

# Community Energy Efficiency Toolkit

## Energy action or 'peer support' groups

This approach uses social interaction, gentle competition and support to take small groups of people on a journey of education and behaviour change, either be through a self- or externally-facilitated process. This approach is sometimes called 'peer group support' as it uses the psychology of peer group ('or pack') behaviour to encourage behaviour change.

### Useful for

Groups of people that are already established and know each other (but are not necessarily already engaged with energy and the environment)

### Why does it work well for these audiences?

- Sharing ideas and experiences and supporting action are key to the success of this approach; the group dynamic is important and it can take people a long time to establish.
- Wanting to be an accepted member of a group can influence behaviour.
- People are more receptive to challenge or new messages from friends than from strangers.
- Members of the group support each other in taking action- no one is doing it alone.

### Benefits of this approach

- This is a 'one-to-several', person-centred approach, providing an opportunity for more in-depth interactions with a group of people that are receptive to messages.
- The relationship with the group can be ongoing, leading to further interactions and deeper changes.
- Groups have found that this approach is effective in engaging people who are new to environmental messages.

### Success factors

- Targeting existing groups was more successful than trying to start new groups. A strong group dynamic is central to supporting lasting change
- Geographically close communities are easier to coordinate
- Facilitated groups progress further than unfacilitated groups.

### Things to consider

- Facilitating groups through a long engagement (5 or more meetings) may be necessary as groups can be reluctant to manage themselves.
- How to help groups measure change and impact (if you are not directly facilitating a group).

### Examples from Big Lottery's Communities Living Sustainably programme

People who are motivated by wanting to be active in their community can be 'converted' to working together on energy and sustainability. Existing, active community groups are being engaged through Manorhouse PACT's Closer Neighbours and Dorset CLS' Transition Together projects. Manorhouse PACT session workers have noticed that this approach seems to be successful at engaging people for whom the environment is not 'high on their agenda [or part of] their perceptions of themselves'. The peer support approach seems to help take people on a journey of discovery about sustainability:

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*'We are moving people along that journey in a non-threatening way. Reaching people who wouldn't normally discuss these issues, finding the right language to enable them to relate to the topic'. (Marc McKenna, Manorhouse PACT)*

The social side of peer support groups is as important, if not more so, than the environmental side, in motivating participants towards behaviour change. New groups can take a long time to establish before they become effective at taking action. Working with a group that is already established means progress towards action should be quicker. Dorset Communities Living Sustainably's experience has been that a group already working together to hold street parties each year became a very proactive sustainability peer support group.

Manorhouse PACT discovered that: *'Participants' motivations to adopt energy saving behaviours extended beyond saving money, to include combating climate change, and a desire to become active as a member of a local community. Seeking and then maintaining a 'sense of community' was revealed as a key driver of participation in activities, and of adopting green behaviours'* (Marc McKenna).

## Useful partners

- Training and education organisations/facilitators
- [Transition Network](#)
- [Carbon Co-op](#)
- [Eco-Active](#)