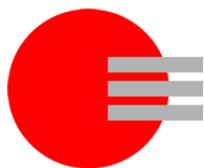
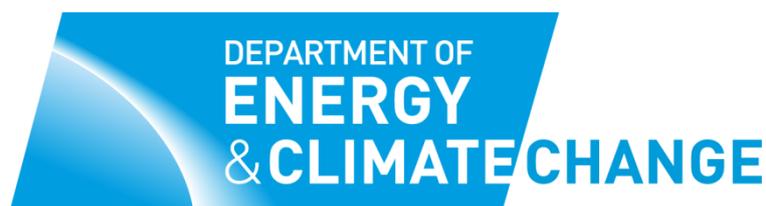


Oxfordshire Community Groups & Volunteers

Engaging the community



Working in partnership with
**THE NATIONAL
ENERGY FOUNDATION**



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NEF*



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INTRODUCTION

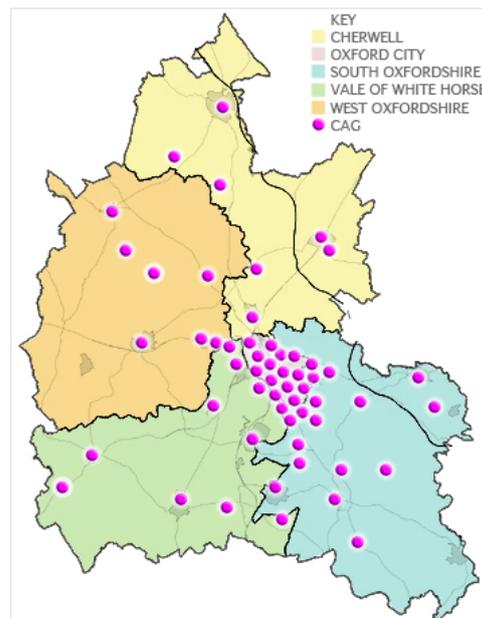
The following pages have been written by National Energy Foundation (NEF), with funding from the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC), aimed at giving you ideas and suggestions on how to develop your role as an Energy Champion in the community and on how to engage with local residents.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

So where to start? If you're currently not part of a Community Action Group, take a look through the CAG Oxfordshire website to see if there is a local group you could join (www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk). As can be seen on the map, there are lots of groups spread across Oxfordshire County! If there is a group local to you, make contact from the details on the website, and you'll be invited to their next meeting to find out about the group, current projects, future aspirations, etc. Please share your ideas at that meeting also!

If you find that there is no local group to you, then you could consider starting one up. You'll soon find that it's not too hard to get the ball rolling, but if this is the first time you have embarked on any such activity, we suggest that you start small, maybe talking with friends and family or like-minded colleagues. You could start by **bringing a few friends together** over a drink or some food to talk about your role and what activities you are thinking of undertaking.

Try out some of the activities included in this toolkit, or that we have gone through at the DECC-funded community energy saving training and see if you feel comfortable with them, or if they can be improved in any way so as to better suit your strengths. If you feel already confident you can maybe try organising a **coffee morning** or a talk at a **local event** or maybe even a film screening followed by a short discussion. In the pages that follow we have put together a few examples of the activities you can think of undertaking.



HOLDING EVENTS

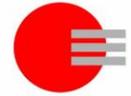
Events are crucial to gauge the interest in the community and to invite people who might not ordinarily consider getting involved. Before planning an event it's a good idea to ask friends and colleagues what would encourage them to come along, and then try to provide it. People will come for many different reasons – some to find out what they can do to do their part on acting on mitigating the effects of climate change, while others will be maybe interested in how to save money on their energy bills; some might participate just out of curiosity, and others because they want to meet new people; whatever the reason, getting people to participate is the first step!

