

Climate Action Top Ups



Learning from Climate Action top-up grants in Wales

The National Lottery Community Fund Climate Action top-ups was a pilot, developed to inspire environmental action from a range of community groups funded by us. In partnership with [Sustainable Communities Wales](#) and [Renew Wales](#), we provided an opportunity for National Lottery funded community groups and charities in Wales to respond to the climate change emergency. We targeted groups that wouldn't normally be associated with environmental activity, and we have been really encouraged by what we have learnt. Some of the groups saved considerable amount of energy and money, others enhanced their local environment while others noted benefits for their health and wellbeing.

So how did it work? We asked the groups involved to commit time to developing plans, and to share their experiences with us. Sustainable Communities Wales and Renew Wales provided practical advice and the organisations involved could find their own ways to respond to climate change.

We provided extra funding for each organisation to deliver their ideas, they could ask for up to £10,000, and we did award a few with a little extra.

As well as being an opportunity to support communities across Wales to reduce their environmental footprint, it was an opportunity for us to test and learn as a funder. We remained flexible with our approach throughout and continuously monitored and reviewed how we were working, and the impact for the organisations we funded.

We brought all of the groups together at a launch event in Summer 2019. Participants received advice in the Autumn and were asked to apply for funding by late November 2019 and deliver activities by end of February 2020. We asked them to tell us about their learning in late February 2020.

Video: <https://youtu.be/dCM6sR9vyxY>

The National Lottery funding paid for

- ✓ Energy and water efficiencies for 23 buildings, including; solar panels, insulation, boilers, lighting, thermostats, carpets, electric stop cocks and windows
- ✓ Building knowledge/awareness activities in six communities (including one market garden feasibility study)
- ✓ 5 gardens/nature areas
- ✓ 5 orchards
- ✓ 2 electric charging points
- ✓ 2 allotments

The impact

It's still relatively early days, so we haven't yet seen the full impact. Some of the organisations involved haven't quite managed to complete the work yet and the COVID-19 lockdown has slowed progress for some.

Energy and water efficiencies

Making improvements to buildings is arguably a quick win. With a relatively small amount of funding, it can reduce energy and water consumption, save organisations money and improve the general atmosphere and appearance of the building. For twelve of the building projects supported by Sustainable Communities Wales, the estimated the annual savings will be:

236,049 kilowatt hours saved (which is the equivalent to the carbon sequestered by planting 2,760 tree seedlings grown for 10 years*)

56 tonnes of CO2 tonnes have been saved

* [Source](#)

Some examples:

- Coleg Elidyr replaced their boiler saving 44,389 kWh and 2.4 tCO2 annually.
- The Hwb Torfaen replaced over 40 light fittings to LED. The annual saving is estimated to be £2,019 and 5.1 tonnes of CO2.
- Bracken Trust anticipate a 32% reduction in energy costs, which equates to a saving of £1,063 annually.
- River Dee Community Church anticipate a 68% reduction in energy costs, which is a saving of around £889 annually.
- Halo Leisure replaced the plate heat exchange system and insulation at their community leisure facility. This has reduced the gas consumption by an estimated £1,200 a year.
- Oasis Cardiff installed waterless urinals which have saved more than 16,000 litres of water in just a few months.

Improving knowledge and changing behaviour

Six of the organisations had learning or behaviour change as a key objective. For others, it was a by-product. The Mid Wales Food and Land Trust undertook a feasibility study which has given them much greater knowledge.

“The research has given us considerable insight into how activities that are considered 'green' within the community gardening sector can actually be feeding climate change, and that new ways of looking at the whole impacts of each activity are necessary to result in a way of planning and acting for climate change amelioration. For example, composting, seen as a sustainable solution, actually generates considerable amounts of CO2 and greenhouse gases throughout the composting process. We've now introduced measures into project design so that the gases generated are actually used effectively as a resource within the system so that the problem becomes part of the solution. Just saying that you're sending less waste to landfill no longer suffices.

Whilst the research was for a new project, the impact has already affected the way we work on existing activities, as now the board have asked us to look at what we are doing and see if any 'retrofitting' is needed to mitigate adverse impact of what we do, or to look for more environmentally efficient ways of doing what we do.

The directors, who are all volunteers, have a much greater understanding that all our activities have environmental impacts, and that considering these at all stages makes a better organisation and better projects. Leading by example and being able to explain what we are doing and why is seen as more effective than claiming 'green' credentials without the substance to back them up.”

Most of the outdoor projects have demonstrated it is a great vehicle for building awareness.

Menter Iaith Fflint a Wrecsam

“Pupils at the local school have been involved in the planning and want to help the project manager carry out the planting and care of the trees. The community, including the local school children, have also been thinking about and considering the next steps for developing the second part of the orchard and the type of events to encourage more sustainable and environmentally friendly living and to protect and increase biodiversity that they would like to see take place there in the future.”

In other cases, awareness and building knowledge has been an unintended outcome.

The Hwb Torfaen replaced over 40 light fittings to LED:

“Because the lights are so much brighter, we don't need to use all of the lights on all of the time so behaviour is also being changed and less lights are being turned on. We now have an environmental policy, we have 2 young people who are now "Climate Champions" and becoming carbon neutral is at the forefront of our minds, this grant has changed the culture of our organisation.”

