



The Climate Action Fund Learning Signposts #7

# Partnership working

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behalf of The National Lottery Community Fund

# Partnership working

## Who is this for?

This learning signpost is primarily intended for people involved in Climate Action Fund projects that engage in or are interested in engaging in partnership working, as well as other climate action projects that involve working in partnership. It shares some of the early learning from Climate Action Fund projects that are working in this area.

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## Introduction

Some problems are too complex for one organisation to tackle on their own. 'Partnership' describes a form of collaborative working where a group of organisations bring together their competencies and resources to work towards a common goal. Partnerships come in all shapes and sizes – they can cross sectors and industries and differ in size and reach. They create a sense of shared ownership and accountability that enables partners to address short-term problems, while learning and evolving together to create a long-term strategic alliance. In the context of climate action, partnerships can enable a joined-up approach to addressing complex challenges. Partnerships acknowledge that different organisations reach and work with different people and address different causes within a community that is beyond the ability of any single organisation, and utilize this when tackling complex challenges.



Successful partnerships require planning (i.e., managing realistic expectations and a shared commitment), and consistent communication (i.e., to be open to differing perspectives, to share responsibility and to communicate honestly). All of The National Lottery Community Fund's projects that are part of the Climate Action Fund are partnership projects, and we approached three representative projects to ask them to share their insights for those looking to enhance their partnerships or begin exploring partnership working.

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



## Do:

- **Invest in relationships as early as possible.** Involve partners with planning and share ideas. Relationships built on openness foster healthy communication that generates trust. This will make the partnership more efficient over time.
- **Put governance in place.** Draw out clear responsibilities, objectives and aims together. This will help to generate shared ownership.
- **Be realistic about what the partnership can deliver.** Regularly review each partner's capacity and way of working to make sure partners have achievable tasks and goals.
- **Don't forget the bigger picture.** As a partnership, make time to meet and think about longer term goals and put short term goals into context.
- **Follow the threads.** Try to identify patterns of communication, approaches to working, and gaps. For example, are there any members of the community the partnership is not reaching? Define what works and what doesn't.
- **Embrace the messiness.** Partnerships bring together people in different roles, with different approaches. Accept that things will not always go to plan and work with your partners to learn from mistakes and sketch out new ways of working. By accepting the messiness, the impact, reach and support your project offers will evolve, helping to support organisations doing amazing things, and the communities they serve.
- **Take time to build relationships.** Be realistic about what each partner can deliver, and foster relationships built on trust and honesty.





# Don't:

- **Be too rigid in your approach.** A structured plan may only take you so far. By being open and flexible to changing structures and processes, meaningful outcomes can emerge.
- **Try to take on the world.** As a partnership, create a longer-term roadmap of activities. Concentrate on one or two things at a time.
- **Create false targets.** Retain the humanness in the partnership, listen to each other and make sure that what the partnership is doing aligns with the overall ambition of the partnership.
- **Ignore the wider context.** It's easy to get tunnel vision when ensuring you are fulfilling your objectives within the partnership, but don't forget the wider challenges that may be impacting partners and the communities they serve.

# Project 1: Food and Climate Action

Based on years of collaborative action in Glasgow and beyond, the Food and Climate Action project aims to work alongside local communities to co-create a more resilient food system that is fairer and kinder to both people and the planet.

## How partnership works at Food and Climate Action (Glasgow)

The project is a partnership of six organisations; Glasgow Community Food Network (GCFN) is the organising and employing partner and then there are five organisations that each host a Community Activator with a loose geographical remit for areas across the city. The host partners are: The Space, Urban Roots, Glasgow Eco Trust, St Paul's Youth Forum, and Central and West Integration Network. GCFN Community Activators are supported by host partners to facilitate and promote food and climate education within communities. Working as a partnership enables each organisation to join forces meaning the project has a far greater reach than it would if they were working individually.

GCFN serves a large geographical area, working in communities with very different needs and challenges. One of the strengths of this structure and approach is that each Community Activator has freedom to explore challenges bespoke to their community. Joining up as a partnership allows each partner to bring their own expertise and experience, while opening opportunities and connecting networks across the city. Tailoring work to specific communities also presents challenges and, if not closely monitored,



Figure 1 - Food and Climate Action, Glasgow Community Food Network CIC launch

can jeopardise the overall aims and remits of the project. To mitigate this, GCFN provide support to Community Activators by acting as the lead partner.

