

Planning an open homes event

Green open homes events are a fantastic way to showcase energy saving improvements people have made to their homes and encouraging others to follow suit.

If you plan to organise a green open homes event, this guide is a good place to start. It is set out in four sections which you can also use as a checklist for planning your event:

This is one of a series of information sheets for community groups organising green open homes events. Find the rest at www.greenopenhomes.net

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Getting started

Start with a meeting or discussion, with a few people who are interested in running an open homes event. There are some key decisions you can make straight away, including (if possible) setting a date. Use the below to help get you started.

Aims

Have a good think about exactly why you want to do it and what you want to achieve. Then set some goals, such as ideal visitor numbers, number of open homes involved, or the number of people who say they'll take action after visiting. It's much easier to work towards a defined aim.

See the Centre for Sustainable Energy's [Running an open homes event](https://www.youtube.com/@csebristol/videos) video on their YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/@csebristol/videos) for an overview. Bath & West Community Energy also have [Green Open Homes Weekend](https://www.youtube.com/@bathwestcommunityenergy593) video showing how they work (www.youtube.com/@bathwestcommunityenergy593).

Target audience

Basically, who do you want to come to your event? Keep them in mind throughout your planning as your audience affects everything you do. You could aim to involve people from across your whole community, or you might have a specific target group. It helps to have people from your audience in your planning group.

For more detail about marketing an open homes event to your audience check out our guide *Marketing your event to the public*.

Type of event

Decide on how long you want your open homes to run for. A day? Over a weekend? Decide how many buildings you'd like to include and how big an area you want to cover. It's good to think through questions of scale at the beginning so you can set realistic targets and make sure you're all on the same page. Obviously for larger events you'll need to scale up the amount of resources needed to organise.

Given your scale, what type of event will work best in your community? Which would be easiest for your core group to deliver? You could run a bus tour, drop-ins, an appointment system or a combination of these. There are pros and cons to weigh up. For help deciding, check out our *Choosing an open homes approach* guide.

Geographical focus

The area you concentrate on could depend on the sort of homes you want to feature, the type of community you live in, the population of your area, and your ambition! Remember that people live in different types of housing, with different tenures (homeowners, flats, private tenants, historic homes, council housing, etc). Including a

range of homes will make the event relevant to a wider audience because they'll be able to visit a home like theirs.

Our *Making open homes events relevant and inclusive* guide has further helpful information on making your event accessible to your audience.

"Limit the number of fancy new-build homes as these detract from potential more relevant retrofits."

Chris Bird, Transition Town Totnes

Set a date

Get a date in the diary early on and make sure you allow enough time to organise the event well. Think about your target audience and when visitors are most likely to be able to come, as well as what will work best for your open home's hosts.

You may want to plan your event to coincide with other events. This has advantages (for example, you may be able to piggy-back on the publicity) and disadvantages (people may be drawn to events elsewhere). Consider the time of year – experience from other events suggests that autumn and spring events attract the most visitors.

"Just go for it - and allow more time than you think!"

James Smith, Shrewsbury Green Doors

Resources

The next thing to do is to look at your resources. You'll need a good group of people, potentially some money and quite a lot of time.

Core group

From the start you'll need a core organising group. Be realistic about what time and expertise your core group can give and consider looking for extra support to help share out the work if needed. Now may also be a good time to consider whether you need to adopt a more formal legal structure for your group.

See some pointers in the resource *Adopting a legal structure for your group*.

Time

It will help your planning if you are clear from the start about available time. Are you all going to be working on the event alongside families, jobs and other responsibilities? Run a quick reality check on how long things will take and how much time you are really able to give. The event is likely to take more time than you think so make sure you've got some contingency plans in place.

Volunteers

An active group of additional volunteers can really help with the smooth running of your open homes event - for example helping with promotion or as event stewards. Think about possible volunteer roles and how much extra support you need.

"Eco Homes is very time-consuming to organise. Dedicated help is a must."

Helen Fairweather, Lightfoot Enterprises

Expertise

You don't have to do it all alone. 'Expert' support for your event could come from a variety of sources such as your local authority, other groups that have done open homes events before, or an energy advice agency. They could help with fundraising, marketing, providing technical expertise or putting you in touch with volunteers. The earlier, the better. Find some more ideas in the *Getting the experts in* guide.

Money

Even the smallest events will need some level of funding to cover things like marketing materials, volunteer expenses and insurance. Setting out a basic budget is an important part of the planning process and will be useful when it comes to fundraising.

Organising the event

Good planning is crucial for a successful event but if you have worked through the first two sections above you are already well on your way. You may need to revisit your plans a few times in case anything changes.

Meetings

Schedule and hold regular meetings of your core organising group to make sure everyone is up to speed with developments. Keep checking back against your task list so that nothing gets forgotten.

Remember that there's a balance to be struck between planning and doing. Planning meetings are essential but if they drag on for too long with little activity you may lose momentum (and volunteers) which could have a serious impact on your project.

