
Community Engagement

1.1 Overview

Engaging with your community is an important part of developing a Community-led LEP. How to engage with individuals and organisations will depend on the role they might play. The different roles can be summarised as:

- **Enthusiast and promoter:** Interested in supporting the development of a LEP, and has ideas about how to best meet the challenges associated with local needs. Not necessarily knowledgeable about energy, but has local area knowledge
- **Co-ordinator:** Individual or group already involved or previously involved in community initiatives around energy or transport. Offers connections with local and national bodies that may be relevant to the LEP development
- **Contributor:** Individual or organisation living/operating in the local area, who has an opinion on the priorities the LEP should address, and what projects or programmes of works might work best in the community
- **Implementer:** Individual or organisation involved in energy and/or transport-related projects, or experienced in managing and securing funding for projects
- **Other:** Individual or organisation with skills and experience that can help with different aspects of the LEP development, such as data analysts, graphic designers, energy consultants, project managers, contractors, engineers and architects, among others. They may be involved throughout the whole LEP development process, or simply be valuable contributors for short, specific tasks

1.2 Where to start?

The starting point for your community will depend on its local circumstances and experience. For example, your community could have:

- Existing experience with low-carbon energy generation, which could be through development of a community asset, such as a wind turbine or hydro scheme
- Received community-benefit money from wind-farm developers (or similar) and have an existing local trust responsible for the management of these funds
- Previously tried to develop low-carbon energy generation but failed to attract sufficient investment or found the development process too difficult
- No experience of low-carbon energy generation, or only have experience with individuals who have installed small-scale renewables on their property

An individual or local organisation may be the first to think about creating a LEP, but to really make it happen, a wider group of community representatives will need to get involved. This will help with momentum, local knowledge, and ideas about how to seek wider community views.

1.3 So who might get involved in developing the Community-led LEP?

Developing a LEP needs to be co-ordinated within your community. This can be done using an existing organisation, or by creating a local group specifically for this purpose.

Some possible approaches:

- Community council – The community council can lead the LEP development, and include an ongoing agenda item in its regular meetings. This could include creation of a sub-committee if it would be most effective
- Community trust/development trust – If an existing local community trust is already in place, it may be able to lead the LEP development
- Local steering group – A group created to direct and steer the development of a LEP. It would include a mix of individuals representing their own views or those of their business or local organisation

Whichever approach you take, it's important to ensure that a range of community perspectives are included. This will make it easier to figure out how to gather the opinions of the wider community.

[You can get a checklist of what organisations could be involved in creating your LEP in Stakeholder Checklist \(Mobilisation Module 4\).](#)

[You can get more information on how to create a core development group in Community Actors Checklist \(Mobilisation Module 4\).](#)

1.4 What about wider community views?

Once your LEP-development group has been established, you'll need to engage with the wider community, for several reasons:

- Awareness – Telling the community that a LEP is being developed, and informing them how they can contribute
- Gathering views – Asking for opinions about challenges in the present energy and transport needs of the area, and where they would like to see change
- Data gathering – Asking specific building owners and organisations to provide details about their energy consumption, in order to build a picture of the local energy profile; asking questions to determine the present awareness of energy efficiency and related issues in the community; asking questions to understand the community's experience of changes to energy or transport

There is no single approach that will suit every community. Online promotion of the LEP development (e.g. via Facebook pages, social media accounts, etc.) may engage some people. Others may prefer articles in the local newspaper or face-to-face community meetings.

Below you'll learn two different approaches that address the objectives above. They're not the only ways to engage, but they do offer a contrast in the approaches you could take.

