

# COMMUNITY ENERGY COMMUNICATIONS

# ENERGY COMMUNICATION GUIDE

COMMUNITY ENERGY COMMUNICATIONS  
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL





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## COMMUNITY ENERGY COMMUNICATIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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ENERGY CITIES

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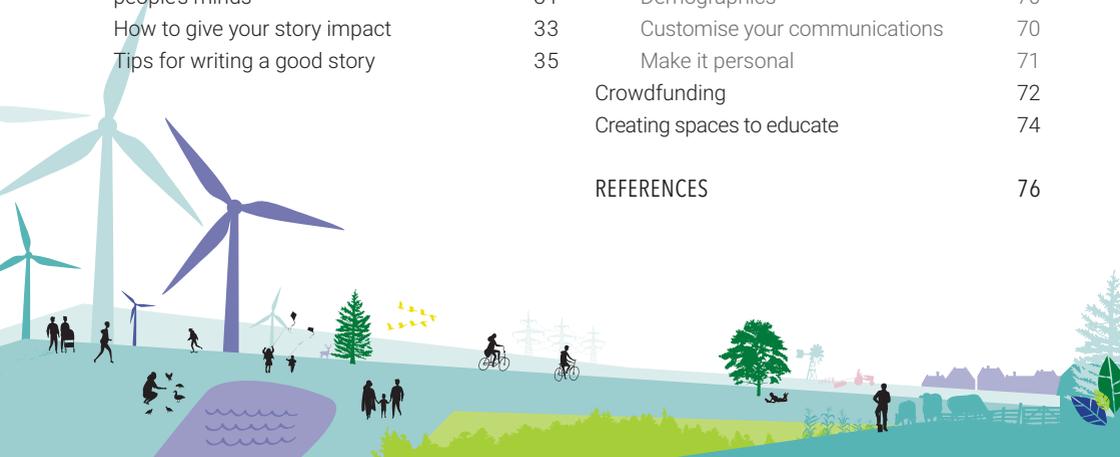


Cover image: Human windmill. © REScoop.eu



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# FOREWORD

## REVOLVE



**We know now that some 100 corporations are responsible for approximately 70% of global greenhouse gases. We also know that the Big Players alone won't be able to bring about the changes we need. If we want to slow climate change, we need everyone involved because we can all make a difference. This Guide gives clear indications of how and what it means to come together in taking action collectively to address the biggest challenge of our times.**

Indeed, I would say that citizen and resident engagement is the more important parallel track to the Big Players – perhaps even the long-term ‘holy grail’ – for pursuing a more embedded, engaged and ultimately a more encompassing energy transformation for our societies. People – as consumers and prosumers – have the power to change their consumption habits and their sources of energy. Everyone has a choice of what mode of transport they take, what food they eat, what electricity they use...

Moreover, we can organise ourselves in Energy Communities that bring clean energy to our territories. What makes these Energy Communities different from most Big Players: citizens and residents are no longer just consumers, they actually own the power installations. They have invested their own money and time to deliver clean energy, energy efficiency, and clean mobility projects.



Energy Communities work together with their local authorities to make the best use of local resources, and to ensure they benefit the entire community. The returns on investment from these projects are very often used to improve the well-being of the whole community while creating local employment.

Local authorities, municipalities and communities are clearly at the vanguard of the energy transition – waiting for neither the corporates nor international politics to move – they are the closest to the people. As an example, at REVOLVE we carried out campaigns with our Cities4Forests network by planting a tree for every image posted of people around trees and in nature.

Around the Mediterranean, REVOLVE is also part of the Ecosystemic Transition Unit initiative (as the campaign of the INTERREG MED Renewable Energy Communities) that aims to engage local authorities and communities in participating more pro-actively in the energy transition. Islands and remote rural areas are hugely symbolic of how energy independence is possible for Europe.

If islands and remote areas can be energy independent, then continental Europe can become energy independent and rely more robustly and securely on local renewable sources of energy. Read this Guide carefully, it is full of little gems and big tips that will inspire you to make a move in that direction and ultimately to change the world in your way.

Stuart Reigeluth  
**Founder of REVOLVE**  
[www.revolve.media](http://www.revolve.media)



Energy Democracy  
 Convergence  
 in Spain.  
 © REScoop.eu



# CONTEXT

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**This Communication Guide complements the publication “Community Energy - A practical guide to reclaiming power”. The Community Energy guide, published in 2019 by Friends of the Earth Europe, REScoop.eu and Energy Cities, explains the European context in which the Community Power movement operates, and highlights the benefits of community energy.**

It also presents the different steps to set up your community energy project, which is why you won't find this information in this document. If you are not familiar with the topic of community energy, we recommend you read *“Community Energy - A practical guide to reclaiming power”* before reading this Communication Guide.

Today, many people still don't know what community energy is and the benefits it can offer in collectively addressing climate and social challenges. Spreading the word about community energy is thus an important aspect of leading the transition to energy democracy.

In this short Communication Guide, we attempt to answer the most common questions we receive from citizen groups and local governments that wish to:

- gain support for the launch of their community energy project;
- motivate their residents, neighbours and stakeholders to take part in their project

This Guide will help non-experts in communications to gain an initial understanding of the topic, enough to kick off communication and engagement activities for the development of local community energy projects. It will inspire them with numerous examples of cities and cooperatives that went before them and succeeded!

DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE 🔍

**Find out more:** <https://energy-cities.eu/publication/community-energy/> or <https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/community-energy-a-practical-guide-to-reclaiming-power>



## THE ORGANISATIONS BEHIND THIS BOOK

The book was put together by two organisations who work together to speed up the development of community energy across Europe.

### REScoop.EU

**REScoop.eu** is the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives. We are a growing network of 1,900 European energy cooperatives and their 1,250,000 citizens who are active in the energy transition. Through REScoop.eu, energy cooperatives wish to make their voices heard in the European energy debate. REScoop.eu empowers citizens and cooperatives, and aims to achieve energy democracy.



**Energy Cities** is the European learning community for future proof cities. We empower cities and citizens to shape their sustainable transition. We showcase concrete alternatives deployed by cities, we advocate for change in the political and economic governance at all levels, and we foster wide-ranging cultural change that leads to a future-proof society. The Energy Cities' community comprises local leaders of thousands of cities in 30 European countries.



Kids with their paper windmills.  
© Community energy Ireland

**Acknowledgments:** We gratefully acknowledge the funding we received from the European Climate Foundation. We are also thankful for the support and inspiration we received from the members of REScoop.eu, Energy Cities and the Community Power Coalition, who are important partners in our fight for putting citizens and communities at the heart of the energy transition.



# HOW TO READ AND USE THIS GUIDE?



**We decided to focus on the aspects of communication that, based on our experience, could be useful to someone wanting to start a community energy project.**

Nevertheless, Chapter 1 will present a general overview of the main steps in developing a communication strategy; these tend to be similar for most projects and sectors. In the following chapters, we will go into the details of communicating about community energy. You will read about hopeful storytelling, an important tool for activists to reinforce their narrative (Chapter 2), and how to engage your

community (Chapter 3), ensuring your communication can inspire the necessary action to make your collective renewable energy project a reality. Chapter 4 focuses on how local authorities and cooperatives can use their respective strengths to successfully plan and implement communication actions. Finally, we bring everything together in Chapter 5 in order to guide you through what is probably the most important tool for #communitypower communication: a community energy campaign.



# BUILDING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY



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Energy Democracy convergence.  
© REScoop.eu

When dealing with communications for the first time and tasked with promoting a great project or initiative, you might think everyone will be as interested in the topic as you are, and will immediately understand its importance and potential...And you might then immediately start contemplating the actions you can take. But before deciding what you are going to do, there are some very important preliminary steps to take: it's time to build your communication strategy!

## SETTING YOUR COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES



**Clarifying your communication objectives is the first step of your communication strategy.** You and your team should start by asking yourselves questions like:

- What is your mission? What is the best communications result you could hope to achieve in the short to medium term?
- What is the vision behind your project? In a best-case scenario, where do you want to be in the medium to long term?



# SETTING YOUR COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

For example, would you like to ensure that the community energy actions your local government is taking are known in your city or municipality? Do you want to gain the local community's support for your renewable energy project or are you looking to recruit more members to your cooperative?

Once you have identified the main goals of your communications, you should find a way to transform these into concrete objectives with measurable indicators.

We continue our considerations based on the examples above:



## GOALS

We want more people to know about our community energy project

Greater support for the community energy project

X people joined the project



## MONITORING INSTRUMENT

A citizen survey conducted before & after the communication actions

Interviews with a pool of residents before & after the communication campaign

Expressions of interest/Attendance list



## INDICATORS

Percentage of positive answers

Number of people expressing support/voicing disagreement

Number of people joining



# DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE



## The second step would be to identify your target audience: who are you talking to?

Think about the people or organisations that you would like to motivate to action, or the ones that you would be happy to simply inform or consult about your project. This step is very important, since your messages, but also the communication or engagement actions you will plan, need to be audience specific.

Knowing your audience is fundamental, so make sure you allocate time to this activity. Some might already have this knowledge within their team; others might have to investigate a bit more. Nevertheless, there are a number of tools that you can use to gather information.

- You can create a stakeholder map: think about all the stakeholders that might have an interest in your project and write them down. Then try to classify them according to their level of involvement (do you want them to play an active role in the project, to consult with them, or to simply inform them),

and the power they have to negatively or positively influence your project. This type of classification will be useful not only for your communication activities but also for the implementation of your community energy project itself!

- You can do as marketing companies do... and build generic personas. Think about a real person you would like to speak to: What's their name? What's their age or job? What interests them or would motivate them to participate? Where would you find them? If someone else knows the local community better than you, ask him/her to help with this task. You can find examples of personas in chapter 2.

Of course there are plenty of ways to gather information on your target audience, and you can choose based on the time and budget you have available: think about organising interviews, discussion groups or surveys in your area. Chapter 3 contains more details and examples of audience definition.



# DEVELOPING COMPELLING MESSAGES



**Once you are clear on the objectives and the audience of your communications, you can start thinking about your messages. Compelling messages should not only inform the local community about your project, but also lead them to support it – if not to participate in it! They should speak to the audience in a language they can understand and are comfortable with.**

There are many different opinions on the tone of voice to be used in our field of work, but we believe it's possible to highlight the urgency of the issues you would like to address while avoiding "disaster language". If you want people to be motivated to act or support your project, show the positive impact their contribution can have and the benefits they can obtain. You will find more on this topic in Chapter 2.