## How Food and Climate Action (Glasgow) maintains a strong partnership

Communication is key to the GCFN partnership's success. They employ a project manager who oversees and maintains this aspect of the work and arranges regular meetings with partners to sense check on progress. Regular communication provides a solid base for the project, meaning they navigate challenges and negotiate solutions as a group.

Second to the success of the GCFN partnership is putting a solid structure in place. Community Activators deliver key activities and access the support of the centralised project. This maintains autonomy and transparency within the partnership and is a good way to ensure the structure is working and the project aims are met.

# Learning so far

## Take time early in the partnership to build relationships

It is important to be realistic about what can be delivered and create relationships that foster honesty. *“Take time to figure out who your partners are, what is happening in their communities and how this is shaping what they deliver.”*

The project has a monthly open forum for partners to provide updates and discuss challenges which enables them to identify different operational structures and assess risk (i.e., resource or capacity).

## Consider the sphere of influence and sphere of control

Working in climate action is complex and requires clear focus on what can be influenced to avoid becoming overwhelmed by focusing solely on issues of concern. Adopting models such as Stephen Covey’s ‘circle of concern’ provides a framework for identifying project-wide concerns, understanding partners’ concerns and areas which all partners have control over.

The model suggests that the more time spent thinking about issues outside of our control (reactive), the less effective we will be at acting and influencing (proactive). Figure 2 illustrates the model. At the centre, the circle of influence contains all the things we have some degree of control over (e.g., where we get our information, how we interact with each other etc.). This circle is contained within a larger circle, the circle of concern (e.g., the economy, government activities, the news).

Covey surmises that we can only react to our circle of concern because they are things that happen to us. If we focus on the circle of influence, however, we can adapt and act which in turn enables us to cope with areas of concern far better. The more time spent in the circle of concern or influence, the more that area will grow. When each partner adapts and acts within their sphere of control, operational aspects of the project can be managed with far greater efficiency, enabling the partnership to look ahead and assess risks.

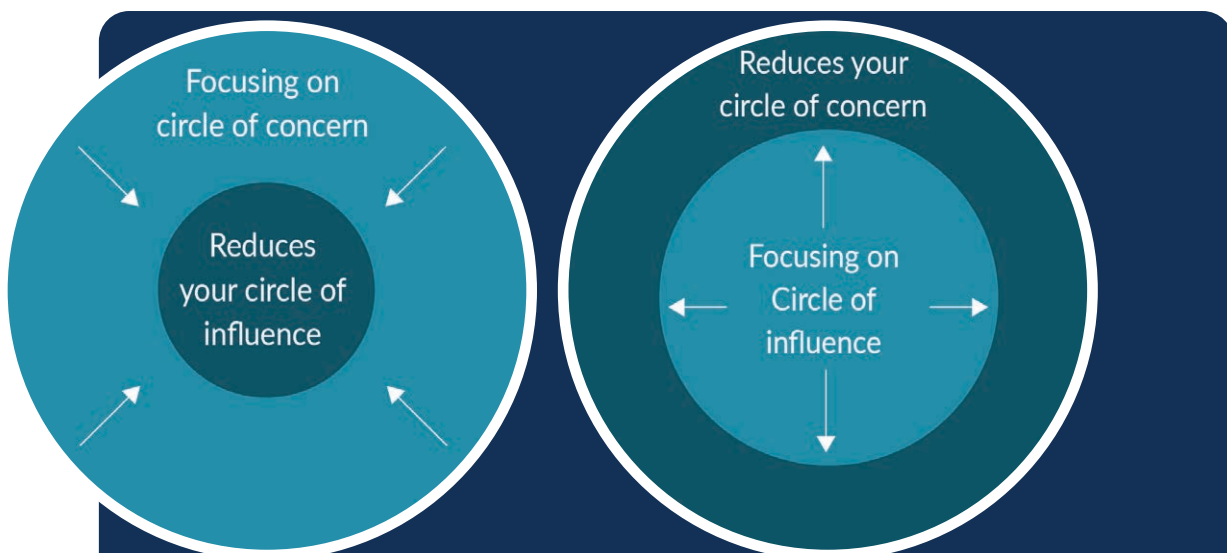


Figure 2 - Stephen Covey’s ‘circle of concern’ (Source: modelthinkers.com)

