

Top tips for community groups tackling climate change, to get the best from their local authority

These top tips are based on research which involved talking to community groups across Scotland who had forged successful relationships with their local authority to tackle climate change...

1. Use your contacts. Find a 'guide' within the local authority who supports what you do and can point the way. Remember your allies might not be the usual suspects.
2. Get to know your local authority and how it works. Research the council policy or strategy that is most closely related to your project. Find out how and when decisions are made, and which council employees are key to your success.
3. Be clear about what your group aims to achieve. Use the Single Outcome Agreement and relevant strategies to identify your shared objectives.
4. The first approach matters –be the solution and show how you can be useful. Approach early in the project planning stages and go right to the top. At the same time make contact with the appropriate officer – housing, fuel poverty, allotments and use third party networks such as the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre.
5. Inform and involve your elected members. Work across all political parties and independents.
6. Relationships need continuous support. Be patient, engage over a decent timescale, and think how you can help each other.
7. Set realistic expectations. Understand and respect local authority timescales and budget constraints.
8. Have, or always be prepared to develop, a Plan B. If your first approach is not successful, try another route - there are lots of people in the council to work with. Sometimes the council might not be your best partner for this project so have another option ready to go.
9. See change as positive and adapt. Look for new opportunities and adjust your plans if there is a change of administration or restructure.
10. Prioritise and build in capacity for engagement. Engagement is not an optional extra. Seek funding so you have officer time for relationship building and to be involved in strategic levels of community planning.

This is a summary of the report *Local Authorities and Community Groups: Getting the best for your project through supportive partnership* which is available on the Scottish Community Climate Action Network website www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk and based on research carried out in early 2013.

The research also revealed some of the benefits community groups enjoyed, such as...

Equipment and labour: second hand office furniture, bicycles recovered from the waste stream, gardening tools, digger for a day, council staff and community service workers for allotments.

Funding and jobs: grants, bridging loan, advice, letters of support for funding applications, funding jobs through graduate employment schemes.

Assets: Leases for allotments, peppercorn rent or gift of community buildings, office or shop space at a reduced rent, space for a Christmas 'pop up' shop, car club parking spaces and key holders, technical support for wind turbine developments.

Technical expertise, data and staff resource: Procurement expertise (eg for bulk buying solar thermal scheme), marketing and communications, advice on health and safety requirements, architectural advice, local knowledge about sites, surveyors, housing data, fuel poverty mapping, open space audit.

Partnership working: Joint promotion of "zero-waste fortnight," Service Level Agreement for provision of fuel poverty advice, pilot 20 mph zone, bulk-buy promotion for renewables, long-term contract for Reuse and Repair shop, contracts for work with schools.

Networking: Facilitate peer-to-peer support and networking, Perth and Kinross community fundraising hosts an annual gathering of community groups, the Borders Energy Agency was created to encourage information sharing and joint initiatives.

For further information

The report recognises that local authorities need to build their capacity for working with community led groups. The report signposts community groups to the policies they might want to familiarise themselves with so they can better understand how local authorities approach climate change issues. Visit the Scottish Community Climate Action Network website www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk to read the full report with case studies including Greener Kirkcaldy, Sustaining Dunbar, Love Milton and The Local Energy Action Plan.

The Climate Action and Support Programme (CASP) is run by the Climate Challenge Fund and can offer community groups working on carbon related projects help and support. Visit <http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/sustainability-climate-change/climate-challenge-fund> for more information.

The Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN) is a membership organisation. Our aim is to empower and enable communities to create a low carbon future and promote local resilience and wellbeing. If you would like to find out more about membership visit www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk/join-us