



The Climate Action Fund Learning Signposts #5

Engaging diverse communities in climate action

Produced by Emily Wilson, MB Associates, on behalf of The National Lottery Community Fund



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Who is this for?

This learning signpost is intended primarily for people involved in Climate Action Fund projects that are aiming to engage with diverse communities as well as other climate action projects working in this area. It shares some of the early learning from Climate Action Fund projects that are working successfully in this area.

Introduction

The UK has a rich and diverse population, meaning our communities differ by race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, language, geographical origin, gender and/or sexual orientation, physical and learning ability. Being successfully diverse means bringing together their different knowledge, background, experiences and interests.

When it comes to climate action, we want to work with, influence and support everyone positively. However, to bring new voices into a conversation about climate action, there is a balancing act of making the topic feel important and urgent enough for people to give it their attention, while not making it seem so big and complex that people feel it isn't even worth trying. It's also important to acknowledge that historically a lot of



Figure 1 - Credit: Ambition Lawrence

climate action work has happened with affluent, middle-class communities who have a lot of social capital. This needs rebalancing sensitively and without transferring responsibility to communities who already have multiple and complex challenges.

Some lessons emerging from the projects we highlight in this resource are:



Do:

- Consider **WHY** you are doing this engagement, then embed practice across the organisation. This isn't the responsibility of one role, it needs to be at organisational level.
- **Do your research!** What support, organisations and networks already exists, then...
- **Work with local and community organisations** and recognise they are the experts, along with the community themselves. They are the true conduits to the people and you can learn from each other.
- Work with/recruit people with **community engagement skills** – recognise that this might not be climate experts.
- **Consider location** – go to where people are, don't expect them to come to you.
- **Start with their issues** – ask questions (i.e. What is important to you? What are the challenges in this area?) – then listen and respond to the answers.
- Consider **language, tone and context** in all communications.
- Invest the time to **build relationships and trust** – this is not a quick process.
- Appreciate that people are **giving their time** and recompense them. Consider covering additional costs (travel, childcare etc.) and offering a payment (cash or vouchers).



Don't:

- Underestimate the budget implications – staff time to build relationships, accessibility, language translation, additional support, recompensing people for their time. This all adds up to a significant amount.
- Start a conversation with 'climate change' – start with what is important and relevant to that community and work together to build on a climate change message.
- Over burden disadvantaged communities – remember that often these communities already have a relatively low carbon footprint so what can others learn from them?
- Use jargon – even the words 'climate', 'green', 'campaigning' or 'activism' can present barriers.

Project 1: Bristol Community Climate Action



Founded in 2007, **Bristol Green Capital Partnership CIC** is a unique partnership of over a thousand member organisations who have committed to working towards Bristol becoming a sustainable city with a high quality of life for all.

Bristol Green Capital's 2019-22 priorities included working towards being a carbon-neutral and nature rich city, increasing the understanding of environmental inequality, becoming a Gold Sustainable Food City and working towards becoming a 'circular city'. To achieve these priorities, engaging with diverse communities is fundamental to the partnership to ensure it is fully inclusive and representative of the city of Bristol.

Phase 1 includes co-producing community action plans with six communities. Four of these are communities defined by geographic location (all communities experiencing multiple and complex deprivation) and two are demographic communities (Bristol's community of disabled people and refugees and asylum seekers).

Activities to engage diverse communities have included:

- Finding the right community partners to work with. Each community has a designated community partner, for example [Bristol Disability Equality Forum](#) and [ACH](#)
- Meeting people in their spaces to have a conversation about their issues (e.g., fuel poverty, food poverty, social isolation) which

leads to conversations about climate change.

- Bringing people together for free community feasts, as food is a great leveller.
- Working with artists to bring creativity to the conversation. See [here](#) for example and this [blog post](#) on why it's important.
- A series of climate themed podcasts produced by children from an inner-city adventure playground.
- Taking a sofa, a table and cake and toured it around community centres and shopping centres, to start informal climate themed conversations with members of the disabled community.
- Creating children's art kits (climate themed) during the pandemic – they included notes about the partnership to start raising awareness.

Hosting 'sewing social' and school uniform exchange events in community centres to encourage repair and reuse of clothing which saves people money. Hosting regular climate-themed shows on local community radio stations.

"Climate action has a history of creating new barriers for disabled people and of leaving us out of the conversation. Our plan shows that by including disabled people there are simple, actionable ways that we can make our cities fairer and better for both the planet and everyone who lives in them."

Emma Green, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum.

