

## Recruiting and supporting open home hosts

It goes without saying that a successful open homes event relies on multiple engaging home openers who are willing to open their homes to the public.

How do you find these people and support them throughout the course of the project

This is one of a series of information sheets for community groups organising green open homes events. Find the rest at [www.greenopenhomes.net](http://www.greenopenhomes.net)

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Finding home openers to participate takes a long time; you might need to start looking for potential homes up to 8-12 months before your event, although it can be shorter than this.

Firstly, establish a set of criteria that you would like your open homes hosts to meet (e.g. certain number of measures installed, lifestyle etc.) and define the geographical area your event will cover. You may choose to be flexible here, in case you get a lot of interest from potential hosts outside the criteria, but having a plan will help you target recruiting.

### **How to recruit hosts**

Use the obvious channels first, then if you still need more hosts, try widening your approach:

- 1) Start with your core group and any other people you know who have made eco-improvements to their homes. In turn, ask if they know of anyone else who has made improvements who could be encouraged to sign up.
- 2) Use your usual communication channels, such as local newsletters, websites, and social media.
- 3) Ask other local neighbourhood groups, transition groups, schools, faith groups, or your local Green Party. Consider where there are already strong networks of local people in your area.
- 4) Have a launch event, like a stall, a talk or demonstration home opening. Invite press (send a press release) to see if you can get people interested.

- 5) Contact potential home openers with visible improvements or installations (e.g. solar panels) you can see from the street.
- 6) Contact local designers, suppliers and installers and ask if they have clients who would be interested in opening their homes for the event.

Carefully consider how you word your adverts and invitations to encourage a wide range of home openers with a variety of improvements to take part.

## Collecting essential information from hosts

When you sign up a home opener, you'll need to gather information such as what improvements they have made to their home, parking and accessibility details, and what days and times they are willing to open their homes.

Having a variety of homes and living situations open makes for a more representative and relatable event for visitors but make sure you consider the different kinds of information you may need. For example, hosts who are renting their home may need to check with their landlord. Hosts who live in flats will need to plan how guests will get from the main entrance to the home smoothly.

Home openers should have comprehensive home insurance, including building insurance (in the case of an unforeseen issue with the home, like a tile falling on someone's head) and contents insurance, which typically includes personal liability for accidents around the home. Read our *Insurance and risk management* guide for more information.

As you are collecting people's personal data, make sure you have a process for data protection (GDPR). To comply with GDPR, you'll need to be able to explain to the home opener the reasons for collecting their details, how long you'll keep their data before deleting it, where you'll store it and who will be using it. Collect what you absolutely need and avoid 'just in case' extras. Make sure you read the advice for collecting and storing people's personal details in our *GDPR for open home events* guide.

Some groups who have run open homes events previously have found it useful to use standard questionnaires which make GDPR compliance easier, as you can use a consent tick box for you storing their details. You could invite people to sign up through a digital form (with GDPR consent included in the questions). Alternatively, people could sign up by phoning or emailing you, and go through a questionnaire with your help.

## Supporting hosts after recruitment

After you have interest from a home opener, visit the home to meet them, check the home is suitable and answer any questions they may have.

Be specific about what is involved – provide verbal and written guidance about what you expect home openers will (and won't) be doing and the support you'll give them. Keep it simple and straightforward: don't bombard them with too much information. You need to both make sure early on you're clear and comfortable with the roles you'll both play. This can include things like the number of visitors at a one time, whether they'd prefer a booking system, and whether they comfortable providing refreshments or letting people use their facilities.

Your first visit is a good chance to go through a risk assessment of the home with the home opener (see our *Risk assessment guide for home openers* and the included template).

Make sure to keep in touch with your hosts regularly to let them know how things are progressing. The way that each home opener will prefer to receive information might be different, for example emails, a group chat or good old-fashioned phone calls. Be clear from the outset what your main method of communication will be, and make sure your method matches the needs of the hosts as best you can.

Some potential hosts may be concerned about opening their home to the public and won't have done anything like this before. Clear information, communication and group events can help to reassure them, as well as being thorough in your insurance and risk management.

There are template guides on the Green Open Homes website for volunteers and open homes hosts.

#### *Information hosts need to know*

You could provide all of this in one go, or 'drip feed' the information so as not to overwhelm anyone. If you take the latter approach, start with general information, and then get more specific as the event draws nearer.