# DEVELOPING COMPELLING MESSAGES



The Golden Circle concept by Simon Sinek.  
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## START WITH THE WHY

First of all, your message should clarify why you launched or want to launch this (community energy) project. Make your vision and motivations explicit from the start in order to foster trust between you and your community and to allow you to share what you believe in, your values. Values will help your audience relate to your message, identify common ground, but also give meaning to your action and in general contribute to better remembering your message.

## HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

You should then explain how you want to achieve your vision, going into greater detail concerning your idea: this is the moment to introduce your community energy project!

## WHAT IS YOUR PROJECT ABOUT?

Finally, you can focus on your community energy project's actions. This would be also the moment to clarify what your audience can do to help, the different opportunities for them to contribute or to have their say.



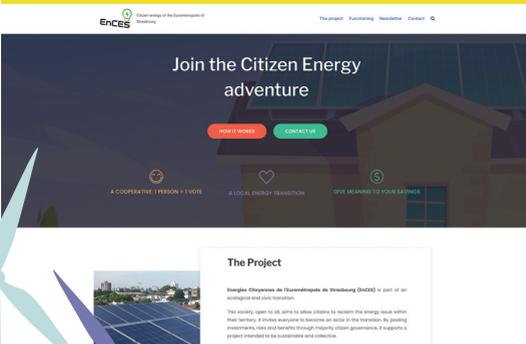


## STRASBOURG'S ENERGY BREWERS EUROMETROPOLE | FRANCE

Strasbourg Eurometropole launched its first energy community “The Energy Brewers” in 2020. The cooperative is the result of joint efforts and collaboration between the renewables department of the City of Strasbourg and the surrounding metropolitan area as well as a number of its residents. If you don’t know the story of the cooperative and how it came into being, be sure to listen *to this episode of the CITY STORIES podcast*.

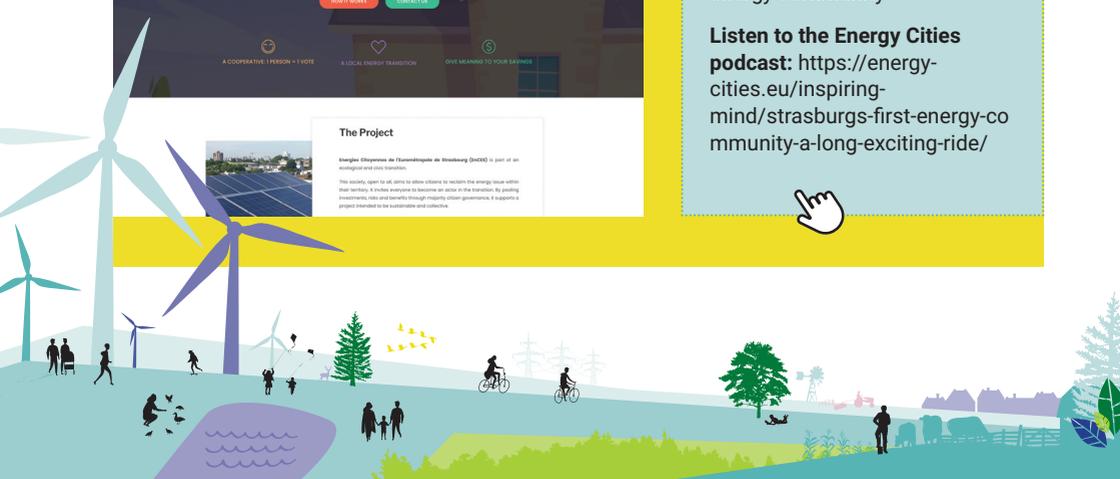
Its website is quite simple, but visitors will find that the main messages such as the WHY-HOW and WHAT are presented well on the homepage. Since it aims to involve each citizen in the project, the language used is purged of technical elements: you don’t need to be an energy expert to understand the message.

The underlying beliefs and motivation are visible from the moment you arrive on the homepage: as a cooperative, it believes in the one person/one vote principle, it desires a local energy transition, and it wishes to give meaning to the local community’s energy saving efforts. Scrolling down, you will see a description of the project, its objectives and the timeline of the different actions.



Visit <https://www.brassEURSdenergie.eu/> to learn more about this energy community

Listen to the Energy Cities podcast: <https://energy-cities.eu/inspiring-mind/strasburgs-first-energy-community-a-long-exciting-ride/>



# CHOOSING THE RIGHT ACTIONS TO SPREAD THE WORD



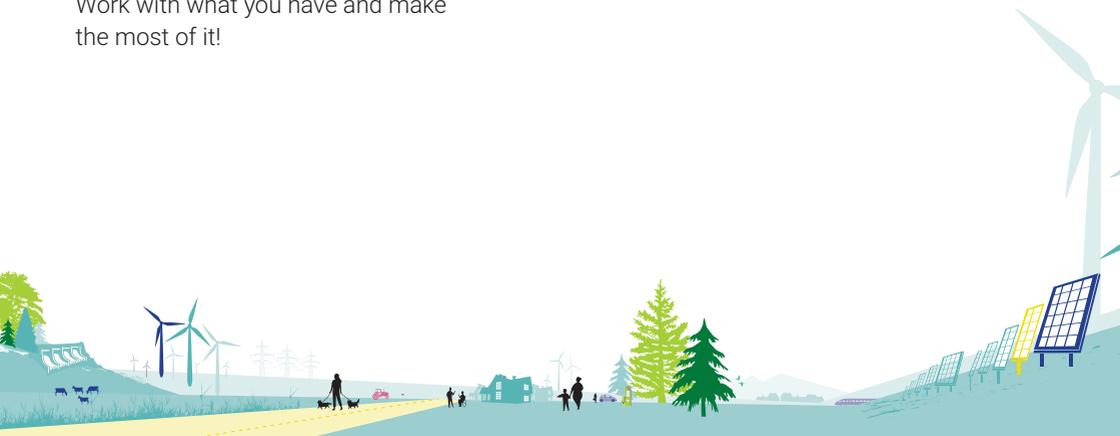
**When it comes to communication actions, there are many options to choose from!** The following section contains a number of ideas, but in the end, the activities you choose should be the ones that are right for you based on the following considerations:

- 1.** The budget you have available for communication
- 2.** The number of people you can count on in your team, their skills and time available
- 3.** What you think your audience will respond better to, where and how you can reach them more effectively

Work with what you have and make the most of it!

## ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVITY/REACHING "UNUSUAL SUSPECTS"

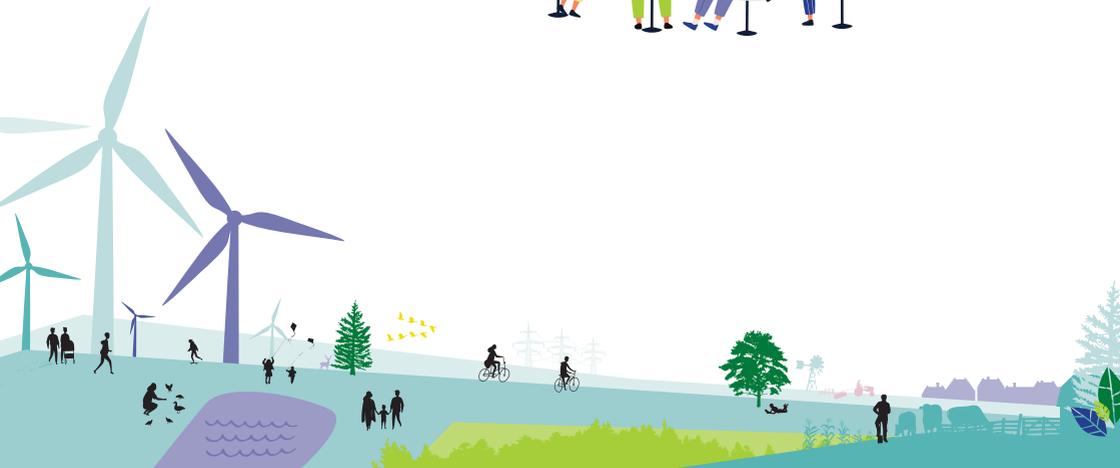
When organising an activity, have you noticed that there are often the same people in the room, or that participation is poor? Energy might not be the easiest subject, and it is obvious that some might be more interested in your project than others because of their field of work, their studies or personal interest. It might also be that the information you shared is not accessible to certain categories of people because you didn't take their situation into account.



## CHOOSING THE RIGHT ACTIONS TO SPREAD THE WORD

### We recommend:

- Taking time and choosing the right moment: time is a precious resource. Try to schedule the activity for a time of day/week that is most suitable for the people you would like to involve.
- Offer different formats: for example, if you would like to involve local youth, social media posts might be an option. If you wish to involve the residents of a neighbourhood and they are mostly elderly, a house visit or a phone call might be best. Make sure information is provided in audio format for the visually impaired.
- Think about age/gender/race/minorities/geography, their concerns and needs (e.g. language issues).
- Make sure meeting rooms are accessible by wheelchair.
- Consider incentives: what would motivate your target audience to join your community or contribute to your project more than once?



# CHANNELS & ACTIVITIES



**Once you have defined your audience and main messages, it's time to think about which channels you can use to communicate and which activities you can develop. Many options are available: some are briefly presented below and described more in depth in Chapters 3 & 5 of this guide. But don't be afraid to innovate: there's a lot of room for creativity in communication!**

## ONLINE COMMUNICATION

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are familiar to most people nowadays, for both work and personal reasons. Therefore you might also want to use them for your project. Before creating an account on any social media platform, you should consider the following:

- Which social media platform is most used by your target audience in your country? Try to select one or two platforms that both you and your audience are comfortable with.
- How much time do you have available to post? Don't underestimate the amount of time it takes to create a profile, build an audience and feed them with content every day. In some cases, and especially if your project or campaign has a limited duration, it might be more effective to use social media profiles that are already established such as one belonging to a partner who has more followers or one that belongs to the municipality that will be more easily trusted as a reliable source of information.
- On social media, videos and images speak louder than words. Try to offer good quality content that your audience can engage with! You, for example, can include pictures of places or people your audience may know. Proximity can increase their interest.



# CHANNELS & ACTIVITIES

## WEBSITES

A website will allow you to have a stable online presence. Nowadays you can build a website on a very low budget, using available templates. Your website should be the place where you display the most important information about your project. Make sure the address is not too long or complex so that it will be easily remembered. You don't need to create too many sections: keep it simple and make sure visitors are able to contact you for more information. Finally, the content should be up to date, in order to establish it as a reliable source of information. What if it's not possible to create a comprehensive website for your project? We advise you to have some kind of online presence regardless. This could be via a simple web page on one of your partners' websites.