Make it fun and interactive

Some people hear the words '**energy efficiency and climate change**' as 'doom-mongering guilt trippers wanting to stop me from having fun' – so it's up to you to prove otherwise and use your imagination to attract people along. Our best thinking and creative solutions happen when we're stimulated and enjoying ourselves, so think 'social event' instead of 'meeting' and you're on the right track.

Ensure you have a good balance of information and interactions: get people talking to each other as much as you can, and have a variety of activities. How about serving popcorn when viewing films? Or tea and cake at meetings? You could even ask your local shop, bakery to sponsor the event by providing refreshments.

Is there anyone local who could give an overview on energy efficiency, climate change or sustainable transport? Perhaps a member of another local Community Action Group, a representative from the Oxfordshire Affordable Warmth Network, or local council?



Example: Film screenings with a difference

Film screenings are a great way to introduce the topic of climate change and on the ways that people are responding to the issue. Some films are more upbeat than others, so take a look at the ones available.

There are many activities you can develop using a film as a resource. For example you can screen short snippets of the film, and intersperse the snippets with small group discussions, this is a way to get the main messages, and encourage a lot of group interaction. After that, you can maybe give some tips and make people sign the pledge.

For a range of opinions, why not invite a range of local people who will have different experiences and expertise. This can be a great way to get a range of experiences and opinions about the impacts and actions needed, help people see the problem from a variety of angles, and counteract the idea that only certain people care about, are impacted by, or can take action.

Examples of activities

People Make Transition Happen:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw_MlXmE1cw

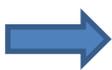
Tip
If you're doing an info based event, such as a film screening or talk, make sure to leave time and space for people to talk and share their responses afterwards.

INTERACTIVE IDEAS



Talking in pairs

Ask people to turn to the person next to them or someone they don't know and briefly discuss how they felt about the film/talk, what they were struck by, and what questions they have. This gives people a chance to think through and process thoughts and ideas before open questions, and can help speed up the discussion time.



Small group discussions

You could have short snippets of talks about some key areas of the toolkit as home energy, and transport. Then have the group separate according to which area they'd like to find out more about, and have clusters of chairs in different parts of the room.



Get out the post-it notes (we love them at NEF – other brands are available too!)

Ask people to write what areas they'd like to focus on or what questions they have on post it notes. Cluster them on large sheets of paper to capture ideas and identify where the energy lies.



Try 'Open Space'

Try using a form of meeting technique called 'Open Space', whereby the agenda is set by participants suggesting topics to talk about, and many discussions are held simultaneously. In theory it ought not to work(!) A large group of people comes together to explore a particular topic or issue, with no agenda, no timetable, no obvious coordinator and no designated minute takers. However, by the end of each meeting, everyone has said what they needed to, extensive notes have been taken and typed up, lots of networking has had taken place, and a huge number of ideas had been identified and visions set out.

The essential reading on Open Space is Harrison Owen's Open Space Technology: A User's Guide: http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm





OPEN ENDED SENTENCES

This is a great exercise to do as part of a meeting. You'll need to have a bell (or 'ting' on a glass), and explain clearly. Here's some text you could use:

1. I'd like you to get into pairs, and number yourselves 1 or 2.
2. I'm going to read out the beginning of a sentence, and I would like the number 1s to repeat what I've said, then complete the sentence with whatever comes into their head.
3. This is about exploring your initial thoughts and feelings about climate change, so there are no right and wrong answers.
4. Number 2s just listen attentively, but don't engage in conversation. You might want to remind your partner of the beginning of the sentence if they dry up.
5. After about a minute, I'll ring a bell, and read out the beginning of another sentence.
6. Number 1s will then start that sentence and complete it in the same way, then I'll start the third sentence after another minute.
7. After three sentences, I'll ring a bell and encourage you to swop roles, so the number 2s speak, and the number 1s listen.
8. The first sentence is: When I think about climate change, the feelings that I have are....
9. At the end, encourage people to reflect on and share their own (not their partners) experience.

