

Guide for volunteers

Volunteers are vital to making sure open homes events run smoothly and are a good experience for everyone involved.

This guide is to help clarify your role and give you some tips to help you prepare.

Your role

Opening a home to the public can be quite a lot of work for the host, particularly if they don't have friends or family available to lend a hand. As a volunteer you can help relieve the pressure, and having an additional friendly and approachable person on hand will improve the experience for visitors. You might end up taking charge of welcoming visitors, keeping track of the number of people in the house, organising refreshments, providing expert advice (if you happen to be very knowledgeable), or something else which the host can't manage on their own.

“Volunteers are essential at the homes - to help manage numbers, enable the household to feel at ease, and to gather visitor evaluation.” | Jo Hamilton, previously Oxfordshire ClimateXchange

Be prepared

Before the event, discuss with the host what sort of help they need, and when the best time is for you to arrive. Make sure you know your way around the house: the key areas of interest, where the toilet and exits are, which areas are out of bounds to visitors ... and how to make a cup of tea.

Have everything to hand that you are going to need, like visitor sign-in sheets, leaflets, stickers and pens for name labels, evaluation forms etc. A safe place to keep all this is useful – or you may prefer to use a deep pocket or a shoulder bag.

If the host is running scheduled slots or tours for visitors (e.g. one hour each), check how these will work and how you can help. Discuss how you will manage visitors at busy times and whether there is a

maximum number of people that can realistically be in the house at any one time.

Helping with visitors

If you can do most of the 'meeting and greeting' and managing visitors, it means the host will be able to concentrate on talks, questions and running guided tours.

As visitors arrive, ensure that they sign in and consider using name stickers so that the host can address them by name. Take their coats if appropriate, and make sure they wipe their feet!

Count visitor numbers throughout the day to ensure you have an accurate record (you may not manage to get everyone to sign in).

If the host is providing refreshments you could make drinks or offer snacks on their behalf, and offer to wash up afterwards. (Make sure you give out drinks at an appropriate time so that visitors don't walk around the house carrying hot drinks or food.)

Make sure visitors complete evaluations (if provided by your group) before they leave, and direct them to further information and guidance if they are interested.

Helping to facilitate

Keep an eye on the time, especially if you're swapping over with another volunteer at an agreed time or if the host is running structured tours. You can give visitors a reminder of how much time is left, move questions along, or give out feedback sheets 5-10 minutes before the end of the allotted time. This will help avoid visits over-running.

Other ways of helping to chivvy people along include giving people their coats back, telling visitors

something like: "it's five o'clock now, let's leave our host in peace" or "the next group is starting to arrive now, so we'll need to make some room for them".

Your visitors are likely to be very interested and enthusiastic, but if there are difficult or demanding questions, the host might be glad of some help dealing with them.

Be aware of the 'mood' of the group too. You could help to move things along if the discussion has become too involved/detailed for the majority of the group, especially if there is still a lot to look at and not much time left. Intervening with a reminder about what time it is, what else is left to view or where visitors can go to get more detailed information are all tactful ways of interjecting.

Early or late arrivals

Check beforehand what the host would like to do about visitors who arrive early or late. You may need to be quite firm and ask early visitors to come back later if they arrive very early, or not let them in if they are very late.

If you are accommodating people who arrive early, invite them to take a seat or look at a display, chat to them about what other houses they have seen, and make sure there are plenty of leaflets to read.

And finally...

Enjoy yourself! Being a volunteer helper for an open homes host can be fun and rewarding, and you will meet lots of people. Open homes events are a fantastic way for people to learn more about energy improvements they can make to their homes, and are great to be a part of. And you may just learn something useful yourself.

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.

See www.greenopenhomes.net



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