## ONLINE MEETINGS

Online meetings can be a very simple way to talk with people if you have no budget for meeting accommodations or travel, and especially if you want to bring people from different cities together to share their experiences. They can be planned much quicker than a regular meeting, and there are plenty of platforms that you can use, allowing you to also choose different formats (training, conference, working sessions, etc). Just keep in mind that personal interaction will be reduced, not everyone has the same IT skills, and people might suffer from online fatigue. Which is why such meetings should not last too long or you should plan regular breaks throughout.



# CHANNELS & ACTIVITIES

## PRINT

### LOCAL PRESS

Using local press might allow you to considerably expand your outreach. Placing news in the local newspaper might come with a price, but it's worth doing if your aim is to reach a general audience. Having a stable presence in local media will reinforce your position and narrative in the community. You for example can invite journalists to the opening of your windmill or solar farm. Or if your community has won a tender, it is useful to send out a press release to announce the news. Also consider profiling your project in the context of a current 'public debate'. Your community energy project, for example, could help reduce people's energy consumption or energy bills.

### BROCHURES, LEAFLETS & POSTERS

A good graphic designer could help you prepare a set of printed materials to give to residents and potential partners. Having a visual identity might come in handy if you wish to develop such communication tools (see more branding tips on page 22). Make sure there is a good balance of text and quality images, and consider the best time and place to use them, especially if you have a small budget. Make sure you don't print too many leaflets or brochures: this might be counterproductive if your project concerns the greening of your city.

### LETTERS

Individual letters delivered to the resident's home might be helpful if they are sent by a partner who is already trusted and well established in the community (the municipality for example). This type of communication, more formal and personal, can allow you to better reach specific segments of the community, for example older people.



# CHANNELS & ACTIVITIES

## IN-PERSON COMMUNICATION

### WORKSHOPS & TRAINING

Energy and especially energy production and sharing are not an easy topic for most people. Therefore organising training and workshops might help them become familiar with the problem you are trying to solve, and also discover what they can do to help.

### NETWORKING EVENTS

Events allow you to establish personal relationships with your community, know your audience and their concerns, and find potential partners to involve in your project. Think small at first: a coffee or kitchen table meeting is not difficult to set up and the intimate environment is ideal for starting real conversations. Events are also a great way to celebrate your successes and give your project greater visibility in your city. If possible, try to link with existing local events that are already well attended, or take part in neighbourhood gatherings.

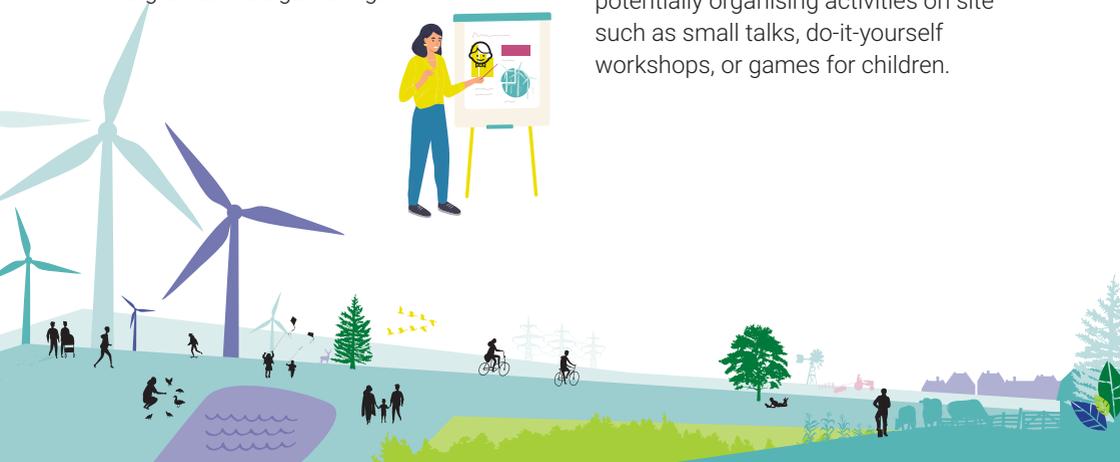


## HOME VISITS & PHONE CALLS

Going door by door (canvassing) is a good way to get a better understanding of the realities of a district and learn what matters to your stakeholders. It's an ideal tool if you have sufficient committed volunteers since it requires a lot of time and patience. To be more effective, consider creating a short script to be shared with the volunteers, and prepare in advance the answers to questions that people are likely to ask. The same script could be used for phone calls if you have less time and people available but have access to a phone list.

## STANDS

A stand at a fair or a truck/cargo bike moving across the main squares, but also in front of museums or shops that share your values, is an informal and friendly way to approach residents. This will allow you to go where the people are and make your project more visible in key locations, while potentially organising activities on site such as small talks, do-it-yourself workshops, or games for children.



# YOUR PROJECT'S VISUAL IDENTITY



**Creating a visual identity is often seen as a fundamental step for an organisation or a project. In reality, it's only a small piece of your communication strategy puzzle, but if done well, it can definitely reinforce it. If you have the budget to work with a professional designer or sufficient design skills within your team, go for it!**

Having a visual identity will help you improve:

- **Positioning:** a unique visual style should help communicate the spirit and values of your activity.
- **Awareness:** people need to remember your project, and a striking visual identity could allow you to stand out.
- **Belonging:** the right visual identity will allow your target audience to relate to your message and feel like they can be part of your project.





## ELECTRA ENERGY COOPERATIVE HYPERION | GREECE

The social cooperative Electra Energy develops community energy projects in Greece, together with municipalities, citizens, NGOs and academia. With Hyperion, one of their community energy projects in the Athens area, its team is promoting collective investments in solar installations. For this, they developed an engagement strategy that includes group chats and meetings with residents, a visual identity that they describe as “reassuring and accessible”, in-person coaching activities but also 1:1 conversations over the phone and a video. They count on word-of-mouth to spread the information, but also on a stable media presence via news and interviews to advertise their project and foster their narrative around “a democratic, inclusive, efficient and sustainable energy system with citizens and local communities at its core”.



Founders of the Hyperion Energy Community.  
© Hyperion Energy Community

**Visit their home page:**  
<https://electraenergy.coop/here-comes-the-sun-first-community-solar-farm-in-greece/>  
**or go to:**  
<http://electraenergy.coop/>



# FINDING SYNERGIES



**When communicating your message, don't hesitate to contact other organisations, companies or people in your city, especially if you see common interests or share the same values.**

They might have more money, be trusted by the community or know the area and the people better, so they could provide you with knowledge, suggestions or direct support. Chapter 4 will go into more detail regarding the opportunities for cooperatives and local governments to join forces to promote a community energy project.



BEST PRACTICES **LICHT LEUVEN****LICHT | BELGIUM**

LICHT – Local Initiative for a Cooperative Renewable Transition – is an initiative of the City of Leuven to accelerate the local energy transition. The aim is to launch projects to deploy renewable energy installations and reduce energy consumption on its territory, with active participation on the part of residents. The city partnered with energy cooperative Ecopower and local association Leuven 2030. Together they cooperate in the development of project ideas and their financing.

In the context of the *SCCALE 20 30 50 project*, they plan to install 10 non-residential PV installations generating 350 kWp in total, 50 residential PV installations generating an average of 3 kWp, and to connect 40 households to a district heating network.

In addition to these technological ambitions, they are using their communication and engagement strategy to actively involve 500 people in the energy community in the coming years. A series of free, in-person info sessions open to all Leuven residents were organised in the autumn of 2021 on different topics: energy sobriety, renewable energy production, and sustainable (re)construction. The LICHT partners are also planning additional actions to incentivise participation by residents. These include an energy sobriety ambassador programme, free energy scans, and access to a collaborative energy monitoring platform.

**Visit**

<https://www.lichtleuven.be/>  
<https://www.sccale203050.eu/>



# NOTES



A large rectangular area containing 20 horizontal lines for writing. Each line is preceded by a small, empty circle on the left side, serving as a bullet point or a marker for each line.



# HOPEFUL STORYTELLING FOR A BETTER FUTURE



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Painting a mural in Sant Celoni by members of a local Som Energia group.  
© Som Energia

Storytelling is a very old craft. Stories have been used throughout history to instruct and lead. In order to create meaningful and long-lasting climate action, we must tell comprehensive climate stories. Not just about disasters and mass marches, but also about resilience and everyday acts of courage. And this is where the community energy story has a role to play. In the community energy network, there are many inspiring stories of people on the ground who are taking back control of the system by jointly developing and democratically managing a renewable energy project. All over Europe, people are bringing the benefits of renewables back home. At a time in which we need to use all available means to address the climate crisis, the community energy revolution can play a significant role. Citizens can, want to and will be part of the solution. Storytelling can be a great and important tool for showcasing the real people behind this energy democracy revolution. In our present information-driven society, whoever controls the narrative, has the power. And the community energy narrative is one of hope, belief, connectedness, empowerment and possibility.

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## WHAT IS STORYTELLING?



**Storytelling is everywhere.** It is present in each of our daily interactions with friends, family and our communities, and in many different forms. Storytelling is us trying to make meaning of events, and creating a

context for what's happening in our lives. In their many different forms, stories are an essential part of how we think, feel, remember, imagine, relate, but also of how we create change.





## WE THE POWER - THE FUTURE OF ENERGY IS COMMUNITY-OWNED PATAGONIA | EUROPE

In April 2022, the 'We the Power' video was launched by Patagonia to spotlight the growing community energy movement across Europe. It aims to demonstrate the advantages to people and the planet that the clean energy transformation could bring. The 30-minute video features the stories of community energy pioneers such as Dirk Vansintjan, the founder and president of REScoop.eu, the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives. Other leaders of the movement include Sebastian Sladek, whose parents started EWS Schönau in the 1980s as a direct response to the potential nuclear dangers exposed by the Chernobyl disaster. Agamemnon Otero OBE, founding director of Repowering London, bringing community resilience to the movement, and Nuri Palmada, board member of Spanish energy cooperative Som Energia, are also featured in the video.

It is a great example of powerful and hopeful storytelling. By sharing the personal stories of community energy pioneers, the We the Power video and the accompanying campaign invite European citizens to imagine a new energy system as an alternative to large, polluting energy monopolies that control the systems of power and money. In place of this outdated and damaging model is one of community-owned, renewable energy production, that is socially innovative and economically beneficial to our local communities.

FIND OUT  
MORE



You can watch the video  
in 7 different languages:  
<https://youtu.be/75A9WGxoUn8>



We the Power movie  
featuring community  
energy pioneers.  
© Patagonia



# WHY STORYTELLING?



## BEST PRACTICES

**30 |** Storytelling is a very valuable asset for the community energy movement. Telling stories is one of the most powerful ways to get people thinking. The power of storytelling lies in the way stories can connect people with each other.