1.5 Public-facing engagement

In this approach, engagement is achieved via:

- Public meetings/drop-in sessions
- Online surveys
- Limited social media interaction

1.5.1 Awareness work

You can build initial awareness of the LEP by:

- Building a key contact list of organisations and businesses in the area
- Developing a short leaflet publicising the development of the LEP and telling people how they can get involved or learn more
- Publishing articles in the local newspaper and on local social media

[You can get a list of potential initial stakeholders in the Stakeholder Checklist \(Mobilisation Module 4\).](#)

[You can see an example of a publicity leaflet and news article in the Community Engagement Examples.](#)

1.5.2 Gathering information and opinions

This step follows on from the initial awareness-building.

There are two options:

Option 1 – Use public display boards to share some initial ideas about the LEP

This could include questions about what people see as priorities for the plan, though it's important not to ask too many – two or three is fine.

The questions can be about energy use or how best to take action.

Here are some examples:

Questions about energy use

What actions do you think would be most beneficial to power requirements in the area?

What actions do you think would be most beneficial to heating requirements in the area?

What actions do you think would be most beneficial to transport requirements in the area?

Questions about action areas

What actions do you think would best enable more efficient energy-use at home?

What actions do you think would most benefit organisations working in the local area?

What local energy generation schemes do you think would be most beneficial to the area?

Option 2 – Use an online survey

Online surveys are another way to engage with the community. There's plenty of free software that will allow you to set up a questionnaire and collate the answers.

The survey should make it easy for people to share their thoughts, not only about what they want to see tackled in the LEP, but also what might motivate or prevent people from taking action.

The survey should be long enough to garner useful information, but short enough to encourage people to complete it.

[You can see an example of a survey in the Community Engagement Examples.](#)

Any survey you create will need to be advertised. This should be done in several ways, because people get their local news in different places. Here are some examples:

- Public notice boards
- Community council newsletters
- Local newspaper articles
- Local-area websites and social media pages
- School assemblies
- Emails to people in the awareness-raising step

Public drop-in sessions

Once you've gathered some findings from your public display boards/survey, they can be discussed at a public drop-in session, which can be arranged as a stand-alone event or combined with an existing event (e.g. coffee morning, gala day, etc.).

Your drop-in session should be led by several friendly volunteers and kept informal, to encourage people to share their thoughts.

The information and opinions gathered can be used to provide topics for discussion. Introduce the topics, then open discussion to let people share their thoughts.

You can run a single group session, or break up into smaller groups, depending on how many attend. If smaller groups are used, someone should be responsible for leading each one.

It's also helpful to have someone taking notes. These should summarise the main comments and queries, rather than be a blow-by-blow account of what's said.

Focus groups

From the survey and drop-in session, themes will arise that are of most interest to the community. For example:

- Improving community access to low-carbon public transport
- Developing community energy-generation projects
- Targeting insulation improvements within the most vulnerable households

These themes can be explored in more detail in a focus group. Focus groups can be done face-to-face or online (the latter being more likely), and should be moderated by someone from the development group.

For example, if the theme was developing community energy generation, focus-group discussion could involve:

- Should projects involve electricity or heat generation?
- What projects have people seen that are of interest to them?
 - Sea water heat pump in Drammen, Norway
 - Solar electricity array in Levenmouth, Fife
 - Hydrogen fuelled buses, Aberdeen
 - Deep geothermal fed district heating

The aim is to discover projects or programmes of works that are of interest to community members, which can be examined in more detail when options are considered during the options appraisal. The details of how such schemes might work aren't the point here. You're simply looking for ideas people are keen to explore.

You may also learn of valuable experiences community members have had personally, such as installing a particular technology, and the positive and negatives of doing so. This is all useful knowledge for developing your LEP.

Workshop

Once you've completed your options appraisal, you'll have a draft list of proposed projects for inclusion in the LEP. It's a good idea to review this list with the wider community and get some final thoughts. This is a chance for the community to ask questions, too, as they might be curious about the options listed, how they could be modified, and what other options might be relevant in the future.

The findings from the workshop can help solidify the final options for inclusion in the LEP, by raising questions the development group hadn't thought of and wish to explore.

