

Planning an open homes event

Green open homes events are a fantastic way to showcase energy saving improvements people have made to their houses 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:

1) Getting started

- Aims
- Target audience
- Type of event
- Geographical focus
- Set a date

2) Resources

- Core group
- Time
- Volunteers
- Expertise
- Money

3) Organising the event

- Meetings
- Sub groups and steering groups
- Timetable and task list
- Fundraising
- Publicity and marketing
- Finding homes
- Recruiting volunteers
- Turning visits into action
- Managing risk
- Monitoring and evaluation

4) Follow up

- Review
- Write up
- Thanks

1) Getting started

You'll probably 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. You could use these 'why-who-what-where-when' questions to help get the ball rolling.

Why do you want to run a green open homes event?

Have a good think about exactly why you want to do it and what you want to achieve. Then set some concrete goals, such as visitor numbers, number of homes involved, or the number of people who say they'll make home improvements as a result. It's much easier to work towards a defined goal.

We recommend the PlanLoCaL video on 'Running an open homes event' as essential viewing for anyone wanting to get an overview of what's involved:

<http://youtu.be/onUufFrwI-U>.

Who is your target audience?

In other words, what sort of people do you want to come to your event? You could aim to involve people from across your whole community, or you may have a specific target group in mind. Bear your audience in mind throughout your planning as it will affect everything from the type of homes you want to showcase through to the wording on your leaflets.

Marketing an open homes event is discussed in more detail in the resource '*Marketing your event*'.

What scale and type of event?

How long do you want it to be, how many buildings would you like to include and how big an area do 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 level of time, person days, planning and organisation needed.

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.

See the resource on '*Choosing an Open Homes Approach*'.

Where will your event be?

The area you concentrate on could depend on the sort of houses you want to feature, the type of community you live in, the size of the population... and your ambition. Remember that people live in different types of housing, with different tenures (homeowners, private tenants, council housing). 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. You could extend your open homes event to non-residential buildings to add interest.

See the resource on '*Making open homes events relevant and inclusive*'

"Limit the number of sexy new-build homes as these detract from the far more important retrofits." | Chris Bird, Transition Town Totnes

When is the best time to hold an event?

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 homes 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

2) Resources

Next, look at your resources. You'll need a good group of people, 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 this group can give, and consider looking for extra support to help share out the work. Now may also be a good time to consider whether you need to adopt a more formal legal structure for your group.

Resource: *'Adopting a legal structure'*

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 jobs, families and other commitments? 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.

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.

"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, groups that have done open homes events before, or an energy advice agency. They could help with fundraising, providing technical expertise, marketing or putting you in touch with volunteers.

See our resource *'Getting the experts in'*.

Money

Even the smallest events will need some level of funding to cover publicity 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.

3) 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.

Sub groups and 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 sub groups 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 sub groups or a steering group, 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 and contacts are.

Timetables and task lists

Create a timetable and write a project plan. There are many different 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, as it will need really good organisation to bring all the different parts together.

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

Fundraising

Fundraising can be done in a number of ways and it's a good idea to try a few different avenues, such as simple raffles, sponsorship from local businesses, small grants or awards. If you don't raise as much money as you had hoped for, you might need to review decisions about the aims, scope, and timings of your event.

Have a look at the Green Open Homes resource '*Finance and fundraising for your project*' for further advice.

Publicity and 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.

There is a GOH resource on 'Marketing your event to the public' which will give you some hints and tips on how to do this effectively.

Finding homes

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

See '*Recruiting and supporting open home hosts*'

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 it is worth the effort.

For more detailed advice have a look at 'Recruiting and supporting volunteers' and the 'Guide for volunteers'.

Turning visits into action

Obviously there is a huge amount of planning entailed in setting 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 an event and make energy saving changes to their own homes. So do think about the things which will help with that. For example: personal contact; good communication; captivating displays in homes; straightforward and reliable information; clear and targeted messaging; benefits which are simple for visitors to remember and actions which are easy to carry out.

See our resource '*Turning visits into action*'.

Managing risk

Make sure you have appropriate arrangements in place for insurance and for managing risk (e.g. a risk assessments of each home; clear guidance for home owners and volunteers). You have a duty of care to your visitors and volunteers and you need to take appropriate steps to protect them.

See our resource '*Insurance and risk management*'

Monitoring and evaluation

Before you run the event, plan your evaluation (including how you will record visitor numbers and feedback) and how you want to write up your findings (so that you collect the right information to start with).

See our resource '*Evaluation of open homes events*'.

4) Follow up

When the event is over there is still a little bit of work to do. Follow up activities, in particular collating feedback, sharing successes and saying thanks, will help you to know how well you did, will keep your group, volunteers and householders motivated, 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 monitoring 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.

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

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.

Here are some words of encouragement from open homes organisers:

"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, Greendor

Good luck with your event!

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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