Hints:

Try this out on a small group before you do a larger group, and choose some sentences that are appropriate for your meeting. For example: "Something positive I've heard about energy efficiency is...", "Things that I could do to take action include...", "The support I would need to take action is..."

Not everyone will be happy to engage with their emotions in such a formal way, so it is important to ensure that everyone in the room is comfortable when the exercise happens. Some icebreakers or general discussion beforehand can help create a relaxed atmosphere.



OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

'Involving and engaging a local community in discussion, debate and actions to mitigate the effects of climate change is challenging, rewarding and frustrating!... it's about changing hearts and minds and promoting a positive 'can do' approach which will lead to permanent and lasting changes in behaviour, habits and attitudes'

Candy Kerpache, Challenge North Leigh.

People will be motivated to take action on energy efficiency and climate change for many different reasons, environmental, social, or even just economical. Whatever "spin" you give the event here are some useful suggestions to keep in mind.

Relevant

Make it relevant for the audience that you're trying to attract. If there's a strong local group, have a think about what's relevant for these groups, how they might be impacted, and what their involvement could look like.

Balanced

If you want people to take action, try to consider how this could be tied into their existing actions, and try to balance the urgency of the situation, with a chance for their agency.

Understandable

Go for maximum inclusivity by ensuring that any jargon is explained in any communication that you do.

Visual

Try to use pictures over words. Evoke pictures in people's minds.

Local

What's precious and resonant locally?
How could climate change impact different aspects of your community?
What links are there between your community and other parts of the world?

SKILLS WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING:

If getting people to take action to "save the planet" seems too large a task, then you can start with getting them to take action to improve their own lives and, by proxy, their community.

Using your skills or skills of fellow champions, you could organise some training sessions or even consider replicating on a smaller scale the workshop you attended during your training as a Champion (could be a way of passing on information that you learnt during the session).

Example: Workshops using the toolkit activities

Topics you can include

Undertaking Home Energy Assessments

You could use the assessment form to do a 'remote walkthrough' of attendees homes, just from what they remember about their house, or perhaps take a group around the building you're currently in (community centre / village hall / your house!)

Calculate your Carbon Footprint

Explain what the Carbon Footprint is and help them to calculate it. What do they think they can do to reduce their Footprint?

How to cut your fuel bill

A lot of people are interested in reducing their fuel bill cost. You can use Activity 5 from the Toolkit to explain the information provided in a fuel bill. Having understood what information you are provided in your fuel bill you can then give out some tips and advice on how to save energy and money!



STALLS AT FETES

Instead of organising your own event, hosting a stall and table at existing events, can be a great way of engaging people, and spreading the word about your group.

Things that work well on stalls are:

- ➡ Information about energy and energy efficiency, such as case studies of Eco-renovated homes.
- ➡ Hands-on things to look at and touch, such as low energy light bulb libraries, or samples of insulation materials.
- ➡ Posters and displays that people can interact with, perhaps with sticky notes so that people can write what they would like to see happening locally.

Make stalls interactive

Previous groups have found that having demo mini solar panels and insulation made out of plastic bottles were good talking points, alongside a game: people had to pay money – they hid £5 in the occasional low energy light bulb box, got people to pay £1 and pick a box. This worked really well; it got people to the stall and they then were more likely to engage and look at other materials.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

What have feelings got to do with fuel poverty, energy efficiency and climate change? Are they relevant?

"If you're really paying attention, it's hard to escape a sense of outrage, fear, despair. Don't even try."

Author, deep ecologist and Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy

*"My candle burns at both ends; It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—it gives a lovely light!"*

Edna St Vincent Millay
(1892-1950)

Many studies (see Randall's 'A new Climate for Psychotherapy', and the report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the 'Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change') suggest that how we feel about an issue will influence how we act, or whether we even bother to get involved in an issue. Different feelings can arise from being confronted with information about the causes, impacts and politics of climate change.

Unfortunately, the increase in reportage over the past few years has not resulted in the necessary action, the tone of the reports is usually anything but empowering, and there are not enough examples of what people are doing to reduce CO₂ emissions.