1.6 An ambassadorial approach

In this approach, a group of voluntary local 'ambassadors' support the development of the Community-led LEP. In their everyday lives, they discuss the findings and work of the LEP with friends, neighbours and colleagues. This promotes debate of the LEP in the wider community, and the ambassadors can then share what they learned with the LEP development team.

This work is supplemented with a community survey – promoted, in part, by the ambassadors.

Your ambassadorial team will ideally comprise a mix of people who span different sectors of the community. For example, it's helpful to have representation from older and younger generations, community groups and businesses.

Invitations to find volunteers can be issued via several routes:

- Targeted emails
- Local newspaper advertisements
- Community noticeboards

Once potential ambassadors have been found, they can be invited to take part in several workshops. These workshops should be tailored to reflect the needs of your community.

[You can see examples of material that could be used in a workshop in the Community Engagement Examples.](#)



Workshop 1: Setting the scene (linked to setting LEP priorities)

This workshop acts as an introduction to the development of the LEP and the proposed role of the ambassador. It would cover:

- What is a Local Energy Plan?
- What are the current energy and transport needs, challenges, and opportunities for the community?
- How do these needs align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UK/International action to combat the impact of climate change?
- How can the community assist in developing the LEP?
- What is being asked of ambassadors?

Workshops allow ambassadors to explore what a LEP might look like in their community, and what it might seek to achieve. They offer the chance to share early thoughts about projects and opportunities that could change how local energy and transport needs are met. They can also examine previously completed projects, or ideas that were never implemented and why.

It's also important that ambassadors are made aware of their role and what's being asked of them. If they don't use their contacts in the community to discuss the LEP, they won't yield useful information. But this shouldn't feel like a chore, either. Ambassadors are asked to talk about the LEP in general conversations, not devise special occasions to talk only about the LEP.

Workshop 2: Opportunities (linked to wider survey of ideas among community)

After Workshop 1 has been discussed by the LEP development group, a second workshop can be organised. This workshop would focus on a more detailed list of potential projects, pulled largely from the ambassadors' observations on what would be most valuable for the community.

Discussion would centre on examples of projects, how the technology might work, and what the outcome might be for the community.

For example, if a community hydro scheme is proposed, these questions could be asked:

- How do you find the best site for a hydro scheme that runs in a watercourse (rather than as part of a dam)?
- How much electricity might this type of scheme generate? How could the community best use this?
- What are the planning and regulatory requirements to operate a hydro scheme?

Information from the LEP development team can be used to facilitate discussion, as can examples of other successful community schemes.

This workshop will result in a longer list of opportunities that the ambassadors would recommend for consideration in the options appraisal process.

Workshop 3: Summarising ideas (linked to draft LEP development)

The final workshop would occur when the draft LEP is emerging. By this stage the ambassadors will have had chance to discuss their ideas with the wider community. The development team will also have examined the ideas and, during the options appraisal, shortlisted the ones thought to best fit the needs of the community.

This workshop therefore gives the ambassadors a chance to reflect on the shortlist and how well it meets the original objectives determined for the LEP. The ambassadors can express a

preference for projects, or ask for some previously disregarded options to be looked at again.

Community survey

A survey seeking the views of community members can be used to supplement the ambassadors' discussions. This is most likely to be effective if developed and issued between the first and second workshops.

The purpose of the survey is to summarise views about the objectives and priorities to address in the LEP, and thoughts on what projects might be included.

[You can see an example of how this survey might look in the Community Engagement Examples.](#)

It's important to promote the survey to maximise the chance for everyone in the community to have their say. It should be promoted via multiple communication channels, including the ambassadors.

The survey could be closed before the second workshop so the findings can be used as a lead discussion points.

Alternatively, the survey can remain open throughout and after the second workshop. In this case, the initial survey findings can be shared with the ambassadors, who can then go back to the community and discuss them, potentially resulting in fresh survey responses or requests for information to be clarified by the LEP development team.