Learning so far

Relationship building

- This can take a long time and the pandemic has made it more challenging. You can adapt to digital formats and have specialist training to make those sessions fun and engaging but it still restricts reach because of digital poverty.
- **Work with people who really care and won't let communities down**, organisations that have built up trust with the community over many years. For example - During the pandemic when face-to-face engagement was impossible, the team would do anything to help, which is where the idea for adding into survival kits and art kits for children came from.
- **Recognise the inequality of climate action** – a lot of climate action is seen as expensive and elitist, there cannot be a situation where climate action is making people's lives worse.
- **Accept that you can never include everyone.** Do the best you can to remove as many barriers as possible but remember there is only so much time and so much money, don't be hard on yourself!

Accessibility

- Translate plans and communications into all languages spoken in the community (see examples here of plans in [Pashto](#) and [Somali](#)).
- Create British Sign Language (BSL) [films](#) of communications.
- Create '[easy read](#)' versions of plans. Easy-read document translation enables information to be more accessible to the disabled community. It is normally undertaken by specialist firms and it is important to include budget for accessible translations within funding applications.

Shared learning

- Audit and acknowledge the skills, experience and networks you do and do not have. Identify gaps and invest time to fill them (training, mentoring, capacity building).
- Find out what you don't know and build this into your budget – you may not be experts at working with a certain community but, with the right training and support, you can be.
- Existing community partners know so much, and this should be acknowledged and shared. Consider giving some structured support to skill sharing or mentoring (and budgeting for this).



Believe in yourselves and your partners

- Recognise that you and the community partners are experts (in their community and/or lived experience) and deserve a seat at the table.
- Be bold and confident that what you have to say is worth hearing.
- Develop a strong narrative – know that communities are a key partner in action against climate change – we cannot get to net zero without them.
- Regularly update key strategic partners/ decision-makers who can help champion and amplify your work e.g. local councillors, local MPs, town/city Mayors or cabinet members and funders.



bristolgreencapital.org/work-with-us

Links

- More info on the project and all the community climate action plans: bristolgreencapital.org/community-climate-action-plans/
- BDEF blog post: bristolgreencapital.org/the-future-must-be-green-and-accessible/
- BDEF engagement film: youtube.com/watch?v=wV45MG0Xu4U
- Muslim's guide to climate change info: eastsidecommunitytrust.org.uk/news/muslims-guide-to-climate-change
- Blog post on using carbon footprint reports: bristolgreencapital.org/community-carbon-footprints/
- Heart of BS13 film of Community version of climate action plan (engaging with young people: youtube.com/watch?v=fRzF9vukbCI)
- Bristol Cable Article on project: thebristolcable.org/2021/08/bristol-communities-building-grassroots-action-to-tackle-climate-change-hartcliffe-easton-lawrence-hill/
- Example of community magazine insert on climate from Eastside Community Trust: bristolgreencapital.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ECTCOM1-1.pdf
- Insights Report: bristolgreencapital.org/project_cat/community-climate-action
- Blog series: bristolgreencapital.org/projects/supporting-materials/#blogs
- BDEF's Guide for Climate Groups on making protests accessible: bristoldef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Protest-For-All-Guide.pdf

Project 2: GwyrddNi

Datblygiadi Egni Gwledig (DEG) is a social enterprise supporting community-led action across northwest Wales. This is an area with relatively low wages in the UK but where fuel prices are high, and as a result there are high rates of fuel poverty. DEG are looking at solutions, alongside the communities that can balance economic needs with allowing communities to flourish and protect the environment.

To work together with the local communities, DEG follow an asset-based approach to engagement and are hosting 20 citizens' assemblies across five different areas.

Within the largely rural geographic area of northwest Wales, five locations have been identified to host citizens' assemblies. Each area (based around a town or village) has a member of staff, and following an asset-based approach, their first role was to talk to local people and organisations and map out existing assets.

Based on this mapping, a lot of time and resource was spent on reaching out to people to invite them to apply to be part of the assemblies. This meant going to where people are (Men's Sheds, rugby clubs, WI's etc.) and delivering an invitation to every household via Royal Mail. The team created a sense of excitement and a desire to be involved. DEG invested in a dedicated communications manager who did all social media coverage, and they received a lot of media coverage from BBC Wales.

Once people had registered interest, the team made sure that there was representation from all facets of the community at the assemblies. This did not mean matching percentages of the population, since ethnic diversity in this area is low, and this would have resulted in less than one person on the assembly. As you cannot have part of a person, it meant ensuring there was someone to represent all communities, from refugees and asylum seekers to homeless people and those with poor health. They spent time figuring out how to make the assemblies accessible to all. In some cases, however, an individual may be the only representative of a group in their area, whether that individual was asked to be a representative was dependent on the relationship and the context.