- People are creating the new system that we urgently need.
- They are cooperating and working together for the common good, not for their own profit. Communities are making the world better.
- This represents a true transformation, not a small change. The entire energy system will be different.
- The community energy story is one of local ideas that reinforce a sense of place and pride in the neighbourhood.
- This transformation creates local investment and reinvigorates local economies. The profits and benefits are shared.
- Citizens are demanding an energy system controlled by the people instead of by a few utility companies
- The community energy transition is based on fairness and solidarity.

### THE COMMUNITY ENERGY NARRATIVE | EUROPE



The Community Power Coalition – a diverse network of like-minded organisations that share a common goal of promoting the development of citizen and community ownership in the urgent transformation to a 100% renewable energy system – has developed a common narrative for community energy. Organisations that want to join the Coalition embark on the same narrative.

- The community energy story is a positive one of hope.
- A quiet revolution is taking place throughout Europe.

FIND  
OUT  
MORE

More information about the Community Power Coalition: <https://communitypowercoalition.eu/>



# MERE FACTS AND FIGURES WON'T CHANGE PEOPLE'S MINDS



**A very important argument for using storytelling for social change is that “facts alone don’t change minds”. Stories hold a power that science does not: the power to move hearts and minds, and connect people to a problem. Having good and trustworthy facts and figures about the community energy sector is important since it gives credibility to the organisations working in that sector.**

How many kWhs do I save or produce? What is my return on investment if I install solar panels? How many people are already part of the community? All these facts can convince someone, but you need to complement these with anecdotes and human, emotional narratives. A fact can be amazing or devastating, but when placed in the context of a story that people can relate to, that fact becomes part of a reality we can better understand, react to and address.





## EUROPEAN CITIZENS WANT OWNERSHIP OF ENERGY PROJECTS IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD & FRONTLINES OF HOPE

ECF / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE | EUROPE

In 2021, the European Climate Foundation (ECF) commissioned a study that surveyed public attitudes to wind and solar power in ten European countries. The study revealed strong support for more renewable energy projects, as well as for the direct involvement of citizens in solar and wind energy generation. These numbers show the great potential of the community energy movement.

In 2020, Friends of the Earth Europe launched their 'Frontlines of Hope' campaign, featuring projects on the ground to address climate breakdown and create a fair, fossil free future. The campaign created blog posts and short videos with stories of communities, cities and people who are at the forefront of building community-owned renewable energy, creating green jobs, and tackling energy poverty.

The two campaigns can be seen as complementary. The ECF study increases credibility, while the Frontlines of Hope campaign puts these numbers in the context of a story that people can relate to.



### ECF polling:

<https://europeanclimate.org/resources/europeans-support-new-wind-and-solar-projects-in-their-local-area/>

### Watch the 'Frontlines of Hope' video on community energy:

<https://youtu.be/ZxMtGyOmPVY>

### Frontlines of Hope campaign:

<https://friendsoftheearth.eu/frontlines-of-hope/>



Frontlines of Hope campaign.  
© Solar Town Project



# HOW TO GIVE YOUR STORY IMPACT



**People have very different ideas about what might improve their communities, lives or society. We have the tendency to embrace information that supports beliefs we already hold. This so-called ‘confirmation bias’ is deeply ingrained and hard to change. Storytelling can be a major stepping stone towards changing these belief systems. When crafting a story, you create empathy with the character and situation, thereby inspiring and slowly changing belief systems which might bring about social change.**

Good storytellers stay true to their audience and mission. Being involved in a community project means becoming a very good listener. It is useful to take time to understand what your audience knows and cares about. To get the story to resonate, it’s not enough to get the facts right: you’ve got to get the emotional arc right as well, and therefore you have to listen.

“Being involved in a community project means becoming a very good listener. You should be present in your community often, observing and learning. To understand the issues that affect members of the community, get to know people and listen to them. Take the time to listen to their stories, about themselves and their communities”

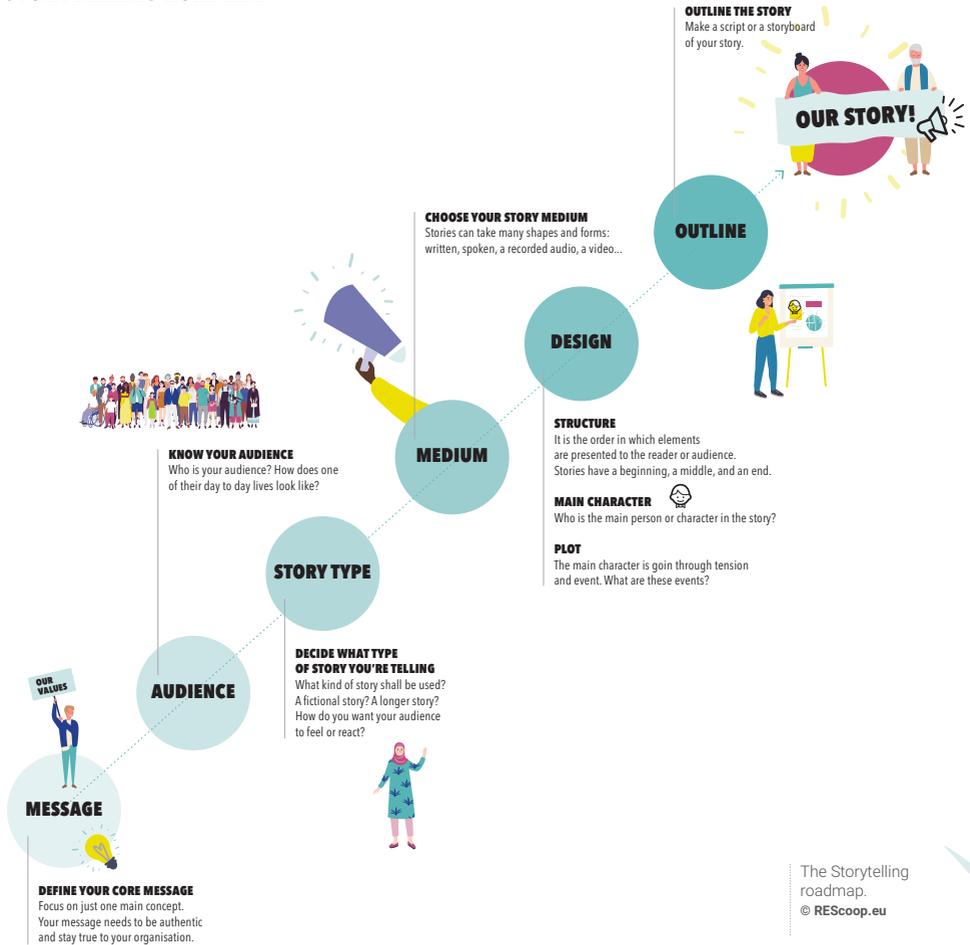
*(Community Energy Guide, p. 70)*

To conclude, the best stories are those based on your inner motivation and personal drivers, creating empathy and tapping into the desire of humans to make the world a better place.



# HOW TO GIVE YOUR STORY IMPACT

## STORYTELLING ROADMAP



The Storytelling roadmap.  
© REScoop.eu



# TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD STORY



## • KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO CONVEY

This is linked to the first point of the storytelling roadmap: the core message of your story (see also the WHY, HOW, WHAT model explained in Chapter 1). You should ask yourself what the purpose of your story is. To entertain? To relay a message? To teach a lesson? Whatever your purpose, keep it in the forefront of your mind as you proceed.

The main message you are trying to convey will impact every aspect of your story, from the type of story, to the plot or the main obstacle your main character is facing, so you need to have it clear from the beginning.

## • OPEN WITH A HOOK

Open your story with a hook to catch your audience's attention. A hook is an interesting incident, question, or problem that encourages the audience to keep watching/reading: it "hooks" their attention. This is especially important for stories spread on social media: otherwise people will scroll past your message and not engage with it.

You can build a hook by creating urgency, starting your story in the middle of an action, implying future or past conflicts, making a surprising statement, creating an emotional connection...



# TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD STORY



- **SHOW, DON'T TELL**

Good stories don't "tell", they "show". Allow the reader to experience the story through actions, words, thoughts, senses, and feelings rather than through the author's exposition, summarisation and description. It will make the narration more immersive, allowing readers to be "closer" to the characters. Dialogues, for example, are an excellent way of showing because they reveal how your character interacts with people: is she shy, is she fun, is she determined? All are capable of inferring this from dialogues, as we do in real life.



- **LIKEABLE CHARACTER**

Your main character and their goals and motivations need to be relatable to your audience: it needs to care about the character and pull for them to succeed. Otherwise, the audience will lose interest in their fate and will leave your story. As stated above, don't say who your character is, show it. It's also good to introduce them in the early stages of the story, so readers can find an element to identify with from the beginning.



- **LENGTH MATTERS**



Stories can be really short – a joke – or very long – a series of novels. The only constraint is the time your audience has available, which is usually very limited. People's attention span is short, so keep your stories as short as possible while still conveying all of the information. To determine the length of your story, you should also consider the medium through which you want to disseminate it. A 10-page story is too long to be published as an op-ed in a newspaper, but too short to be published as a book. For example, videos and animations for social media should be under 7 minutes, and preferably under 4. If you have too much information, split it into several stories.



- **DON'T GET STUCK IN THE DETAILS**

In line with keeping your stories as short as possible, you should focus only on what the audience needs to know. Excessive details can muddle the story and the core message, so your communication effort will be less effective. People may even lose interest before finishing the story. When you compose your storyline, make sure that each character, point, or principle somehow relates to the main point you are trying to drive home.



## TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD STORY

### DATA CHECK



#### • CHECK YOUR FACTS

Even if you know your content intimately, double check dates, locations and facts in general. A single data mistake could harm the reputation of the entire story. You should also check if your data is up to date. If you use data, be mindful that it should not be too time sensitive if you want your story to have a reasonable lifespan. You can also indicate the time your data refers to, so you will be without blame if you share the wrong information. However, your story will age much quicker.



#### • BRING THE MESSAGE HOME WITH AN “AHA” MOMENT

An “aha” moment is a moment of sudden inspiration or discovery, a moment when you would exclaim “Aha! That’s it!”. Make the climax of your story the aha moment that brings home your core message. At that point, your audience will have maximum engagement with and understanding of your message.

“A-HA!”

## BEST PRACTICES



### REPOWERING LONDON | UK

“By creating these projects, we can change the narrative around energy, community and what life can look like. We try to support as many people as possible by sharing this narrative, and the more people we work with, the more they tell our stories. The thing is about stories, the more often they’re told, the truer they become. Hopefully one day we don’t have to tell the story as the narrative becomes the world we’re all living in.”

*(Community Energy Guide, p.22)*

**DAVE FULLER**, ROOFTOP PROJECTS MANAGER  
OF REPOWERING LONDON.



# NOTES



A large rectangular area containing 20 horizontal lines for writing notes. Each line begins with a small empty circle on the left side, serving as a bullet point or a guide for line placement.