# Successes so far



- **Autonomy amongst partners:** the Food and Climate Action project has worked hard to ensure Community Activators support host partner's activities, while still delivering on the overall project aims. *"Our Activator has brought many positive contributions [to our organisation] and is great to work with. They are sensitive to existing activities and don't try to impose an agenda, working sympathetically with existing projects and community members."* (Urban Roots)
- **Collective problem solving:** Working with a collective of community organisations means every partner brings their knowledge and experience of their respective sector. This means they tackle problems together and develop new ways of thinking and working. *"Even if we are not dealing with an immediate problem, we take time to organise peer training days, during which we discuss how we do things, how we could do things better and then practice how it may work. We invite people within the partnership who work at different levels to bring together our bank of expertise to help understand perspectives."* (GCFN)
- **A model for the future:** According to partners, GCFN has helped them achieve project aims during the turbulence of COVID 19. They believe this model could be adopted by other cities. *"This model, i.e., a city-wide lead and local hosts is something that could be replicated across many different types of projects."* (Glasgow Eco Trust)
- **Increasing capacity:** The Partnership model has enabled smaller, community-based projects to deliver work they would not have had capacity to otherwise. *"The [Community] Activator's presence in our organisation has been invaluable so far... We are a comparatively small organisation, and the activator has enabled us to have a strand of work in our organisation that we have often attempted but never had the capacity to see through."* Central and West Integration Network
- **New conversations:** GCFN has initiated climate change conversations within communities who may not have made the link. *"We have really valued being part of this project: previously there was no work on climate change taking place in our community and the Food and Climate Action Project has really taken this work forward."* (St Paul's Youth Forum)

## Links

- To find out more about Glasgow Community Food Network, see: [glasgowfood.net](https://glasgowfood.net)
- Glasgow Local Authority co-ordinated a multi-sector partnership to connect community and public sector organisations and, eventually, gave rise to the GCFN. GCFN continue to work closely with their Local Authority through the Glasgow Food Policy Partnership. For more information on this partnership, see [goodfoodforall.co.uk/](https://goodfoodforall.co.uk/)

# Project 2: Climate Action Fife

Climate Action Fife is a 12-member partnership that brings together individuals, communities, local government, and businesses to tackle the climate emergency and make Fife a greener and fairer place to live.

## How partnership works at Climate Action Fife

Climate Action Fife, led by Greener Kirkaldy, functions as a nine-strand partnership 'involving a range of local environmental groups (see Figure 3)' and seeks to raise awareness and enhance knowledge around climate action.

## How Climate Action Fife maintains a strong partnership

Climate Action Fife utilises the partnership model to access local knowledge and trusted relationships within communities. The project initially started with four partners, and brought in additional, smaller organisations that enabled them to broaden their reach and number of strands delivered. Key to this has been structured governance and communication, combined with an agile approach to project management. They organise regular steering group meetings, alongside working groups and informal catch ups to ensure the project is on track. An agile approach is also key as it enables the partnership to identify differing capacity, pace, and approaches, and how these compliment and blend to deliver a common goal.



# CLIMATE ACTION FIFE

Figure 3 - Climate Action Fife partnership map



# Learning so far

## Set clear boundaries and parameters

It has been important to set boundaries to maintain efficiency and impact across the partnership. Each partner brings their own set of strengths and knowledge and setting parameters reduces the risk of duplication, meaning that each partner maintains their unique identity within the project. To do this, Climate Action Fife designed a bingo event between partners, inviting partners to share their aims and deliverables, to mutually set out who is delivering what, and how.

## Articulate the value of partnership to prospective partners

Community organisations do valuable work. It is safe to say they are interested in change-making and making things better for their community. However, they are also generally under resourced, and longevity is key. Find a way to clearly articulate how connecting in partnership will benefit each prospective organisation.

