

Funding an open homes project

No matter how large or small your open homes event is going to be, you're likely to need funding for things like insurance, publicity, volunteer costs and possible even for transport and venue costs, or staff time.

This means you probably need to do some fundraising.

First things first: setting a budget

Before looking at how you might fund your project, you need an estimate of how much money you need: in other words, set a budget. For this, you'll need to decide what your aims and specific targets are, and then identify the tasks you need to carry out and what the associated costs will be.

For example, say you're aiming to recruit 20 open homes hosts for a one-day event, get 200 visitors through the doors, and recruit and train 40 volunteers. To set a basic budget you would break each of those targets into specific tasks (e.g. run a training day, produce leaflets etc) and estimate costs for each. This is likely to require some research (including quotes) and a few educated guesses.

It's important to be clear about your minimum budget requirements. What are the things that you *must* find funding for if your event is going to run at all? Are there some things which would be 'nice to have' but you could live without if you can't raise the money?

Your aim now is to raise funding that will take you as close to your ideal budget as possible, but whatever you raise must be at least as much as your minimum budget.

Raising the money

Open homes events usually get funding from a combination of places. Grants from local organisations, awards from trust funds and sponsorship from local businesses can all play their part. But don't forget non-grant options like crowdfunding, local fundraisers and donations. Bear in mind your target fundraising amounts and your timeframes, so you can balance the amount of time put into fundraising against the likely success rates.

Local fundraisers might generate lower amounts but there's a good guarantee of getting at least some funds to work with. On the other hand, grant or competition applications take time to complete, and there's a risk that you might not win anything. But, if you are successful, you could get a lot of money in one go.

Local fundraisers

Start simple. If you only need a small amount, you might raise it all with a couple of cake sales, raffles or benefit gigs. If you have a strong network of supporters and you can get them enthused about a green open homes event they might be willing to donate. The benefits of grassroots fundraising is that you are answerable only to yourselves, you won't have to wait for months to hear whether your application was successful, and if your plans change for any reason you don't need the approval of the funder.

Sponsorship and in-kind support

You may consider approaching local companies for sponsorship or direct funding. Small businesses are often happy to support local community event, and larger companies in the area may have a dedicated 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) person or team which might offer financial support or volunteer staff days.

Local shops or companies may donate raffle prizes or help with refreshments, and you may find that your local council can help with low-cost essentials (like printing) and with promoting your event through their communication channels.

If you are hoping to raise large amounts of money through corporate sponsorship, bear in mind that the process is time-consuming and you'll need to start well in advance of your event taking place. Consider who you approach, why they should be interested in your event and what you can offer them in return – a stand at your event for example, or a logo on your publicity materials.

And finally, think carefully about the impact sponsorship might have in terms of how your visitors perceive the event: your autonomy and impartiality is important for maintaining the trust of your local community.

A note on handling the money

If your group doesn't have a bank account already you'll either need to work with a partner who can provide this service, or set your group up as an legal body and get your own bank account. Either way, factor in some time to make this happen, and put systems in place to keep track of your finances (even if it's just a spreadsheet and a process for approving any spending).

Traditional grant funding

An open homes event could tick a lot of funders' boxes because it covers a range of activities, from education to promoting low carbon solutions. Potential funders might include local government, charitable trusts, national funding schemes or funding pots for specific community activities.

There are good funding databases you can access, often for free through community support organisations or your local council. For example:

- Trustfunding, www.trustfunding.org.uk
- Charities Aid Foundation, www.cafonline.org
- Funder Finder, www.funderfinder.org.uk

If you have support from an organisation with funding experience, see if they can help with your grant application.

Three more things to bear in mind: firstly, you might have to mix and match if you are unable to secure the total you need from a single funder. Secondly, some funders require matched funding, which means you need to show you have already secured a portion of the total project costs. Finally, it's a good idea to avoid having all your eggs in one basket. Timescales for funding decisions can be quite long and if you find out you are not successful and have to start again from scratch it could affect your event planning.

Small awards

Some local authorities and local organisations offer small awards or run competitions you could enter. Contact your local authority first, as they usually hold details about small grants for voluntary and community groups in their area. Town and parish councils and community development trusts may hold their own funding pots. And check if there are any organisations in your area with the specific remit of supporting community groups; they should be able to offer advice on likely sources of funding.

Organisations like the Community Development Foundation (www.cdf.org.uk) or the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (www.navca.org.uk) can provide support, and there is a list of energy agencies that may be able to help you on the National Energy Foundation's website: <http://bit.ly/16uwvXQ>. Always check the details first so that you don't waste time applying for a grant that you're not eligible for.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding involves asking a large number of people to give a small amount of money each. There are various online crowdfunding platforms, each of which works slightly differently so you'll need to do some research before diving in. Most platforms take a percentage of the total amount you raise to cover their costs, and on some platforms you don't get anything if you miss your total funding target, so be realistic about what you aim for. On the plus side, funders can come from anywhere in the world, and it gets more people invested in and excited about the event. Local people who donate might be inspired to offer their time or expertise too.

On most crowdfunding platforms you have the option to offer a reward in exchange for funding. This might be the opportunity to take part in a workshop, come to a party, or receive a gift like a mug or T-shirt. Nesta (www.nesta.org.uk) has created a website dedicated to crowdfunding, which will tell you more about the process and help you find a suitable platform: www.crowdingin.com

Entrance fees and donations

Unless you've done some robust market research and are very confident that your target audience is willing to pay, steer clear of collecting donations from visitors; entrance fees are likely to put people off. However, donations on the day, especially in return for refreshments, could help you to start building up funds for future or follow-up activities.

Keeping track

Make sure you have a way to keep track of how you're doing on your fundraising. Your plans will need to be flexible; you might need to revisit the 'masterplan' as things progress and perhaps scale down your ambitions if fundraising proves difficult.

Maintain a methodical record of everyone you approach and what the result was, so that you can follow up as appropriate. And keep all your active funders and supporters updated as your event shapes up – not forgetting to thank them at the end.

Further information

There is more information about sources of funding, including ways to plan your funding strategy and links to various funders and funding databases, in these PlanLoCaL resources (both PDFs):

'Grants and other charitable funding'

<http://bit.ly/16ej9Vm>

'Options for funding your community energy project'

<http://bit.ly/1eZ4ctH>



The **Green Open Homes** network supports low carbon retrofit by promoting existing open homes events and helping new initiatives get going with resources, practical support and funding.

We've produced lots of other information sheets like this one covering legal and insurance issues, volunteers and marketing: www.greenopenhomes.net