Figure 2 - GwyrddNi, Cyflwyniad Assembly - Credit: Ceri Cunnington

Learning so far

Being truly accessible

- Consider the location of the assemblies. Make sure the locations are physically accessible and people can travel easily to them. Where transport is difficult, each community partner has at least one electric vehicle (if not more, including mini buses) which are available for community hire and they use these to transport people to and from assemblies.
- Make engaging possible for those with low literacy levels by allowing them to bring someone with them who can help.
- Remove as many barriers as possible, including the cost of attending. Citizens receive £25 for each assembly they attend and an extra £100 if they attend all four as an incentive to keep coming.
- The assemblies are all hybrid events, being face to face and online to allow people who cannot leave their homes to attend.
- Reach out to young people. *“Having struggled to engage with 16-25 year olds, we’re doing more work with sixth forms and colleges and going into school assemblies.”*

Getting the communication right

- Previously, most climate action has been communicated in English – DEG are foremost a Welsh speaking company, their communications are all in Welsh.
- Tone is as important as language, this is dependent on who you are talking to and the context in which you are communicating.
- Engagement works best when done by people from that community. *“We recruited from the community, so our team know how to speak to the local people and understand the area.”*

- Be sure not to alienate people with your language
- Start with the issues that matter to that community. When trying to engage with farmers we asked, *“What is important in this area? We want to learn from you.’ Then we listened!”*

Get the resourcing right

- Engaging people who are difficult to engage takes time – there are no shortcuts and it is not always easy.
- Allow time for relationships to develop (and to listen to the community). *“When a team is passionate, as people often are with climate change, the instinct is to ACT and sitting back to listen can be challenging.”*
- Do not underestimate the budget and staff cost needed for this work. *“If we could have had the resource we would have had a bigger communications budget and full time staff (we are all part time to make the budget work).”*

Links

To find out more see:

- DEG deg.wales/?lang=en
- TEDx talk by Cormac Russel, Sustainable Community Development: from what’s wrong to what’s strong tedxexeter.com/speakers/cormac-russell/
- Cormac Russel explains Asset Based Community Development youtube.com/watch?v=y6EkaMpAgdE
- nurtureddevelopment.org/who-we-are/cormac-russell/

Project 3: All One Collective & Lab



All One Collective and Lab (All1C) is a social enterprise based in Todmorden, Calderdale. They work with communities to build knowledge and skills to enable people to take social action on the issues that are important to them. Their approach focuses on increasing political literacy, the development of wellbeing and self-care tools and the practical skills needed to influence, such as leadership and public speaking.

They have expertise in working with diverse and disadvantaged communities and since 2019 have been developing work to engage Calderdale communities on the issues of climate change and climate justice. This emerged out of All1C's delivery of a climate change focused 'Active Citizens' programme, (the British Council's social action leadership programme), when they began to explore the barriers that people from low income and marginalised communities face to engaging with the issues of climate change. This included an online climate justice event with local community and voluntary sector organisations to begin exploring the intersections between poverty, inequality and climate change in the local context.

All1C is currently working in partnership with the Climate Challenge College at Todmorden Learning Centre and Community Hub (TLCCH) to raise awareness of climate change with a particular focus on bringing less heard and more diverse voices into the local climate change conversation.

They aim to:

- Raise awareness of climate change and explore its relevance to people's lives in low income areas in Calderdale.
- Promote awareness of the green economy, green Jobs and the Green Futures Course.
- Work with voluntary and community sector organisations to raise awareness of climate justice and explore options for next steps with regards to learning, skills development and taking action on climate change.



Figure 3: All 1 Collective and Lab workshop

Learning so far

The three key activities are:

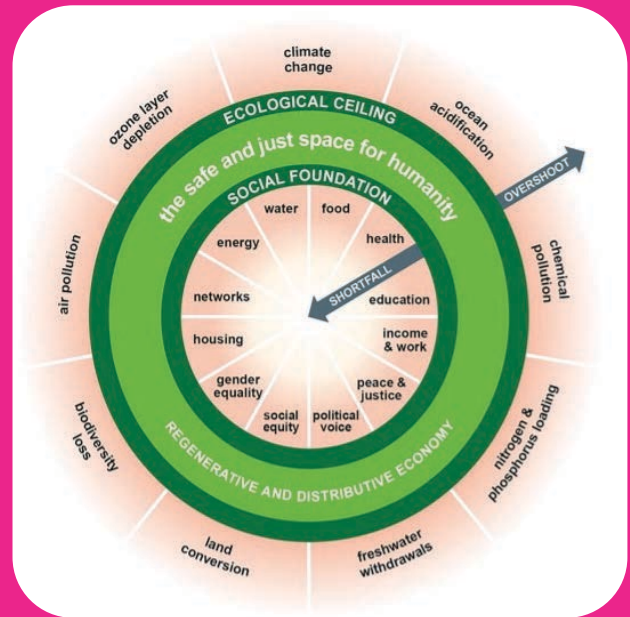
- **Climate conversations with voluntary and community sector organisations** – delivering workshops to a wide range of voluntary and community sector (VCSE) organisations to explore how their current work with communities links with climate change and climate justice. This has included using the dialogue approach promoted by Climate Outreach to run workshops on effective approaches to talking about climate change.
- **Community events** in disadvantaged areas – working in partnership with North Halifax Partnership and Halifax Opportunities Trust, these events focus on what is important to local people. They are about having fun and making connections whilst exploring how climate and the environment relate to their everyday lives through conversation, food and creative activities.
 - Example event – Local people were particularly concerned about waste – the event included a meal provided by the Real Junk Food project, an art workshop using junk, a community litter pick, face painting, a vintage litter display and sustainable goody packs (including bamboo toothbrushes), as well as lots of conversations about the local area, and what would make it a better place to live.
- **Climate champions sessions** with students – building confidence and skills in talking about their course and influencing others.