## Adopt an agile approach

Partnerships like Climate Action Fife bring different organisations with different approaches together, which opens opportunities to learn from and with each other. Adopting an agile approach helped Climate Action Fife identify pressure points within the project that were putting a strain on delivery. For example, they renegotiated processes within the partnership to release pressure from partners with less capacity, freeing them up to do what they do best – supporting their community.



# Successes so far

- **Strengthening trust and empowering community groups throughout the county:** Climate Action Fife has explored different angles to build trust and ensure partners have the power of influence to get things done. *“It’s always a challenge to build trust between partners and between the lead partner and the rest of the partnership. The solution is transparency; to be open and honest in communications. Communicate a lot to keep everyone informed.”*
- **Growing the partnership based on engagement gaps:** Climate Action Fife continuously review their engagement gaps to make sure they are reaching every corner of their communities. They wanted to engage more young people in climate action, and so approached Youth 1st to join the partnership. Joining the partnership demonstrated how easy it was for Youth 1st to adapt and learn how to introduce climate themes, for example food waste, to their activities.
- **A metaphor for ecosystem:** Climate Action Fife work with their Local Authority. *“I like to think of the Local Authority as a tree – they provide structure, whereas I think of the community groups as the pollinators – they know where the flowers are.”*  
*“One of our successes has been cross pollination between community groups brought by different perspectives. The community groups have had to add structure and organisation to engage the Local Authority, at the same time the Local Authority has learned to streamline their internal systems, e.g., the facilities team working with council services.”*

## Links

- To find out more about Climate Action Fife, see: [climateactionfife.org.uk](https://climateactionfife.org.uk)
- Scottish Communities Can (SCCAN) provides support, advice and networking for the climate change movement in Scotland. For more information, see: [scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk](https://scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk)
- Fife Communities Climate Action Network CIC (FCCAN) is a network of community groups in Fife that are acting on Climate Change. Membership of Fife Communities Climate Action Network is free and is open to any organisation or group in Fife already acting, or wishing to act, on climate change. The network aims to empower and enable communities to create a low carbon future and promote local resilience and wellbeing. [fccan.wordpress.com](https://fccan.wordpress.com)

# Project 3: A Green and Healthy Future for Frome

A circular logo with a yellow border and a white center. The text "Green + Healthy Future" is written in a green, sans-serif font, with a yellow arrow pointing upwards and to the right, curving around the top of the circle.

Green  
+ Healthy  
Future

**A Green and Healthy Future for Frome** is a partnership project between Edventure Frome, Frome Medical Practice and Frome Town Council, that focuses on climate and health. Their mission is to enable their community to gain the sense of confidence that it is possible to create a radically different world, contributing to a strong community, growing meaningful livelihoods, and building ventures as part of a sustainable, zero-carbon economy that works for all. **A Green and Healthy Future for Frome** is a community-led partnership that supports the local community to live in a way that is good for their health and the environment.

## How partnership works at the Green and Healthy Future for Frome

The triangulation and collaboration between these three organisations blend the civic participation (supported by the Town Council), community enterprise (ensuring action is community-led) and health and wellbeing (supported by the Medical Practice). The partnership enables them to deliver a programme about health and climate with multiple routes in, reaching communities and participants in different ways. *“Frome has partnership and collaboration in its DNA.”*

The Green and Healthy Frome model is unique. Frome Medical Practice have a social prescribing platform, which provides a more holistic approach to enhancing health and wellbeing care. Social prescribing links Frome Medical Practice patients and wider population with non-medical sources of support within the community. It connects people to the assets on their doorsteps. Their service directory is embedded in the EMIS (Egton Medical Information Systems) patient record, enabling health professionals to have signposting at their fingertips.

The partnership has focused on health as a lens for looking at climate change – the health of ourselves and the health of the planet are firmly connected, and if we improve one, we’ll improve the other.

Frome Town Council is run independently meaning party politics don’t play a core role as they may do in other towns. That enables activity and action that would otherwise be difficult to work around, *“Frome Town Council is working on key public themes that have been identified over a long time, including climate, health, wellbeing, transport, infrastructure – key points that are supported by independent town councillors. Edventure Frome have a decade of experience in supporting and enabling community enterprise and helping to “create livelihoods that matter”. Edventure has partnered with others to create innovative projects such as the SHARE Library of Things, a Remakery, and the Community Fridge.”* Green and Healthy Frome utilise their working relationships to focus on climate, raising awareness, and generating and supporting community action throughout the town.



