

Sustainable Steps Wales – Action Grants and Egin Grants

“Net Zero – Net What?”

Insights on language and communication in
community climate action projects



Insight Report #2
November 2025



Asedau Segur
Camau Cynaliadwy Cymru

Dormant Assets
Sustainable Steps Wales

Ddarperir gan
CRONFA GYMUNEDOL
LOTERI GENEDLAETHOL

Delivered by
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
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About Sustainable Steps Wales - Action and Egin Grants

Sustainable Steps Wales is delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund and supported with money from the Dormant Assets Scheme. Action Grants and Egin Grants are two of the four Sustainable Steps Wales programmes. They support The National Lottery Community Fund's commitment in Wales to:

- create a sustainable future
- reach new audiences who want to take action on climate change.

Egin Grants (2023–2030) aim to help community groups to take action on climate change and live in a more sustainable way. Funding is available for up to £15,000. It is open to groups that receive support from the [Sustainable Steps Wales – Egin Mentoring Service](#).

Action Grants (2022–2028) aim to address climate change in communities and help people live in a more sustainable way. Funding has been awarded to 14 projects, ranging from £10,001 to £350,000. You can find out more about [Egin Grants](#) and [Action Grants](#) on the Fund's website.

About the evaluation

Severn Wye Energy Agency, with Liz Bickerton Consulting, was appointed by The National Lottery Community Fund in 2022 to evaluate the Sustainable Steps Wales – Action Grants and Egin Grants programmes. The evaluation team aims to generate programme-wide learning and evidence of impact, focusing on how the grants engage new people and groups in climate action, motivate behaviour change, and reduce carbon emissions. The evaluation will run until 2027.

This is the second Insight Report in a series to be produced during the evaluation, along with detailed project case studies and annual reports.



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1. Introduction

This is the second Insight Report for the evaluation of the Sustainable Steps Wales – Action Grants and Egin Grants.

The Insight Report aims:

- through deep dives into programme activities, to provide an opportunity to reflect on challenges that arise from a community-led climate change initiative
- to capture learning and to inspire others, in particular other community organisations (either potential applicants to The Fund or not) thinking of embarking on projects similar to those supported by SSW.

The theme of this Insight Report reflects a concern that emerged from project annual /interim reports about the barriers that were created to participation because of the language used about climate change during their project activity.

Project staff reported that people felt patronised, excluded and sometimes confused by the language used, leading to behaviours such as the “rolling of eyes” and general disengagement from activities.

Three case studies, highlighting how projects have approached language barriers accompany this Insight Report. The three projects are summarised in the appendix to this Insight Report.

2. Research Questions

In this Insight Report, we explored the following key research questions.

- a. What barriers has the terminology/language used in climate conversations created when engaging with diverse communities?
- b. What techniques have projects used to overcome these barriers?
- c. What success has been achieved? What have been the frustrations?
- d. Do the techniques and approaches differ between types of communities, different types of organisations (public, private and/or third sector) or different settings?
- e. What learning can be shared with other SSW grant recipients?

3. Methodology

We explored the key research questions using the following methods.

- An in-depth analysis of project reports produced by the three case study projects.
- An overview of **written reports** for all 10 other (non-case study) Action Grant projects submitted to The Fund and any material (including reports) provided by the 15 Egin Grants that had reported by 1st October 2025.
- **Site visits to three case study projects (below).** Three projects were selected to inform this study (below). Case studies were written up and sent for approval to the featured organisations. These case studies are published alongside this report.

The three projects were selected because they each highlighted the barriers that language posed when engaging diverse populations in climate change conversations in their annual /interim reports. In these reports, they each described methods they had used to overcome barriers that language created, and they shared resources they had developed. The three case study projects are different to the case studies selected for the 2024 Insight Report (Inspiring People).

During the visits we:

- interviewed project staff
 - observed project activities
 - spoke to project participants (where available).
- Notes, observations and materials from **SSW - Action Grants and Egin Grants Learning Event**, held in Newtown on September 23rd 2025. Representatives of 10 Action Grant projects and one Egin Grant project were represented at the event.. The event was an opportunity for funded organisations to share their experiences and good practice when using language in climate conversations.
- Background reading (mainly project sponsor websites) to understand the operating context of the projects supported by SSW- Action Grants and Egin Grants.

