

Community champions

Recruiting volunteers willing to share experiences and provide information and advice to their own networks, to help others build confidence in retrofit

How it works

Community champions are a common approach used by many community energy groups across the UK. The approach focuses on finding individuals who are willing to give energy advice and/or promote home retrofit to others through their work, community or personal networks of friends and family. Community champions might share personal experiences:

- Being a willing **case study** for others to learn from, through written resources, audio or video
- Participating in **Q&A events**, **Green Open Homes** or other public events where others in the community can ask questions about the retrofit experience
- Hosting **'house warming parties'** to share experiences with near neighbours, friends and family
- Contributing to **research on retrofit** and household experiences of the retrofit process

In other cases, champions may give advice or signpost others to energy advice and retrofit services – usually as a volunteer, or to complement a paid role supporting people who may benefit from advice (e.g. in health and social care). If you are working with an **existing community group**, rather than recruiting champions directly, your approach needs to be more flexible to work with the group's priorities and ideas about how the role can work.

Case studies

All LEAD projects in the South West used the Community Champions model in some form. For example: **Green Heritage Homes LEAD** recruited Listed Buildings Energy Champions; **Green Open Homes West LEAD** supported communities to run Green Open Homes events hosted by Champions; and **EnergyWise LEAD** recruited Energy Champions to reach people with disadvantage through personal networks.



Image © Bristol Energy Network

What you'll need

- ⇒ If recruiting community champions directly, a clear role description defining what you want them to do, who you want them to reach, and the level of commitment expected
- ⇒ A plan to recruit, train and support community champions to carry out their role, either directly or working with a local group
- ⇒ Materials for champions to use, such as advice leaflets
- ⇒ Budget for community champion expenses, where applicable
- ⇒ If using community champions as case studies, deciding what format to capture this in (e.g. written article, podcast, blog or video diary or interview) and how you will disseminate this to your target audience

Why it works

Friends, family and other ‘word of mouth’ contacts are important sources for trusted information about retrofit (PFA, 2024). Research on community champions in other contexts shows they can influence opinions and be an important bridge between communities and services, especially in communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage (PHE, 2021). Because community champions are seen as impartial – with relevant experience and an understanding of the concerns, values and experiences of people in their community – this helps build trust. Training, mentoring and supporting community champions helps give them credibility as retrofit advocates or advisors. Combined with their personal credibility as a trusted messenger, this approach can be very influential.

Top tips

- ✓ Different groups of people will have different trusted messengers; think about who has already built these relationships of trust with your target audience.
- ✓ Community champions can be an easy model for local sustainability community groups to get involved in, and can also involve people in paid roles (e.g. health workers).
- ✓ Champions need training and mentoring to give confidence and ensure advice is appropriate (e.g. traditional buildings retrofit).
- ✓ Look after your champions – some existing community volunteers may be well-placed to help but struggle to take on an additional role, and champions can become at risk of burnout.
- ✓ Like other volunteers, community champions benefit from opportunities for leadership and development, and celebration of their efforts.
- ✓ Householders are motivated by heavy discounts for advice in return for becoming community champions and case studies.
- ✓ Events where people can talk to expert retrofit assessors and community champions are useful to households.
- ✓ Champions will lose momentum without ongoing support; for time-limited projects, consider how to prepare champions for when the project ends – giving them tools to continue (if appropriate), linking them to other ongoing projects (if possible), or formally ending the initiative with a celebration.

Resources

- [Home energy advice leaflets](#) on CSE’s website
- [Retrofit Basics online course](#) (3 x units, each under an hour)
- Energy Efficient Listed Buildings webinar training (15 May 2024) by BWCE and BANES: [Part 1](#) (length: 48:32) and [Part 2](#) (length: 47:39) available on BWCE YouTube channel
- Other relevant LEAD Toolkit contents (see [South West Net Zero Hub](#)): **Green Heritage Homes LEAD** (project summary), **Green Open Homes West LEAD** (project summary), **EnergyWise LEAD** (project summary), **Community Outreach** (method)
- [Community Energy Champions Guide](#) (2010) and [Resources for Energy Champions](#) by Low Carbon Hub

About LEAD

LEAD is managed by South West Net Zero Hub and funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. The programme is trialling innovative approaches to retrofit advice for hard-to-reach groups and hard-to-treat homes. Find out more [here](#).

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