# ENGAGEMENT AT THE HEART OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES



HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY AROUND YOU?	43
FROM AMBITION TO ACTION	45
MEMBERS AS AMBASSADORS	53
SKILLS	55



The Ecopower team visiting their neighbour cooperative in Wallonia 'Vents du Sud'.  
© Ecopower cv

**In this chapter you will learn about the fundamental importance of including engagement strategies in your communication activities. Engagement with members is absolutely necessary for creating and retaining an energy community. It is the key element that distinguishes the energy community from traditional top-down energy companies.**

Through a close relationship with members, energy communities build renewable energy projects, and contribute to a clean, fair and democratic energy transition. The more deeply engaged the members are, the more loyal they become, the better they support your core values, the greater their willingness to volunteer or contribute, the more likely they are to keep their membership, and the better they understand when rates go up or services are reduced. Therefore, an engagement strategy should always be part of your overall communications strategy.

In this context, it's important to understand the difference between push and pull communications.

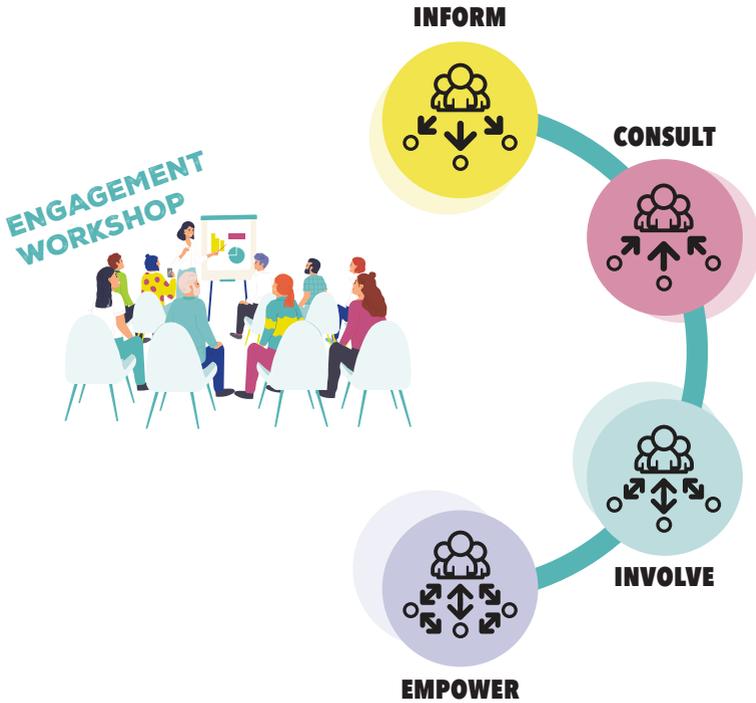
- **Push communications:** you send your messages directly to the public, for example by disseminating flyers or sharing information on your website. These activities are usually a great way to reach out to new groups of stakeholders.
- **Pull communications:** you want to bring the members to you. For these communication activities, you have to listen and understand the issues and concerns of a local neighbourhood in order to echo those needs while building your project. It's in this last category that community building takes place.

To secure involvement from members, an energy community needs to explore different approaches to engagement, based on the members' interest and level of involvement. These approaches may range from sharing information and consultation during the conceptualisation stage of the project, to encouraging active participation such as collaboration and empowerment during the project's implementation and operation. Because of the great diversity of energy communities and the context in which they operate, there is no one-size-fits-all approach.



# ENGAGEMENT AT THE HEART OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES

## DIFFERENT ENGAGEMENT LEVELS





## THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WITH CONCRETE EXAMPLES ECOPOWER CV | BELGIUM

Ecopower is a large Belgian energy cooperative with more than 60,000 citizens who jointly produce green and local energy. Because of its size, Ecopower engages in different communication activities to keep its members' engagement high over time.

**Inform:** Ecopower issues a quarterly digital and printed 'Powerpost' for members. This informative brochure gives updates about the cooperative and the larger energy cooperative network in Flanders.

**Consult:** Ecopower regularly organises 'Energie cafés' for its members. With these interactive neighbourhood events, held at various locations, Ecopower aims to broadly inform its members about energy-related topics and – more importantly – hear their opinions and exchange ideas.

**Involve:** Ecopower gives its members the opportunity to participate in innovative research projects. Actively involving members in these projects not only increases the know-how within the cooperative, but members are able to directly participate in shaping the energy system of the future.

**Empower:** Each year, Ecopower organises its General Assembly. All members are invited to participate in this meeting and thus in the collective decision making of the cooperative. Members for example can decide on the size of the dividend that will be paid, appoint the board of directors, or approve new investments. In addition to the more formal parts of the General Assembly, Ecopower also takes the opportunity to get its members' input on specific topics.

The team of Ecopower  
in front of their  
windturbine.  
© Ecopower cv



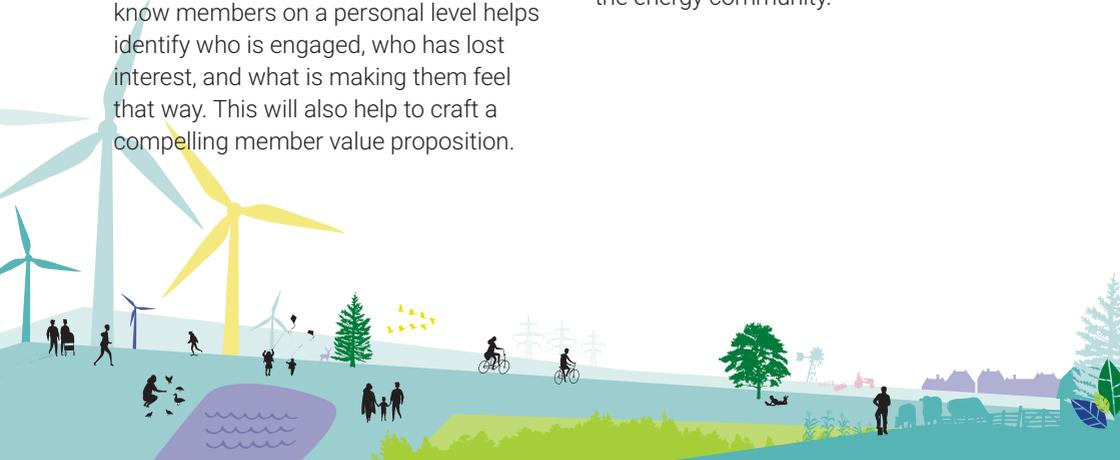
# HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY AROUND YOU?



**Knowing your members is the process of engagement that takes place before the membership journey begins. It's important to identify your (future) members and which communication tools best suit them.**

It's important to know that without adequate engagement strategies, resources allocated to the activity will likely result in insufficient results. For this reason, consider investing more time getting to know your members before applying specific tools and techniques. The result of this activity should be deepening member engagement, since the content feels more personal. Getting to know members on a personal level helps identify who is engaged, who has lost interest, and what is making them feel that way. This will also help to craft a compelling member value proposition.

Motivation for joining an energy community varies: Some do it only for the financial incentives. They, for example, receive a dividend or low-cost energy. Others join the energy community because they believe it's the right thing to do out of ideological considerations. But there are also members who join because of the so-called "affective motive": they are members of the energy community because they feel good about it, they feel connected to the mission of the energy community, and they know that the energy community will offer them reliable services. It's this last group that will show the most commitment and that can play an active role within the energy community.



## HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY AROUND YOU?



### CREATING PERSONAS WITH DIFFERENT ENGAGEMENT INCENTIVES

One way to segment your audience is to create 'personas'. A persona is a fictional character that you create in order to profile a certain group of people. By creating a real character for your audience segment, it will become easier to think of appropriate tailored communications for each of them.



**Financial incentive:** Lisa is a 35-year-old woman living in the city. She joined the energy cooperative in her neighbourhood because it could supply her with low-cost energy. When first reading the annual report of the cooperative, she was happily surprised about the dividend that all members would receive that year. Lisa is proud that the company of which she is a part is doing well economically. For Lisa, clear, transparent and reliable information about the activities of the cooperative makes her feel connected to it.



**Normative incentive:** Yemi is a 25-year-old student and a climate activist. He is very concerned about environmental issues. Yemi is not only vocal about what is going wrong, he also wants to be a part of the solution. Yemi joined his energy cooperative because it supplies its members with 100% renewable and locally produced energy. Yemi likes to follow the cooperative's Twitter account since it underscores the position of the cooperative in the public energy debate.



**Affective incentive:** Georgina is 70 years old, retired and socially engaged. Georgina feels emotionally connected to the goals and core values of the energy community she is a part of. She truly believes in the added value that her energy community brings to the transition to energy democracy. Georgina likes to talk with other cooperative members during member meetings. She is an active member of the cooperative's Slack group and she values voting during the General Assembly.



# FROM AMBITION TO ACTION



**When an energy community grows, the group of members also becomes more heterogeneous and not all members feel equally involved. It's not an easy task to first understand the different groups within your community and then define appropriate engagement activities for each of them.**

## LADDER OF ENGAGEMENT

A tool that can be used for thinking about the different levels of engagement of those involved in your energy community is the so-called “circles of commitment” model. It classifies your community into 5 different groups, and describes how people can engage at each level and how they can move from one level to another, called a “ladder of engagement”. The circles are concentric, which means each group is contained in the groups that are larger than it.

After knowing and segmenting your members, it's best to create contextualised content for your different audiences. Personalising content is a great way to increase member engagement since the content is more relevant to the member, making them feel more engaged. The more committed someone is, the more personal your communication with them should be (and vice versa). It's important to develop inclusive and appealing communications in which it is clear to community members how they can participate in the design, planning and implementation of your project.

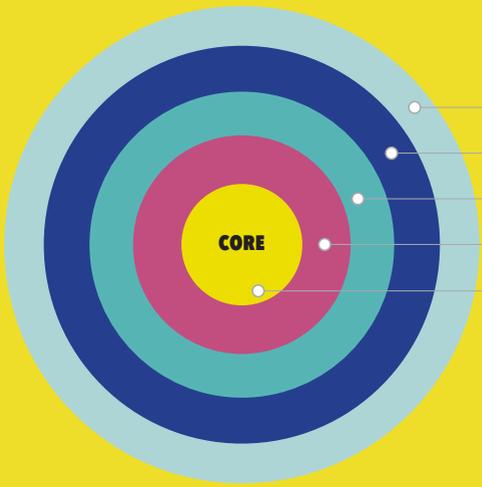


# BEST PRACTICES



## THE CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT URSTROM EG | GERMANY

### THE CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT



- COMMUNITY
- CROWD
- CONTRIBUTORS
- COMMITTED
- CORE

The Circles of Commitment by Michael Pulsford.  
© Commons library

We will explain the different circles of commitment with examples from UrStrom, an energy cooperative founded in 2010 in Mainz, Germany. In March 2022, UrStrom celebrated its 500<sup>th</sup> member, and now owns and operates 17 PV systems, good for more than 1.1 megawatts peak (MWp) of installed capacity. It supplies locally produced green electricity to members and the general public, and offers them an e-car sharing service with 8 electric cars at 5 sharing stations as well as cargo bike sharing.



