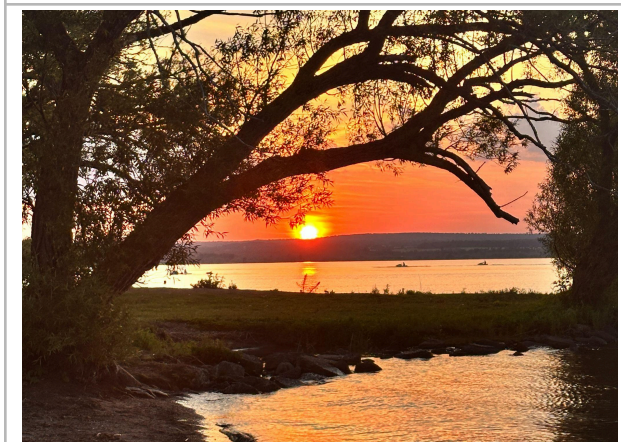
Evaluations of the event were overwhelmingly positive, with participants giving the event an average of 4.7 out of 5 stars. 95 percent said they would recommend the event to a colleague. Respondents appreciated the opportunity to connect with others, learn about local projects, and to collaborate on specific projects.

The gathering was designed, led and staffed by a team from OSCE and Cheq Bay Renewables. Please see Appendices below for attendees and materials.

Upcoming Events

Upcoming gatherings include the following. See WI-CAN's website for the most recent schedule.

- August 18, 2026 - Webinar for WI-CAN members on [Wisconsin's Emissions Reduction Roadmap, released in June 2026](#).
- October 2026 - Statewide WI-CAN gathering in Stevens Point
- Winter 2027 - Regional WI-CAN gathering in Western Wisconsin
- Spring 2027 - Regional WI-CAN gathering in Central Wisconsin



Appendices

- Small group topics & projects (below)
- [Participant Agenda](#)
- [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Tour Handout](#)
- [Attendee List](#)
- [Evaluation results](#)

Small group topics & projects

On Tuesday afternoon, participants identified topics related to the work they are currently doing. Topics selected and explored in small groups included:

- Clean Energy Transition, Infrastructure Development & Community Planning
- Energy Efficiency & Electrification
- Energy Sovereignty & Community Resilience
- Climate Adaptation, Nature-based Solutions & Habitat Conservation
- Community Engagement, Education & Workforce Development
- Climate Advocacy

On Wednesday afternoon, participants “pitched” over ten climate action projects. Everyone registering for the event had the opportunity to sign up to request and receive help on a specific project. Projects pitched and collaborated on in small groups included:

- Transformative climate action
- Energy Coach
- Understanding local needs (Nature Conservancy)
- Preparing for climate advocacy
- Municipal needs story mapping
- Climate investments map
- WEDC Office of Rural Development
- Save Energy Wisconsin
- February climate conference (Valley Climate Coalition)
- Trillion Trees Project
- Climate Table