Why engaging with feelings is important

Whatever we may feel about energy efficiency and climate change, it's good to make space for an emotional dimension, as sometimes people feel drained, overwhelmed, or sense an impending doom that they are powerless to avert. Sometimes people can assume that they are the only ones to feel this way, which can lead to feeling isolated and powerless, or lead into a burnout cycle of overwork.

How feelings can be used

Some of the projections about climate change are painful and overwhelming, and it's sometimes hard to talk about painful things. In the UK we tend to avoid sharing painful or overwhelming issues in public, but in doing so it makes it harder to come up with positive and engaging solutions.

How to start the process of reclaiming responsibility

Simply by sharing how we feel, and allowing others to share how they feel, we can open up a valuable space from which sustained engagement and action can grow – and enabling people to respond to the information. In this way we're using our feelings as a way of bringing people together, instead of remaining isolated and scared. By mentioning how you, and others, feel about energy efficiency and fuel poverty in your talk, you give people permission for themselves to engage with how they feel about the issue.

"Our individual difference may be small and appear insignificant in the big scheme of things. But, just imagine the catastrophes that would occur if everyone else did nothing! Together, the difference is significant, but this must start with the individual. Those generations who came before us didn't know and weren't empowered to tackle global climate change, those who come after us will not be able to make the difference needed if all of us, today, don't do what we can to protect our Earth for future generations to come."

Dale Hoyland, National Energy Foundation

YOU AND YOUR GROUP

Training and facilitation

Emotional wellbeing is crucial if your group is to maintain enthusiasm for sustainability and helping your community. External input can be extremely useful to offer perspective and expertise.

➔ The Change Agency also offer workshops and resources aimed at sustaining activism:
http://www.thechangeagency.org/01_cms/details.asp?ID=100

➔ N.B. Activism doesn't have to mean chaining yourself to something, anyone who is active is an activist! If you are reading this, chances are you are an activist and therefore welcome to the hundreds and thousands of support networks nationally and worldwide.

➔ Other webs offer useful workshops and information
<http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/free/shortconsensus.pdf>



Inner Transition

The Transition Towns movement is bringing an awareness of the emotional dimension of this work through their Inner Transition movement, formerly 'Heart and Soul' groups, which allows a space and structure to acknowledge and process the emotions that arise, including everything from dealing with the information to the frustrations experienced at the pace of change. In Totnes, the Inner Transition group is exploring ways to support and inspire us through these challenging and exciting times'.

➡ See full information and examples of meetings here:
<http://www.transitiontowntotnes.org/groups/inner-transition>

OTHERS

One word feelings

When people are introducing themselves ask them to say one word which best describes how they feel about climate change and one thing that makes their heart sing. This gives an indication of their feelings and something you can also reflect on later, either with the one word feelings slide /poster (see above) or by reflecting that people have different feelings about climate change. If you've had a talk or shown a film, it's a good idea to invite people to talk to the person next to them about how they feel about the issue. This not only gives them a chance to engage with their feelings, but also breaks down isolation, which can creep in if people are feeling overwhelmed by the impacts and realities of climate change.

Poetry and Pictures

➡ Try including some climate change related poetry at events. It can change the atmosphere and give people a chance to engage with how they feel.
<http://climatex.org/articles/creative-climates/>

➡ The British Council have produced a great anthology called 'Feeling the Pressure: Poetry and Science of Climate Change' which you can access here:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/anthology.pdf>

➡ Developing relationships with local artists is also a good way of engaging with the community through shared thoughts and feelings which link to climate change but might not be explicitly connected. Look in local newsletters or message boards for artists in your community.

Further resources and information

Website:

- Community Action Groups Oxfordshire: <http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/>
- National Energy Foundation: <http://www.nef.org.uk/>
- Low Carbon Hub: <http://www.lowcarbonhub.org/>