Biodiversity/habitat creation

Most of the gardens and orchard developments are in their early stages and we are likely to see the full impact after a few years. It is a requirement that they use native species.

Cyngor Tref Amlwch Town Council

Creating a community grow garden, wildlife conservation site and educational nature hub. This will include raised beds, an orchard area, soft fruit planted area, herb gardens, rewilding zones, bird hide and feeding station (assembled and maintained by the local community), a nature trail, native hedge species and additional planting of key plant species to increase and support biodiversity.



Confidence building and a catalyst for other ideas

The organisations supported told us that they now feel more comfortable in taking climate action in their communities. There is also strong evidence of further action beyond the top up activities.

Borth Family Centre - "To help with energy efficiency and saving on costs we are having the windows in our main hall double glazed. We are planning a couple of repair style cafes come 2020 as set out in this plan, and we are making small changes within the organisation. For instance, whilst we had already changed over to using real soap instead of from plastic pump down containers, we now recycle crisp packets via TerraCycle. With the build up to Christmas we have done with one of our parents - making our own Christmas crackers using reuse or eco-friendly materials - and one parent had made for them a fabric Christmas cracker hat with velcro on the back in order 'one size fits all', it was machine washable and is something that will last."

Listen to our Third Sector Insights podcast with Renew Wales and Valleys Family Church to find out more about their experience of taking part in the pilot. [Click here to listen.](#)

What did we learn?

Communities need little persuasion to take part.

Of the 30 organisations we approached, only two organisations weren't in position to take part due to capacity, or because they were unable to complete the work within the timeframe of the pilot.

Advice is important

From a funder's perspective, it enabled us to limit the amount of information we required from grant holders and to make quick decisions as we had the reassurance that grant holders had received appropriate objective advice.

From a grant holders' perspective 88% said that the advice was important with, 53% saying it was very important. Menter Iaith Fflint a Wrecsam told us:

“The advice from Sustainable Communities Wales was excellent, and we were able to have confidence that we were addressing the most important areas and that the quotes we were getting were reasonable and from reputable companies. When obtaining quotes we were able to go back to the companies and ask for clarification on certain areas due to the insights Sustainable Communities Wales gave us.”

We are also grateful to Renew Wales for finding and putting us in touch with our mentor, Iwan Edwards of the North Wales Wildlife Trust. Iwan Edwards has been a great help to us in designing the orchard and it is great that he continues to be involved in the developments as he is now Project Manager and is leading on the development of the orchard.”

Funding is important

All of the organisations told us that they felt that the funding was important with the overwhelming majority (96%) identifying it as very important. It is clear that the organisations feel unable to fund or prioritise activities such as these.

“Our timeline for some of these improvements were years, not months. It accelerated the process.”

“There was no budget to introduce the PVs, but they were in our plans at the beginning.”

Was £10,000 enough?

There was an equal split between those that said it was 'about right' and 'needed more'.

“This was a top up grant that did not involve any competitive tendering, it was big enough to make a significant impact and I see it as a timely gift that we are very grateful for. Under those circumstances it was about right for us.”

“We were able to do a lot with the money, but now that we are more “aware” we have lots of plans for how we can make even more changes, this is thanks to the report undertaken by Sustainable Communities Wales, we have big plans for the future.”

Overwhelming positive experience for those taking part - We debated hard whether to hold a launch event which would require people to travel from across Wales. It was the right decision to go ahead as it gave the pilot a focus, an opportunity for people to ask questions and speak to ourselves and partners. It also gave the grant holders time to network which they valued.

Influencing factors

Timeframes and money restricted what participants decided to do.

Swansea Community Farm told us “I think the short timescale added pressure and felt a little like the film Brewster’s Millions. We are a very small organisation who already had stretched workloads at this time due to fundraising and delivery commitments and a change in staffing which led to this being a particularly busy time. Although this was a great opportunity- it felt rushed and meant that other things had to be put aside and that extra hours needed to be worked.”

Not all of the organisations have completed their activities. Implementation of ideas fell between December to February which we realised would be difficult for some activities such as community gardens. Other reasons:

- Storms and bad weather have delayed progress
- Delays in receiving goods, particularly specialist equipment
- Getting permissions
- Having the resources to devote the time to the task

What’s next?

We set out with the intention of testing whether we could make an effective contribution to reduce the impact environment/carbon emissions by working with grant holders. Whilst it is still early days there is clear evidence that even with small amounts of funding, we can make a difference. There is a willingness from community groups and charities to do this. The combination of advice and funding made the pilot achievable and impactful.

We have used this learning to develop the next stage of the pilot - Climate Action Boost. In October we will invite another cohort of community groups to take part in Climate Action Boost. Compare to the top-ups, there will be a larger focus on groups developing ambitious action plans for long-term organisational action on climate change from our partners [Sustainable Communities Wales](#) and [Renew Wales](#). We will also increase the size of additional funding available and provide more time to develop and implement activities. Climate Action Boost will enable us to keep learning and growing as a funder to ensure that we can support and enable a more environmentally sustainable future for the third sector.

[You can find advice on reducing your environmental impact here.](#)