Information that hosts may find useful to look over in their own time include:

- A general guidance sheet (you could use or adapt our *Guide for open homes hosts*).
- 'Job descriptions' for home openers, stewards and other volunteers, so that hosts are clear about what they need to do and also what support they will get from the volunteers.
- Admin guidance on any necessary paperwork, (e.g. risk assessments, managing visitor sign-in, how to record incidents if they occur)
- Checklist of things they'll need for the event that you'll provide (e.g. sign-in sheets, flyers, evaluation forms).
- Ideas of things that would be useful to show visitors but aren't essential (e.g. before and after photos, written information for people hard of hearing).

- Clarification on what they do or don't need to provide for visitors, e.g. toilet, refreshments, spaces to sit down, somewhere to leave coats. Make sure you've agreed this with your home openers in advance.

### *Host introduction meetings*

Running group events for hosts is a great way for them to meet and feel more involved in the overall event and gives you a chance to provide more information in an efficient way.

If you can, find time to run a series of introduction and training sessions for the home openers (or potential home openers) to avoid misunderstandings, clarify the roles of the hosts and volunteers, and run through any issues or worries people may have.

You could ask home openers who have participated as hosts before to come along and give feedback on their own experiences, and if they're willing, act as mentors. They don't have to come from the same geographical area you're focusing on.

In any events, include Q&A sessions, time to get to know each other, and most of all, make it fun! Home openers are giving up their own time and opening their homes – it is important that they feel valued and that they enjoy taking part.

Events are a useful time to provide an overview of:

- What to expect overall – timelines leading up to the event, potential numbers of visitors, how they might arrive, that there will be a range of levels of understanding (from expert to just inquisitive).
- What times homes will be open, if there is a booking process, and if so, how this will work.
- What to say to visitors – it is up to them, but if they need help in organising their thoughts then there is a suggested outline for telling their story in the *Guide for open homes hosts*.
- Clear expectations of the level of technical detail needed from them during visits i.e. just what they know already – if this is little or no technical knowledge then that is fine, they are not expected to know the answers to every question. Explain that an open homes event is about real people telling their own stories about real homes.

Make sure you've listened to feedback from your home openers, and they are comfortable with the details around visitors, timings and the rest. You don't want to surprise them by changing anything they previously thought agreed.

*"Gather together a dedicated group of people; allow each owner a lot of freedom (e.g. times they open, what they tell visitors, what they show); seek good local publicity (e.g. through the local paper)"*

**Adrian Phillips, Cheltenham Green Doors.**

### *Event packs*

Prior to the event, provide all the materials the home opener will need such as:

- Signage
- Information sheets (printed or QR codes to webpages) about technologies they have installed (but make it clear that they are not expected to be technical experts – the event is about real people telling their own stories)
- Other leaflets of interest
- Visitor sign-in sheet (e.g. tablet, clipboard) with instructions
- Evaluation/feedback sheets
- Sticky labels and marker pens for making name badges
- Samples (e.g. of insulation materials, draft-proofing)

*"It is useful for each house to have a summary of information to give to people... Some general leaflets about other environmental things going on in the area are also a good idea."*

**Anne Thomas, Transition Black Isle.**

### *Other top tips*

- Recruit as many volunteers as possible. The more help that home openers have, the better.
- During the event itself, make sure there is always someone in the home with the host.
- Where possible, ensure that volunteers are matched with a suitable home, e.g. one where they get along well with the host, or where they have appropriate knowledge or interest in the improvements on view.
- A couple of weeks before the open homes event, run a 'dress rehearsal' if possible. This gives home openers the chance to go and view other homes that are joining in.
- Consider whether you could provide cleaners to clean hosts' homes before or after the event. Could donations or sponsorship cover this?
- Tea, coffee and cake will go down well with visitors (so long as the host is comfortable with this, so agree it in advance). You could reimburse the cost, seek donations from local businesses, or agree that home openers have a collection pot to cover costs or to donate to charity.

*"We arranged a Saturday a couple of weeks before the event for people who would be opening their homes or otherwise occupied on the day to be able to go round and see some of the homes and this also gave people a chance to practice what they would say."*

**Anne Thomas, Transition Black Isle.**

## After the event

Above all, make sure your home openers know that they are valued. As well as saying thank you verbally, you could send a letter or card afterwards, provide a summary of feedback on the whole event and about their particular home, organise an evening out to celebrate or run follow-up events to keep the network going and to keep people interested and enthused.

*"It is hard work but rewarding too. Treat the householders well, they are your prime asset."*

**Kate Watson, Bristol Green Doors.**

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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](http://www.greenopenhomes.net).

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