

Community Outreach

Going out into the community to find your audience through events, public spaces and existing groups

How it works

Instead of a traditional approach of marketing a helpline or website and expecting your audience to come to you, community outreach is about meeting your audience in places where they already go, through people they already know. It is already widespread practice in the community energy sector, though approaches are not always successful or cost-effective, and must be planned with an understanding of your target audience.

Community outreach can take many forms. Your **target audience** will determine what methods you use for community outreach.

Some of these methods include:

- **Information stalls** at public events
- **Drop-in advice surgeries** in trusted locations, such as libraries, town halls, doctors' surgeries or workplaces
- **Talks and advice surgeries at community group meetings**

Community outreach can be delivered by staff, or by **trained volunteers** who have sufficient knowledge to provide basic advice and signpost people to more in-depth support.

Working with community groups and other volunteers can be a cost-effective way of delivering community outreach, and can be popular with community groups who share your aims.

Case study

Community outreach formed a part of many of the LEAD projects, recruiting households for home energy surveys.

Within **EnergyWise LEAD**, partner Green Isle of Wight CIC ran regular drop-in advice surgeries with community groups that already supported people from their target audience, during their existing meetings. These included Veterans Outreach Support, Sight for Wight and Alzheimer's Café to reach older people offline.



Image © Plymouth Energy Community

What you'll need

Suggested starting points (not all will apply):

- Relationships with community groups who regularly support people in your target audience and are happy to host talks or drop-in advice surgeries
- Relationships with venues (libraries, GP surgeries, large local employers) willing to host drop-in advice surgeries
- Display materials to attract people to your advice stall
- Appropriate messages for your target audience – actions they are able to take and linked to their own priorities and motives
- Appropriate support (materials, advice and service offer) for your target audience

Why it works

Community outreach is about getting information to people who will not seek it. It is particularly useful to build trust with audiences that are often mistrustful of sales approaches, often being wary of scams and sceptical about claims around improving their lives. It also helps reach people who are offline ([5% of the UK adult population](#)) or functionally illiterate ([18% of the UK adult population](#)), and cannot easily access online information or services. People who are older or from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are most likely to need time and personal connection to build trust, and are also typically more at risk from fuel poverty. Community outreach can also help find a range of other audiences who can be nudged into action through face-to-face advice.

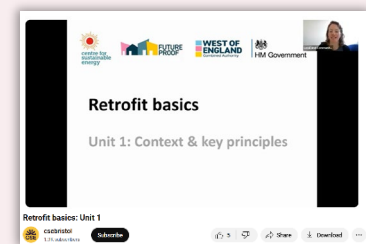
Top tips

- ✓ Trust is important in successful community outreach, so working in partnership with individuals and groups who are already known and trusted by your target audience will greatly improve their willingness to engage with you.
- ✓ Think about how you are branding your outreach presence and materials – is the local council visibly endorsing the service? Does it look a sales pitch? Does your location for a drop-in service give people confidence (e.g. public building)? Is the time and place convenient for your audience?
- ✓ Drop-in advice works particularly well for families, low-income groups, and other audiences who may struggle with set time appointments.
- ✓ Location, timing and privacy are all important, and you may need a regular, repeat presence to encourage some audiences to engage.
- ✓ Learn from your experiences – not all community outreach is cost-effective, and if an approach is not working (and is not building good relationships) then be ready to adapt.

Resources

- [Home energy advice leaflets](#) on CSE's website are free to download and print to support energy advice
- [Running a community energy advice service](#) guide on CSE's website contains lots more useful tips
- [Retrofit Basics online course](#) (3 x units, each under an hour long) is freely available on CSE's YouTube channel and is an excellent entry point for event volunteers
- Other relevant LEAD Toolkit contents (see [South West Net Zero Hub](#)): **EnergyWise LEAD** (project summary), **Futureproof Wiltshire LEAD** (project summary), **(Not-Yet-) Green Open Homes** (method), **Community Champions** (method)

SWNZH LEAD Webinar Series: [Innovations in domestic retrofit advice - Retrofit, Engagement and Communication](#) 11 Dec 2024 (10:38 to 12:30, 45:21 to 49:36) (see also [full slides](#)).



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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