## FROM AMBITION TO ACTION

### 1. COMMUNITY – the group of people you want to reach

The largest circle is the “Community”, representing the group of people you are trying to reach with your energy project and who can potentially be a part of it. Although it might seem obvious, it’s important to identify the stakeholders and the groups you want to reach out to. The identification phase is crucial, since it will help you understand the environment in which you are working.

*The UrStrom community consists of citizens living in Mainz and the Rheinessen region.*

### 2. CROWD – the members of the community who showed an initial interest in your project or topic

The second circle is your “Crowd”, those who have been in touch with your energy project in one way or another. These are, for example, people that saw a social media post, signed a petition, subscribed to your newsletter, etc. Those in the Crowd are more engaged with your energy community than those in the general Community, however, it’s still largely a passive engagement. That said, it does make sense to see people in this group as persons who are willing to connect. There is good reason to believe that you can bring the people from your Crowd to your next circle of commitment.

*UrStrom implemented several activities to connect with the citizens of its community in order to make those people part of its Crowd. For example, to introduce people to its e-car sharing services, UrStrom lets them take test drives. This first – likely positive – experience is a good starting point for potential further involvement. Another example is the organisation of an annual event – open to all – called “UrStromUnterwegs”. It showcases inspiring energy transition projects to its broader community. A monthly meeting for members and interested citizens called “UrStromClub” was quite popular as a way to discuss, in person, recent activities of the cooperative and everything connected to energy, mobility and the climate crisis. Due to the pandemic, this meeting now takes place online, making it possible for those living farther away from Mainz to now also join in the exchange of valuable information. UrStrom also participates in various local public events, and provides information about the cooperative and electric cars. UrStrom can be found online on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.*





## THE CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT URSTROM EG | GERMANY CONTINUED

### **3. CONTRIBUTORS – those members of the Crowd who volunteer, buy shares or donate**

The next level of engagement is the one where people contribute to your energy project by, for example, buying a share or volunteering on an occasional basis. Contributors are not systematically engaged, but can engage at important moments.

*In March 2022, UrStrom had more than 500 members who had purchased one or more co-operative shares. From the beginning in 2011, UrStrom founded the "UrStromClub" to create a feeling of togetherness. The management and supervisory board of the cooperative, together with the members, are invited to this monthly meeting in an informal context, like a neighbourhood centre or a café. Through the UrStromClub, members get to know each other personally and can exchange views on new projects and current developments in the field of renewable energy. It's also in the UrStromClub that members can sign up to volunteer in areas such as IT, administration, data protection, project acquisition and PV monitoring. All important decisions are prepared, discussed and made at these meetings.*

### **4. COMMITTED – those Contributors who structurally engage with and support your project**

Committed members are engaged with your energy project in a more permanent manner. These members are capable of independently organising activities for the energy community. This level of engagement is more demanding compared to the level of Contributors. These members feel a certain responsibility to make your energy project a success, and manifest a higher level of belonging to the project.

*The annual general meeting of UrStrom is an important platform to engage its committed members. Here, among other things, the supervisory board is elected, which controls the work of the management board. Each member has one vote, regardless of the number of*



## FROM AMBITION TO ACTION

co-operative shares they hold. Participation in the General Assembly and in the formal decision making process of the cooperative is a great way to engage committed members.

### 5. CORE – those Committed people without whom the energy community would not exist

The Core of your energy community are those people you need to actually run your energy projects. In many cases, the people in the Core are the ones that took the initiative in the first place. If your energy community has a staffed team, these team members are also part of your Core. An energy community is rarely launched by just one person, but rather by several people coming together to make it happen. Therefore, facilitating good teamwork and team dynamics is important in this context.

*UrStrom was launched in 2010 by nine founding members. Today, UrStrom is governed by four management board members, supported by a five-member supervisory board. The management board handles the day-to-day business and the supervisory board oversees and supports the work of the management board. Volunteers organise events, monitor, clean and repair the solar PV installations, maintain the website, manage the e-car-sharing platform, design communication materials and contribute to the success of UrStrom eG in many other areas.*



FIND  
OUT  
MORE

**UrStrom:**

<https://www.urstrom.de/>

<https://www.urstrom-mobil.de/>



Urstrom Mobil.  
© UrStrom eG

## FROM AMBITION TO ACTION

### ENABLING INTERACTION

Individuals often join energy communities to meet like-minded people. This allows them to learn and grow. Your members will like feeling that they're part of a growing community. By simply bringing people together, you can boost engagement, build community, and offer value to your

members. So consider basing your member engagement strategy on encouraging member networking and interaction: LinkedIn groups, Slack channels, Facebook groups or cosy in-person meetings where people can interact at any time.

### BEST PRACTICES



### INTERACTION AMONGST MEMBERS PARTAGO | BELGIUM

Partago is an e-car-sharing cooperative in Ghent, Belgium, founded in 2015, and committed to contributing to a more sustainable transport system. With support from over 1,000 local citizens and small businesses, the cooperative operates a fleet of 111 electric cars that can be used by the members via a mobile app.

Partago's range of engagement activities includes setting up a Loomio platform for its members. This interactive online forum aims to connect members with each other and with the Partago team. The Partago community can post messages about electric driving, the neighbourhood, the cars, etc. Members can find a lot of useful information on Loomio, and there is a dedicated group for Partago Buddies: active users and ambassadors who occasionally do test drives, attend an event, move cars, etc. Loomio was developed by the cooperative Enspiral (New Zealand).



Partago:

<https://www.partago.be/>

Loomio: <https://www.loomio.org>

FIND OUT  
MORE



Group of citizens in front  
of a cooperative e-car.  
© REScoop.eu

## FROM AMBITION TO ACTION

### THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY - FORMALISING MEMBERS' EMPOWERMENT

The General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the energy community. It consists of all members and is responsible for defining the outlines and strategy of the energy community. Voting at the energy community's General Assembly

is the ultimate act of engagement. For the organisation on the other hand, it's a great moment to engage members by allowing them to participate in the democratic decision-making and contribute to stable governance in the long term. Therefore, engaging in communication activities to maximise the number of members joining your general assembly can increase overall member engagement.

#### BEST PRACTICES

### REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES SOM ENERGIA | SPAIN

Founded in 2010, Som Energia is Spain's largest renewable energy cooperative with over 75,000 members located throughout the country. Som Energia supplies renewable energy to more than 130,000 citizens. It uses a bottom-up governance model. The general assembly is the main decision-making body. Each member has one vote, regardless of how many shares they hold. The day-to-day operations are handled by the board of directors and a staff. Som Energia has implemented a decentralised model, giving autonomy to several local groups. These – usually geographically centred – groups can organise their own regional assemblies, create information campaigns, recruit new members or organise other capacity building activities. Some groups for example focus on education and training, while other groups set-up e-car sharing services. Sometimes, local groups form independent cooperatives to advance their own causes. In this case, Som Energia is cooperating with the new local cooperative.

**Som Energia:**  
<https://www.somenergia.coop/>

Som Energia School  
in Mataró (Barcelona).  
© Som Energia

## FROM AMBITION TO ACTION

### HOW TO ASSURE LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT?

It's a challenge to keep the initial engagement of your members high over time. You can include tactics in your communication activities to increase retention and keep members engaged for longer.



1. Stay true to your story. Show what you stand for. Be transparent and communicate about how you run your business. When fees increase, for example, communicate this and explain why.



2. Communicate about your project's results and create space for listening and reacting to critique and complaints from members.

3. Show your unique identity. Proudly proclaim that you are an energy community. The language you use in your communications can strengthen this public identity. For example: use the word "members" instead of "shareholders".



4. Make digital and segmented content. Especially if your energy community continues to grow into a large organisation, making a personal connection with each individual member no longer possible.



Try to gain insight into why members have joined your energy community. Collect this information when they are onboarded. For example, set-up a welcome programme that includes a survey. This will enable you to communicate in a more targeted way from the start.



5. Think about the frequency of your communications. Make choices and develop a plan. Communicating about everything will result in information overload. Find out what's important to your members and see how you can use it.
6. Don't demand too much from your members and be sensitive to the time they need to spend engaging with your project.

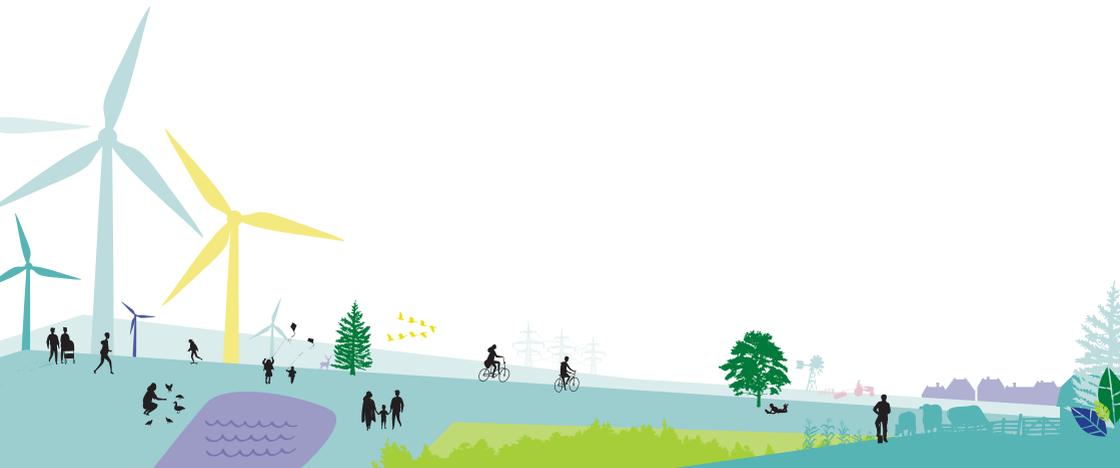


# MEMBERS AS AMBASSADORS



**Word-of-mouth advertising plays a major role in many energy communities. Therefore, it might be a good idea to develop promo packages for members to help them inform their neighbours. This potential is especially high with members who have recently joined or members who are strongly connected to your community. Brochures, posters, stickers to put on a bike or window, an “invite friends and family” button in a welcome email, eco cups,... all these activities can help members spread the word and therefore increase the impact of your communications.**

An ambassador campaign can be designed for strongly committed members who want to convince not only friends. Recruiting “celebrity” members or influential residents as ambassadors can be a good idea since these people are usually regarded as important and credible, and can potentially convince a larger group of people to take action.