Partnership working

- Working in partnership is essential for engaging with diverse and disadvantaged communities. Local community organisations know the people, have established relationships and trust, and understand the local context best.
- VCSE organisations want to know how to have conversations about climate change in their organisations and the communities they work with, but don't always know where to start.
- Using 'doughnut economics' and the image of the doughnut worked well with VCSE organisations. A visual representation of the connection between social and the environmental has been good for supporting learning and discussion and relevance to their work.



Doughnut Economics is a model developed by Kate Raworth in 2012. The framework builds upon Rockström's notion of planetary limits and adopts social standards identified in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (2015), which creates a space Raworth calls the 'safe operating space for humanity'. This space (illustrated by two concentric rings) lies within the boundaries of social foundation (below which there is human deprivation or 'shortfall') and the environmental ceiling (above which there is environmental degradation or 'overshoot'). The Doughnut economics has been adopted at multiple scales, by businesses, schools, communities, cities and governments. It can be used as a framework to gather empirical evidence and measure an individual city or country's position within the doughnut, to reimagine business models or public policy, or to engage individuals and communities to visualise and familiarise themselves with this way of thinking.



<https://doughnuteconomics.org>

Relationship building

- Building relationships with community organisations and community leaders is key and it doesn't just happen at the start, it's an ongoing process that needs resourcing throughout for significant impact. It takes time and consistency.
- Having conversations about climate change
- Don't necessarily begin a conversation with climate change. Ask open questions and listen to what people feel is most relevant to them.
- Do use dialogue skills for talking to people about climate change. This involves active listening, open

questions, empathy and finding common ground and shared experiences.

- Be sensitive about behaviour change messages and make sure that they are reflective of the local context and people's lived realities.

Links

To find out more see:

- [All ONE Collective and Lab all1collective.org.uk/about/](https://allonecollective.org.uk/about/)
- Talking Climate Workshop from Climate Outreach climateoutreach.org/reports/talking-climate-workshop/

To find out more...

- Finding diverse and inclusive stock images mediatrust.org/resource-hub/where-to-find-free-diverse-and-inclusive-stock-images-for-your-charity/
- Britain Talks Climate climateoutreach.org/reports/britain-talks-climate/
- Place-based dialogics for engaging local communities in conservation campaigns blog.frontiersin.org/2017/12/08/conservation-campaigns-frontiers-in-communication/
- What is climate justice? climate.friendsoftheearth.uk/resources/what-climate-justice
- Blog post bristolgreencapital.org/how-to-bring-people-ideas-and-information-together-to-make-positive-change/

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful to the following for their help in compiling this resource:

- Amy Harrison, Bristol Green Capital Partnership CIC
- Grant Peisley, DEG Wales
- Hilary Turley, All One Collective and Lab

About the Climate Action Fund

The Climate Action Fund is a ten-year £100 million fund supporting communities across the UK to take action on climate change.

About The National Lottery Community Fund

We are the largest non-statutory community funder in the UK – community is at the heart of our purpose, vision and name. We support activities that create resilient communities that are more inclusive and environmentally sustainable and that will strengthen society and improve lives across the UK. We're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to work closely with government to distribute vital grants and funding from key Government programmes and initiatives. As well as responding to what communities tell us is important to them, our funding is focused on four key missions, supporting communities to:

1. **Come together**
2. **Be environmentally sustainable**
3. **Help children and young people thrive**
4. **Enable people to live healthier lives.**

Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, we distribute around £500 million a year through 10,000+ grants and plan to invest over £4 billion of funding into communities by 2030. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

National Lottery players raise over £30 million each week for good causes throughout the UK. Since The National Lottery began in 1994, £47 billion has been raised and more than 670,000 individual grants have been made across the UK – the equivalent of around 240 National Lottery grants in every UK postcode district.

www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

