

Community Energy Efficiency Toolkit

Getting started with community home energy efficiency

1 What is energy efficiency?

The way we use energy has a significant impact on our home bill costs and on carbon dioxide emissions. Using energy efficiently means not wasting energy, or only using as much as you need.

This is not the same as ‘demand management’, a term used to describe behaviour or technology designed to balance out times of peak and low demand for energy at a grid level. The two can work together well but have different aims. Energy efficiency is key to reducing total energy demand but may not affect fluctuations in demand.

Addressing energy efficiency requires a combination of implementing energy saving measures, such as loft insulation, and changing behaviour around how we use energy.

2 What can communities do about energy efficiency?

Communities are well-placed to address some aspects of home energy efficiency that commercial and government agencies find very difficult:

- Identifying people in greatest need of help
- Gaining access to people’s homes to provide advice
- Building trusted relationships to support an understanding of personal and household energy use and behaviour change.

Communities can have strong local connections, which puts them in a good position to influence uptake of energy efficiency measures and behaviour change. They can also add value to large-scale schemes seeking to install energy saving measures such as insulation.

The role your community organisation plays will depend on the needs of your community, what you aim to achieve, what skills and resources you have at your disposal and whether any related activity is happening in your area.

3 What do you want to achieve?

Consider your short, medium and long-term goals.

Main reasons to take action on energy efficiency:

- Reduce energy bills
- Tackle/relieve fuel poverty
- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions from home energy use
- Improve people’s living conditions and health

Saving money on bills is a key motivator encouraging people to take action on energy efficiency. ‘In 2013, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at 2.35 million, representing approximately 10.4 per cent of all English households’ spending more than they could afford on energy bills ([DECC, 2015, Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2015](#)). As well as financial pressure, this can lead to people not heating their homes, which can cause damp and health

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problems. Vulnerable people (e.g. the elderly, those on low incomes, those with long term health problems, socially isolated or people new to the UK) are more likely to suffer from fuel poverty and poor housing conditions and/or debt problems. Helping them save money and improve their homes can make a huge difference to their quality of life.

Cost may not be a strong motivator for more affluent householders, who often use more energy and so create more carbon dioxide emissions. However they may be open to the idea of making significant improvements to their homes or be environmentally aware or socially active.

To make a lasting impact on the serious challenges of reducing carbon dioxide emissions and fuel poverty a long term, sustainable delivery model is needed. Communities could have a key role to play in that model.

Use our 'choose your activities' page to help you think about what you want to achieve and with whom.

4 Who is your target audience?

Understanding who you want to help or influence is key to choosing what you do in your project. Ask yourself these questions to help you get started:

- What do you know about the people and houses in your area?
- What baseline information do you have about your area?
- Where is the need in your community?
- What would you like to achieve and with whom?
- What factors might motivate those people?

Use our 'choose your activities' page to help you think more about what you want to achieve and with whom.

5 Could you achieve more by working in partnership?

As you consider what you want to achieve and with whom, you also need to consider what resources you have at your disposal.

- Are you a funded organisation or will you need to draw in funding from elsewhere for your activities?
- Do you have paid staff or do you rely on volunteers?
- What are your strengths?

Particularly if you rely heavily on volunteers to deliver activities, consider how best to use your resources. Many communities partner with other organisations to deliver projects and it can be the key to success, especially when working with vulnerable people. People can be suspicious or may be isolated. Partnering with a known organisation can be effective in addressing this, especially organisations already supporting vulnerable people or working with your target audience, providing a 'trusted route' through which to reach people.

Consider where you can have greatest impact – which organisations already have a relationship with your target audience? Could you work with them to achieve your goals?

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Working with commercial partners can be challenging for communities as it could be seen as compromising independence, however commercial companies such as insulation installers play a vital role in the process of addressing energy efficiency. They also have technical expertise that can support your project. They are likely to need a commercial reason to work with your organisation so consider what's in it for them before approaching potential partners. Clearly define your relationship through a partnership agreement or contract.

Key partners

- Support organisations active within your community (e.g. Age UK, Care & Repair, organisations supporting ethnic minority and non-English-speaking people)
- Local authorities or Registered Social Landlords
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Citizens Advice Bureaux and debt advice agencies

Practical examples of partnerships:

Sustainable Sheppey targeted their home energy advice visit leaflets to people receiving state benefits by arranging for them to be inserted into Department of Work and Pensions correspondence.

The Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities Project uses Binoh, a support organisation active in the Orthodox Jewish community, to get their energy messages out to that audience. The rabbi is involved in promoting their services.

Sustain Eden provided training to Eden Housing Association staff to help them to spot tenants in fuel poverty and take appropriate action. Sustain Eden also contracted Eden Housing Association to provide a draught proofing service to vulnerable households. See examples of their tender and contract documents under 'Home Advice Visits'.

Access the full Community Energy Efficiency Toolkit under the 'Home Energy Efficiency' area of 'Choosing and Developing Projects'.

Further information

The Centre for Sustainable Energy's [Plan LoCal project](#) provides a wide range of resources for communities looking to engage with energy efficiency. The downloads section provides detailed guidance on project planning, finance and case studies.