# BEST PRACTICES



## 'PUT A COOPERATIVE SHARE UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE' ZUIDTRANT | BELGIUM

Zuidtrant is an energy cooperative founded in 2016 in Antwerp, Belgium. The cooperative invests in renewable energy by installing solar panels on public and private roofs, and supports and guides citizens in lowering their home energy use. The cooperative has also invested in its local district heating network. At the end of 2021, Zuidtrant launched a "member get member" campaign, packaged in an end-of-year theme. It encouraged members to give a cooperative share to family and friends as a sustainable Christmas gift. To this end, it designed a Gift Card and provided its members with clear instructions.

54 |

*Kadobon ZuidtrAnt*

Leg eens een duurzaam kado onder de boom

KOOP EEN AANDEEL VAN ENERGIECOÖPERATIE ZUIDTRANT

[HTTPS://WWW.ZUIDTRANT.BE/DOE-MEE-WORD-COOPERANT](https://www.zuidtrant.be/doe-mee-word-cooperant)

ZuidtrAnt:  
<https://www.zuidtrant.be/>




Gift voucher Zuidtrant.  
© Zuidtrant cv



# SKILLS



**Energy communities can continue to operate autonomously and independently in a democratic and economically sustainable way, only if they are managed and controlled by people who are sufficiently trained and skilled. It's important that members regularly receive transparent and clear information about the financial, economic and social status of their energy community. Equally essential is that staff and volunteers working in the energy community are able to effectively and qualitatively manage and monitor the energy community.**

Therefore, the energy community needs to pay attention to the training and education of its members, directors, management and staff so that they can contribute optimally to the development of the energy community.

Members of an energy community can be a source of expertise and even launch their own complementary initiatives. Training and education are key components of an energy community, since they make possible a better appreciation and understanding of energy by members and local citizens. Therefore, understanding training needs and providing adequate educational activities and coaching should be a top priority when developing an energy community. It's useful to team up with other energy communities or organisations to jointly provide for these training needs.





## TRAINING PROGRAMME

### ÉOLIENNES EN PAYS DE VILAINE (EPV) | FRANCE

The energy community EPV, founded in 2003, has over 2000 members who jointly invested in 5 local wind turbines. EPV's mission is not only to produce local renewable energy, but also to educate the community around energy savings. They created an MDE programme (maîtrise de l'énergie, or energy demand management) that has developed various activities to make citizens aware and inform them on energy efficiency.

For schools, for example, they developed an "escape game" about energy savings, an interactive game that educates young people to be more aware of their energy use.

EPV also has an educational van that visits markets and other public events to share information in an accessible way to a broad audience, focusing on energy efficiency and how to reduce the energy bill.



Citizens group with paper wind turbines.  
© Éoliennes en Pays de Vilaine

Visit:  
<https://www.enr-citoyennes.fr/>



# DIFFERENT ACTORS, DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES



LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
COOPERATIVES

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Bro Dyfi Community Renewables Ltd (BDCR) is a Welsh community owned renewable energy company. It aims to promote wind and other renewable energy projects that benefit people in the area and that are subject to a significant degree of local control. © BDCR

There are different actors that can be involved in energy communities. Under European legislation, citizens, small and medium enterprises, and local authorities can set up a legally recognised entity to produce, store, share, consume and sell the renewable energy they produce. In this chapter, we will focus on municipalities and energy cooperatives, two actors whose partnership often leads to successful community energy projects. When it comes to communicating, each also has its own strengths that you can take into account when planning your project's communication and engagement activities. When launching a new community energy project, you might want to reach out to local authorities or check if there are existing energy cooperatives in your area!

## LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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### TRUST

Local authorities willing to develop community energy projects have every reason to encourage inhabitants and stakeholders to take action. In order to do so, they might have to relinquish a bit of control and decision-making power, and be ready to listen, to take into account how the

community responds to communication activities, and adapt the project accordingly. Municipal staff and all departments should also be informed about the project and the benefits of wider participation in the energy transition, in order to support the communication activities.



## LOCAL AUTHORITIES

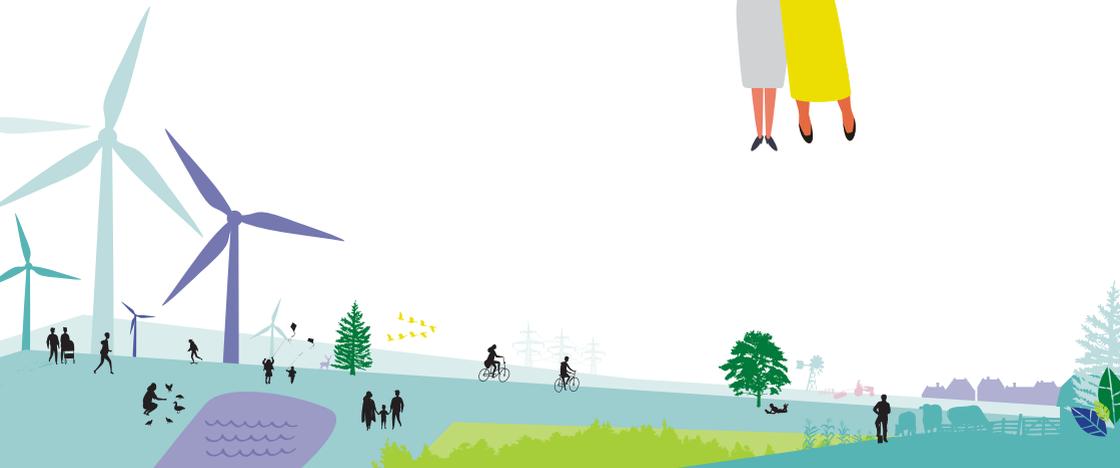
The communication should be as open and transparent as possible, in order to build confidence in the project. Local governments are often seen as a reliable player, so they can play a very important role in explaining the processes, facilitating discussions and addressing the concerns of the local community. Impactful communication will make for a stronger local partnership.

### VISIBILITY

Cities have access to many “official” channels to spread their message. From newsletters to magazines, websites or direct mailing, a communication with a “city stamp” is likely to receive greater attention. Local governments are also likely to have established connections with media and the press that could further increase the visibility of a community energy project and facilitate its replication in other contexts.

### NETWORKING

For successful communication, you will need to reach out to other local actors, community leaders or related initiatives that could amplify your message. A local authority usually has a wide network of partners (universities, businesses etc.) and peers that can help you with word-of-mouth promotion or even decide to support your project in a more direct way.



# COOPERATIVES



## COMMUNITY ENERGY IS IN THEIR DNA

Citizen energy cooperatives have the development of community energy projects as their number one priority. They therefore can often take the lead in communication activities. They might use their knowledge to explain the opportunities of citizens' participation in the energy system, but also the legislative context in which the project operates, or provide more technical information on how energy can be produced and shared locally.

## FLEXIBILITY

A citizen energy cooperative can be more flexible than a municipality-based initiative. Thanks to its way of working and the presence of volunteers, they can reach the target audience at times and places that better suit that audience.

## ACCESS TO KNOW-HOW

An energy cooperative will be able to explain the project in detail thanks to its knowledge of the local energy system. Its team should be able to help clarify technical aspects as well as the benefits and financial returns expected for the community. This information will be very useful to your project's communication activities. Moreover, because energy cooperatives are often strongly anchored in the neighbourhood, they can communicate directly with residents, thereby removing local opposition to energy projects. Through their governance and tailored communication activities, cooperatives directly involve citizens in the project, giving them ownership of the produced energy. This can result in a massive increase in acceptance and support on the part of citizens.



BEST PRACTICES **VILADECANS' PARTNERSHIP FOR A LOCAL ENERGY OPERATOR**  
VILAWATT INITIATIVE | SPAIN

In Viladecans, a public-private-citizen governance partnership (PPCP) involving the Municipality, the municipal companies VIGEM and VIMED, the Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona, the Catalan Energy Institute and various private companies (Ubiquat, Cíclica, Gespromat, LIMA, EGM) resulted in the launch of the Vilawatt initiative, from March 2017 to October 2020, with the support of the European Union's Urban Innovative Actions (UIA). This PPCP established a new local energy operator promoting renewable energy production and energy justice. The energy operator managed 4 services to improve governance and facilitate the transition towards energy sovereignty:

- Renewable energy supply;
- Integral energy retrofitting that allowed for the renovation of 3 buildings and 60 dwellings;
- Creation of a local currency linked to energy savings, to be used in local shops, but also to raise awareness on sustainable energy management;
- Engagement and citizens empowerment activities around energy.

The engagement activities were organised with a strategic participation plan, including for the year 2019:

- The creation of an open space to enable learning and exchanges among citizens, businesses, professionals and schools.
- Monthly learning programmes about energy for residents and schools
- Involvement of professionals in working on future trends for the sustainable building sector
- Free energy audits for local shops

The city is now bringing the Vilawatt experience to 3 additional European cities who would like to replicate the project: Seraing (Belgium), Nagykanizsa (Hungary) and Trikala (Greece)!

**FIND  
OUT  
MORE****Visit:**

<https://www.viladecans.cat/es/vilawatt-3> and <https://uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/viladecans>



# NOTES



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# COMMUNITY ENERGY CAMPAIGNS



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Westmill Solar is one of the UK's oldest community solar projects with over 1,500 members. © Westmill Solar

In this chapter, we will highlight several communication campaigns relevant to many energy communities throughout Europe.

# AWARENESS RAISING



64 | Awareness campaigns are one of the most popular, effective, and flexible ways to generate public interest, educate your community about your mission, explain why it matters, and show supporters how to get involved. It is important to understand that not everyone has the same level of awareness. Therefore, it's very important to inform people about the community energy basics.

When developing your awareness campaign, try to structure and prepare it in a strategic way. Set your goals, target your audience, define your messages, and choose the appropriate tools and channels to share your message (see Chapter 1). It's important to understand that people will participate in your awareness campaign because they are attracted to your mission. Take advantage of that natural connection by keeping the messages in your campaign mission-focused. The community energy movement has many allies. Make maximal use of that benefit by thinking of which networks to contact in order to help and support your organisation and the awareness raising campaign.