4. Case Studies

The following three projects informed the findings in this Insight Report.

- **Down to Zero.** A Community Benefit Society established by **Cynon Taf Housing Association** that aims support community led environmental activities that help tackle climate change.
- **One Planet.** A project by **Innovate Trust**, an organisation that works with people with learning disabilities, autism and other additional needs.
- **Sustaining a Legacy.** A project by the **Community Impact Initiative** that aims to engage local community members in climate action through the regeneration of empty properties.

A summary of these projects is provided in the appendix.

5. Barriers to Engagement

Project staff highlighted a range of language and communication barriers they faced when talking about climate change and the environment with participants. The following summarises the main points made.

- Unfamiliar language.** Unfamiliar language can include jargon or simply words used in a context unfamiliar to people. Project staff from Innovate Trust soon found that they needed to talk to participants in a stripped back way because almost no-one had a concept of what 'energy' was so, staff spoke instead to individuals about how they currently used appliances and what small changes they could make. Other examples of unfamiliar language quoted by project staff included terms such as "local provenance" or "sustainability".
- Relevance.** If the language is unfamiliar then people do not relate the issues to their own lives. Project staff at the learning event spoke about how they used the word "nature" rather than "environment", this being a more relevant term for project participants.

The lifestyle examples that are used may not be appropriate. Using metrics such as number of air miles used for example is unhelpful for people who do not fly regularly or at all. A Community Impact Initiative tutor said,



"There're not many people using private jets round here, so reducing your air miles isn't relevant. Everyone fills a kettle so only filling what you need is relevant."

One project staff member at the learning event referenced "culture wars" to describe the feeling of being blamed for problems caused by others.

Relevance also means grounding communication in the reality of participant's lives. Dealing with day-to-day challenges is difficult for many participants. People impacted by the cost of living, leading busy lives and facing up to other life challenges are not able to prioritise climate concerns.

c. Methods of communication. Project staff highlighted the need for inclusive methods of communicating, especially in written form. Literacy was an issue for some people engaged in projects. The Community Impact Initiative soon found that classroom sessions did not work, with negative connotations that many associated with school.

d. Confidence. Not having the relevant vocabulary can lead to lack of confidence so that, even when people are interested in engaging in conversations about climate change, they may not engage. This can be harder for some groups in the community than others and can be linked to lack of opportunity. The following quote illustrates the frustration.

'I feel I can't take part in discussions about climate change. I don't think that people will listen to me, so to be honest I don't bother.' - Innovate Participant.

e. Opportunity. Some people lack – or are not offered by others – the opportunity to participate in conversations about the climate and therefore do not get exposed to the use of certain words, phrases or concepts. Some participants may not have responsibility for their energy bills or general management of households. This means that they have no experience of the choices to be made, for example choosing an energy supplier, shopping for food or making choices about the cleaning products they buy for the household.

Innovate Trust said that accessing activities through which people with learning disabilities can engage with climate conversations can be challenging. Community gardening activities for example are difficult to access through a lack of support, anxiety regarding mixed public

events, poor physical access and difficulty in understanding how to find and sign-up to opportunities.