Subgroups & steering groups

If you're running a small event then a set of regular meetings with your core group is enough, but for large events it is worth considering smaller subgroups that can focus on particular tasks, such as marketing. An overarching steering group could also help to maintain a strategic overview and keep things on track.

If you decide to set up subgroups or a steering group to share the workload, here are a few things to bear in mind:

- Strong communication between groups is absolutely essential but will take some organisation.
- Check that the extra time it will take to have separate groups running in addition to your core group is really worth it.
- Think carefully about who will be involved and what their skills, contacts and availability are.

Timetables and task lists

Create a timetable and start writing a project plan. There are many ways you can do this (for example online tools, paper templates); the most important thing is to find something that works well for your group.

Basically, you need to start with the date you've agreed for your event and, working backwards, schedule in all the tasks that need to be done and by when. Agreeing exactly who is going to do what (and by when) is crucial, especially if you're planning a big event.

Timetable in periods when people will be away or will have less free time (such as during school holidays) and the crunch points when you will need all hands on deck.

Fundraising

Fundraising can be done in several ways and it's a good idea to try a few different avenues, such as sponsorship from local businesses and small grants. If you don't raise as much money as you had hoped for, you might need to review decisions about the aims, size, and timings of your event. There's much more advice in our *Finance and fundraising for your project* guide.

Marketing

Good promotion of your event could make the difference between success and failure. Creating a buzz and selling it as a fun thing to take part in will help to engage open home hosts and get people along on the day. Write a marketing plan and do as much publicity as you possibly can in the lead up to your event. See more hints and tips in our *Marketing your event to the public* guide.

Finding homes

You can't have an open homes event without homes. You will need to engage people who are willing to open their homes. You'll need to collect information about their homes, the low energy features that will be on display, how visitors can access their home, and then find a way to present this information to visitors (for example on a map or in an event guide).

Our *Recruiting and supporting open home hosts* and *Setting up your event* guides have more help on how to do this.

Recruiting volunteers

You may have decided that you need additional volunteers to help your core group prepare for and run your event. Recruiting volunteers does need some thought and careful planning but they're extremely useful to have.

Recruiting and supporting volunteers has more guidance for organisers, and the *Guide for volunteers* has useful information to share with volunteers themselves.

Turning visits into action

As you can see it takes quite a bit of planning to set up a green open homes event. But the event itself is really only a means to an end. Most organisers ultimately want their visitors to go home after and take action in their own homes. So think about the things you can do to enable this. For example: personal contact; good communication; captivating displays in homes; straightforward and reliable information; messages that are simple for visitors to remember and actions that are easy to carry out.

Insurance, risk management and data protection (GDPR)

Make sure you have arrangements in place for public liability and home insurance; for managing potential risks to visitors, and for collecting personal data from home openers, guests and volunteers. You have a duty of care to your visitors and volunteers and you need to take appropriate steps to protect them.

Our guides *Insurance and risk management for an open homes event* and *GDPR for open homes events* have more information about this.

Monitoring and evaluation

How will you determine if your event has been a success? Before you run the event, plan how you will evaluate it (including how you'll record visitor numbers and feedback) and how you want to write up your findings. so that you collect the right information to start with.

Read our guide *Using questionnaires for open homes events* for ideas. And remember to think about data protection when you're collecting feedback. Read *GDPR for open homes events* for more guidance.

Follow up

When the event is over there is still a little bit of work to do. Follow up activities, such

as collating feedback, sharing successes and saying thanks, will help you to know how well you did, will keep your group, volunteers and home openers engaged, and could help you to design new projects or attract future funding.

Review

Review your project while it's fresh in your mind. Collect and collate data (e.g. number of homes, number of visitors, types of questions that were asked) and feedback from participants (including visitors, hosts, supporters and organisers). Record quotes and comments, suggestions and lessons learned. If you have photos or videos from the event so much the better. Remember to use people's identifiable information and photos only for what they have consented to (see the *GDPR for open homes events* resource).

Write up

Pull together any project reports that are needed for funders, write up a short summary of the event to share with participants, include an update on your website or in newsletters, and see if you can get any follow up good-news stories to keep the publicity going.

Thanks

Most importantly make sure to thank everyone who was involved. It is likely that a large number of people have given time and energy to help make your event happen and they will appreciate a thank you.

Green open homes network

Even though at this early stage the list of things to consider may seem daunting, don't forget that it can also be fun! You're not alone and there are groups that have done all of this before, many of which are featured on the Green Open Homes website.

To help with each element of planning your green open homes event, all the guidance referred to in this document as well as more resources and templates, are available at: www.greenopenhomes.net.

Finally, here are some words of encouragement from open homes organisers to show that it's all worth it:

"Just do it! Start small and have a go."

Tina Holt, Transition West Bridgford

"Very worthwhile, has great feel-good factor, excellent way to spread good practice - do it!!"

Sally Cooke, Greendoors

Good luck with your event!

This information sheet was produced by the Centre for Sustainable Energy. We're committed to supporting low carbon retrofit by promoting open homes events and helping you get going with resources, practical support and funding.

You can find more advice at www.greenopenhomes.net.

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