## TEN REASONS TO START OR JOIN A COMMUNITY ENERGY PROJECT COMMUNITY POWER COALITION | EUROPE

This campaign created by the Community Power Coalition highlights the advantages of community-owned energy. This campaign image was used by several members of the Community Power Coalition to increase awareness within its different networks. REScoop.eu for example published a blog post and shared these reasons, one by one, through its social media channels. <https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/news/ten-reasons-to-start-or-join-a-community-energy-project>

**1** Help build the system needed to **stop the climate crisis**

**2** Community renewables **redirect money** from fossil fuels

**3** It can **reduce energy poverty** in your area

**4** You'll get to **know your neighbours** and strengthen your community

**5** You will **produce your own renewable energy**

**6** Helps **educate** people on the issues of energy, climate and democracy

**7** It keeps the **money locally** in your community

**8** You will **show other communities** what is possible

**9** It will contribute to creating a **more local, more circular economy**

**10** You will be building the kind of **world you want to see**

If you are interested in using this picture for your own communication purposes, feel free to reach out to REScoop.eu: [info@rescoop.eu](mailto:info@rescoop.eu)



# BEST PRACTICES



## ENGAGE ENERGY CITIES | EUROPE

From 2010 to 2012 Energy Cities rolled out its ENGAGE campaign: a participative communications campaign implemented by local European authorities. The idea of the campaign was to create a communication tool that local authorities could use to share the *Covenant of Mayors* objectives locally. The campaign required personal energy-saving pledges from all citizens and stakeholders as contribution to the cities' energy and climate targets.

A user-friendly online tool – still available and used today – allows local authorities to create posters showcasing the pledges of each participant in order to demonstrate the power of combined energy-saving actions.



Visit: <https://energy-cities.eu/project/engage/>

FIND OUT MORE 



Aachen campaigners with their posters.  
© Aachen Municipality



# POLITICAL PRESSURE



**Since the beginning of 2019, the European Union's set of directives and laws called the "Clean Energy Package for All Europeans" gives power to citizens to take ownership of energy transition projects through energy communities. This new European regulation acknowledges citizens as important actors in the energy market, and outlines governance principles and activities for energy communities. People, local authorities and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can set up legal entities that must be supported by their national governments.**

This also means that community groups now have the power to demand their rights to participate in the energy system. Energy communities could, for example, write a letter to their energy minister and local political representatives, to explain that the group wants to be part of the energy transition and that the Renewable Energy Directive should be fully transposed into national law, to support the community energy project.





## **THE DUTCH CLIMATE AGREEMENT**

### **ENERGIE SAMEN | THE NETHERLANDS**

Throughout 2018, the Dutch government held dialogues with stakeholders across the country in order to agree on goals for a climate agreement for The Netherlands, including the value of local and community ownership of renewable energy projects. During these so-called “round tables”, the Dutch community energy movement was well represented by Energie Samen, the Dutch federation of energy communities, which directly influenced the debate. The final agreement was a great success for community energy, containing a non-binding objective stating that all new wind and solar projects should be 50% owned by the local community.



**More information can be found on the website of the Dutch federation of energy cooperatives, Energie Samen:**  
<https://energiesamen.nu/>



Windturbine inauguration in Neer.  
© Energie Samen



BEST PRACTICES **LETTER TO INFLUENCE GREEK  
TRANSPOSITION PROCESS ELECTRA | GREECE**

In February 2021, an informal coalition consisting of Greek energy communities, REScoop.eu, Electra Energy, WWF and Greenpeace published a report, which was also sent to the Greek government, addressing the problems that energy communities are facing, and proposing recommendations on how to overcome these issues by properly transposing the European directives on community energy into Greek law. As a result, in March 2021, the group was invited by the energy ministry to discuss the topic. Since then, the government has been actively working on the transposition, and a dedicated working group in the ministry was set up to work on energy communities. In the meantime, the community energy group continues to apply pressure by sending follow-up letters to the ministry.

**More information:**

[http://electraenergy.coop/report\\_feb21/](http://electraenergy.coop/report_feb21/)

**FIND OUT  
MORE** 

In Greece, community energy groups demand their rights.

© Electra

# GROWING MEMBERSHIP



**Energy communities usually start with a core group that structures the project. A moment will naturally arise when the time becomes ripe to encourage more citizens and local stakeholders to join in your initiative. Growing your membership base will cost time and effort. Appealing and diverse communication activities will be key to motivating the broader community to join.**

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

When recruiting more members, first consider the demographics (factors like age, race, sex, education, income level,...) of your target audience. Identifying those groups that are currently underrepresented in your project will allow you to increase the “social capital” of your project, and to target your communication activities in a more strategic and efficient way.

## CUSTOMISE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

It may seem obvious, but you are more likely to reach a younger citizen via social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Instagram. You might consider social media advertising to reach and convince specific target groups (based on demographic information provided by the social media platform). The better you can connect your message with your target group, the more likely this group is to consider joining your project. On the other hand, some target groups might appreciate reading printed brochures or being able to ask questions at a community meeting. In summary, the key question you should ask yourself is how to diversify your communication materials in order to reach your different target groups.



## GROWING MEMBERSHIP

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

Face-to-face contact is time consuming but also very effective. A neighbourhood meeting for example can be a great platform of exchange and a powerful tool to raise awareness of your initiative.

After all, energy communities are all about citizen empowerment. Enabling interaction within your community will be important to your membership campaign. A good network of ambassadors can support these activities. A neighbour telling someone else why he joined the energy community will have more impact than any other digital message.



### MEMBERS MEETINGS ZUIDERLICHT | THE NETHERLANDS

Zuiderlicht is an energy cooperative founded in 2014 in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The cooperative collaborates with the city, sports and youth clubs as well as schools to jointly develop solar production projects. The cooperative regularly organises 'member meetings'. The purpose of these meetings is to inform members about the cooperatives' activities and to encourage dialogue among community members, to promote a common goal, and to leverage the knowledge and experience of the group in order to advance its initiatives. Different topics can be addressed during these meetings, focusing on inspiration, education and exchange. The meetings are also used as a platform to celebrate successes! Usually these meetings are organised in person in an Amsterdam neighbourhood, and the meeting provides space for words but also for different forms of art like poetry. In doing so, the cooperative attracts both young and older members.

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More information:  
<https://www.zuiderlicht.nu/>



Members of Zuiderlicht dancing at a Member's meeting. The cooperative combines word and art for engaging a broad audience. © Zuiderlicht



# CROWDFUNDING



**One of the biggest challenges you will face is funding your project. You will need money, in different amounts and forms, from the pre-planning stage through the development, investment and operational phases. Overcoming financial barriers requires a mix of innovative approaches and existing instruments. Community energy projects are typically financed by citizens. Amongst the variety of innovative solutions to choose from, crowdfunding is an activity that many energy communities engage in to raise money directly from the community. Crowdfunding can be a great way to empower the larger community to support the causes it believes in.**

Any crowdfunding activity will benefit from good preparation. Moreover, it's important to choose a good online crowdfunding platform (or build your own), and to present a compelling and transparent story. Use your social media channels to increase interest for the project and to drive people to the crowdfunding platform. In your crowdfunding communications, try to answer the following questions:

- **Problem and solution:** What problem are you trying to solve and how? Why is this a problem?
- **Transparency:** How much funding do you need? How exactly will you spend it? What happens if you don't reach your target?
- **Who are you:** What is your background and why should I trust you with my money? Do you have supporting partners?



BEST PRACTICES **CROWD INVESTING FOR SOLAR ROOFS IN KRIŽEVCI ZEZ | CROATIA**

ZEZ (Green Energy Cooperative) is an energy cooperative in Croatia with 18 members. Because of the restrictive cooperative-related legislation in Croatia – in Croatia a cooperative member, for example, is ineligible to receive employment related benefits – raising capital for production projects through membership fees was not an attractive option for ZEZ. So the cooperative created a crowdfunding platform to finance solar production projects. This project was the first of its kind in Croatia and saw the creation of a wide-ranging partnership between ZEZ, the City of Križevci, Regional Energy Agency North, Greenpeace Croatia, Solvis and ACT Group. With the active collaboration of the City of Križevci, in no time, over EUR 53,000 was raised in the form of 93 citizens' micro loans to ZEZ. The City of Križevci provided administrative and financial support in the preparation phase and has signed a 10 year PV power plant lease agreement with ZEZ. The PV power plant production is mainly used for self-consumption, and the lease fee is lower than the achieved savings on building energy costs, thus both consumers and investors are granted an energy-saving bonus for a period of 10 years. ZEZ and Regional Energy Agency North developed a cost-effectiveness analysis and the general design documentation; Solvis, a PV module producer from Croatia, installed the rooftop PV plant. With these investments, ZEZ has installed and operates two solar power plants (30 kW peak) in the city of Križevci.



**More information:**  
<http://www.zez.coop>

**FIND OUT  
MORE** 



Energy Cooperative ZEZ  
collaborating with  
the City of Križevci.  
© Zelena energetska zadruga



# CREATING SPACES TO EDUCATE



**Community energy creates spaces to educate people on the issues of energy, climate and democracy. Energy communities raise awareness about the energy transition within the community, and empower citizens to take action such as energy savings. The main reasons to actively provide education to staff, members and the broader society are two-fold. First, this type of training opportunity will engage your members and connect them to your energy community. Second, education can empower your members to change their energy behaviour, which in many cases will directly contribute to your overall mission.**

There are different ways to create this education space. You for example could ask your team to share its expertise in house renovations or mobility during a workshop or webinar. You could also facilitate peer-to-peer training, capitalising on the human capital within your community. You could for example create a forum where members can share among themselves their tips for energy-efficient measures in homes.





## TRAINING YOUTH TO JOIN THE GREEN ECONOMY

### REPOWERING LONDON | UK

Repowering London is a not-for-profit community energy development organisation that empowers urban and disadvantaged communities to plan, fund, build and benefit from a low-carbon future. This work includes providing mentoring, training and work-experience opportunities that prepare young people to join the Green Economy. For example, trainees in its paid Youth Training programme develop skills in low-carbon and renewable technical feasibility analysis, solar panel making, installation and design, energy efficiency, community engagement, CV writing and interviewing, and teamwork.

Repowering London -  
Trainees. © T Mitchell

**More information:**  
<https://www.repowering.org.uk/>



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# COMMUNITY ENERGY COMMUNICATION GUIDE

COMMUNITY ENERGY COMMUNICATIONS  
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Today, many people still don't know what community energy is and the benefits it can offer in collectively addressing climate and social challenges. Spreading the word about community energy is thus an important aspect of leading the transition to energy democracy.

This Guide will help you to kick off communication and engagement activities for the development of local community energy projects. It will inspire you with numerous examples of cities and cooperatives that successfully built a local, community-led renewable energy revolution!

**Spread the word about our story of hope, belief, connectedness, empowerment and possibility. This book can help you.**



REScoop.EU

[www.rescoop.eu](http://www.rescoop.eu)



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