Figure 4: Green and Healthy Frome partnership team

## How the Green and Healthy Future for Frome maintains a strong partnership

Each partner at the Green and Healthy Future for Frome has clear responsibilities and outcomes to deliver. The partners meet on a weekly basis to provide updates and identify where they can work together to deliver their clearly articulated plan. They have an evaluator embedded within the team (with ethical oversight from an external institution) working closely with the team to perform a qualitative and quantitative evaluation, identifying where they have impact leading to behavioural change.

The Green and Healthy Future for Frome have a strong governance structure. There are two people from each partner who form part of the project team. Each partner is connected with additional organisations. This continues to grow as they identify new groups and communities generating new audiences and greater reach. This means that the project is not just driven by the partnership but is extended and propelled by community support and enthusiasm.

# Learning so far

## Develop a sense of shared ownership

**Green and Healthy Future for Frome** aspire to be inclusive of individuals and groups and foster a sense of belonging within their community. To do this, they regularly assess their position. *“Who is not at the table? Who has been left behind? We then look to other parts of our community and groups that may already be delivering on specific strands and explore how we can invite people to be part of the project through bringing their ideas, skills and concerns. We assert boundaries of responsibility with an open mind and heart.”*

## Balancing short term challenges with long term aspirations

When people experience crises, such as the cost of living crisis, there is a tendency to focus on the short term. *“This means we focus in, not focus out.”* The challenges of climate change requires the partnership to work together to focus on the long term goals because, *“through focusing on the long-term, our short-term decisions will be affected for the better”*. They know that some of their long-term ambitions will exceed the lifetime of the the Green and Healthy for Frome project. In those instances, they work to create sound foundations for a sustainable community.

## The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

Before the Green and Healthy Future for Frome project began, there was a sense that there were groups focused on different ways of addressing climate but didn't have the capacity to start stronger networks and community building. They are now working to strengthen the container in which all partners operate, by celebrating the partnership and focusing on what they can deliver together. Storytelling plays a big role in this, *“storytelling elaborates the effectiveness of the partnership, and enables us to share our work and our stories through multiple audiences with different reach and engagement”*.



# Successes so far

- **Co-ordinating needs-based strands:** One of the Green and Healthy Future for Frome strands, 'Healthy Homes', focuses on providing support to people living in cold, drafty and inefficient homes. Frome Town Council have given out communications and advice, while Frome Medical Practice have integrated Healthy Homes information into respiratory letters and texts that go out to patients, connecting patients to the support available in Frome. *"Partnerships are most relevant when you can understand and recognise who is most in need. Using this approach gives us access to members of the community who would otherwise not hear about it through our usual engagement techniques."*
- **Ensuring action is community-led:** *"We have people in our community who are initiators and want to drum up action. We look to this community to share ideas and look at how to generate momentum."* Green and Healthy Future for Frome work to strengthen the community engagement for each partner and take time to lift their gaze to avoid being siloed and restricted by any one project's agenda.
- **Make use of the different perspectives each partner brings to the table:** Working with the Medical Practice and Town Council means that systemic change can be part of the plans.
- **Develop toolkits that showcase partnership and could support other multi-sector partnerships:** Edventure Frome and partners have developed six toolkits to share learning for anyone looking to adapt the Green and Healthy Frome model in their own communities.

## Links

To find out more about Green and Healthy Future for Frome, see: [greenhealthyfuturefrome.org](https://greenhealthyfuturefrome.org); and [Green & Healthy Future for Frome launch event](#)

You can access their toolkits, using the links below. For more information, contact [greenhealth@edventurefrome.org](mailto:greenhealth@edventurefrome.org)

- [Cycle Together](#)
- [Green Community Connectors](#)
- [Healthy Homes](#)
- [Future Shed](#)
- [Choosing Wisely](#)
- [Storytelling](#)

# Other resources produced by The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery have delivered several resources for partnership working

- [Partnership working learning paper](#)
- [Effective partnership working during help through crises \(and beyond\)](#)
- [Partnership working for women and girls](#)



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## 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.

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[www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)

