

Tips for Strengthening Local Energy Committees

- 1) ***Think big, start small:*** Start with small, manageable projects that will lead to relatively near-term success, are highly visible, and will give your committee a sense of accomplishment.
- 2) ***Understand and build upon people's strengths:*** Everyone has certain skills, knowledge, and interests – and these are oftentimes complementary. Find out what people like to do and what they are good at – and then identify concrete projects that you folks can work on to apply their skills/strengths.
- 3) ***Understand what people value and what they feel is at risk:*** People are drawn to action when they feel that something that the value is at risk of being lost or diminished. You can tap into that motivation by understanding what folks care about.
- 4) ***Undertake broad educational events to raise awareness and identify potential folks to serve on your committee:*** There are people in your community who are interested in doing something to address energy/climate action – they just need an opportunity to come together. You can hold public informational forums, show environmental-related movies, or invite a speaker on an energy/climate change related topic. Then, publicize it broadly throughout the community. Folks who are interested in the topic will attend. Make sure you have a sign-up sheet for your committee, and announce the date and time of your next meeting. Be sure to make follow-up calls to participants.
- 5) ***Secure the support of town elected officials at the outset:*** Selectboard and city council members hold the keys to many local actions – whether it is approving a budget items, getting an item on the town warning, and adopting a town resolution or ordinance, among others. Solicit the support of elected officials at a very early stage to inform them of your efforts and solicit their ideas on what your priorities should be. A great way to get your elected officials' attention and support is to help them reduce municipal energy use/costs!
- 6) ***Build coalitions and collaborative efforts:*** You don't have to do it all by yourself! Contact other organizations/institutions within your communities and find out how they might like to get involved in energy/climate action, identify where your interests converge, and undertake joint activities. Whether it is schools/students, local civic/community groups, elected officials, or local retailers– the opportunities are there.

Tips for Retaining Volunteers

- Make sure volunteers clearly understand and share in the group's focused mission – and keep that mission in the forefront of people's minds. Volunteers give their time and expertise because they believe in the cause. Keeping that central – perhaps in writing on the wall even – is important.
- Run a good meeting, being cognizant of people's limited time. That means coming to the meeting with an agenda and sticking to it!

- Make certain everyone knows each other. Introduce each other, and consider opening each meeting with a quick go-round 'check in' with people. Building strong personal connections among group members helps to strengthen working relationships on the committee and people's commitment to the shared cause.
- Make one person — often the Chair — the single point of contact for group members.
- Make certain everyone knows how to communicate and connect with each other. Create, update and disseminate a contact list.
- Take notes of the meeting. Identify (and consider rotating) a notetaker at the beginning of each meeting. Capture the key ideas and specific tasks and make certain people know what is expected of them so they can follow through.
- Set high standards of activity. Members will take their cue from you.
- Do what you can to ensure that members have ownership in the group; that could be ensuring they work on issues they care about most.
- Do things at meetings: transact business; make decisions; review past work; plan new things. People will be more committed to things that they have agreed on as a group. They will feel that they are an active part of working towards their goal. Besides, they won't keep coming to meetings unless they accomplish something.
- For each activity, get agreement on group goals. Achieving them will give you a real feeling of accomplishment. When there are no challenging goals, members can feel that activity is unimportant.
- Training and empowering volunteers is important; provide them opportunities to attend information or training sessions, give people leadership roles on issues etc.
- Encourage people to help each other out on jobs. "Every person for themselves" is not good committee work.
- THANK YOUR VOLUNTEERS! The #1 reason why volunteers quit is because they do not feel appreciated or think what they did mattered.
- Cultivate and welcome creativity... People have different skills and styles; a group, which fosters and capitalizes on that can benefit from that diversity.
- Have fun! Focused meetings are essential, but weaving a little fun into group sessions is also important. Consider a brown bag potluck. Start with a game or a story to open the meeting. Organize a fun event that you can all enjoy!
- Celebrate victories or milestones, even small ones. Community organizing is often hard and time-consuming work. Make certain you take the time to recognize when something has gone well or when the group (or an individual) has achieved success.