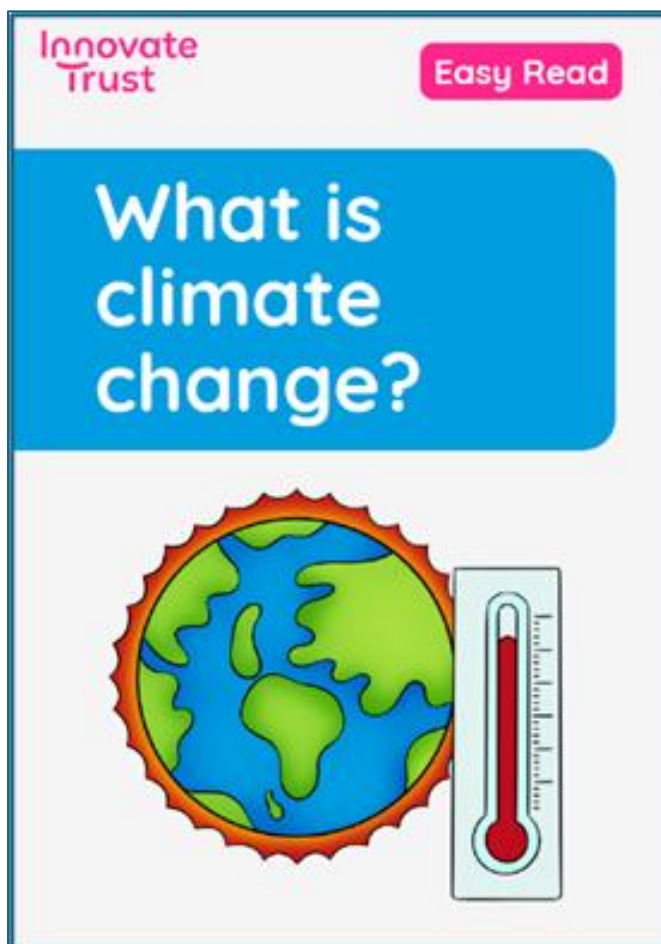
- f. **Negative language.** A reluctance to engage in climate conversations was sometimes reported to be due to the use of negative language. For example, project staff at the learning event reported that the continuous language of doom and gloom turns people away.

6. Overcoming Barriers

The case studies and the learning event provided evidence for how projects had sought to overcome language and communication barriers. The key methods are listed below.

a. **Simple language**

Innovate Trust said, that “stripping back” the language used was important when trying to engage people in climate conversations. They have produced simple resources to explain the concepts and promote engagement.



Examples of Innovate Trust Resources



b. Relatable language

Projects have used terms such as “helping nature” as opposed to “environmental sustainability” to make the outcomes of the actions more relatable to people. Project staff stressed the importance of knowing the audience and conveying to them the positive impacts that behaviour changes could have on their lives. Making conversations relevant to people’s lives and what they care about, such as improving the world for grandchildren has been important.

Women Connect Fife use personal stories to make messages relatable and place an emphasis on intergenerational communication so that messages come from familiar community members. Other project staff have found that who delivers the messages is crucial. The people delivering the messages need to be relatable to the local community; not those with limited local understanding or connections, such as some academics or highly skilled experts who can seem distant.

Those projects that are focussed on specific audiences such as people with disabilities or children are very conscious of language and ways of communicating that are appropriate for their audiences. Trees for Tomorrow (the first Egin Grant to be awarded) for example use storytelling about the life of a tree as a way of communicating climate messages to schoolchildren.

c. Incidental Climate Change

Down to Zero, working with Social Farms and Gardens, developed a way of working called “incidental climate change” that engages local people through “incidental climate conversations” and supports behaviour change.

The term has been coined from best practice Welsh/bilingual education of incidental Welsh. Incidental Welsh is where Welsh is integrated and used unconsciously/subconsciously in everyday conversations that would otherwise be monolingual.

Incidental climate conversations often occur during practical activities and start with the everyday benefits of an activity rather than focussing on its climate positive credentials. Some project staff at the learning event called this approach “finding a way in” to describes the way in which incidental climate conversations happen on the back of other activities.



Climate conversations have been introduced by explaining in practical sessions, “this is why we do this” to prioritise the non-climate benefits first. For example, “we do this to improve the vegetables produced as well as being a climate friendly approach”.

Climate positive messages have been introduced subtly during activities including community growing, mending bicycles or retrofitting buildings.

Down to Zero: Prioritising the non-climate benefits such as better vegetables.

The Community Impact Initiative soon discovered that the classroom-based approach did not work. Participants did not engage. The way forward was to include climate conversations alongside the “on the job” practical skills.

Dref Werdd worked with young people who are not in education. They received training on how to strip down old bikes and repurpose them as electric bikes. The programme and conversations focussed on developing skills and training of the young people first, which then contributed to environmental sustainability.

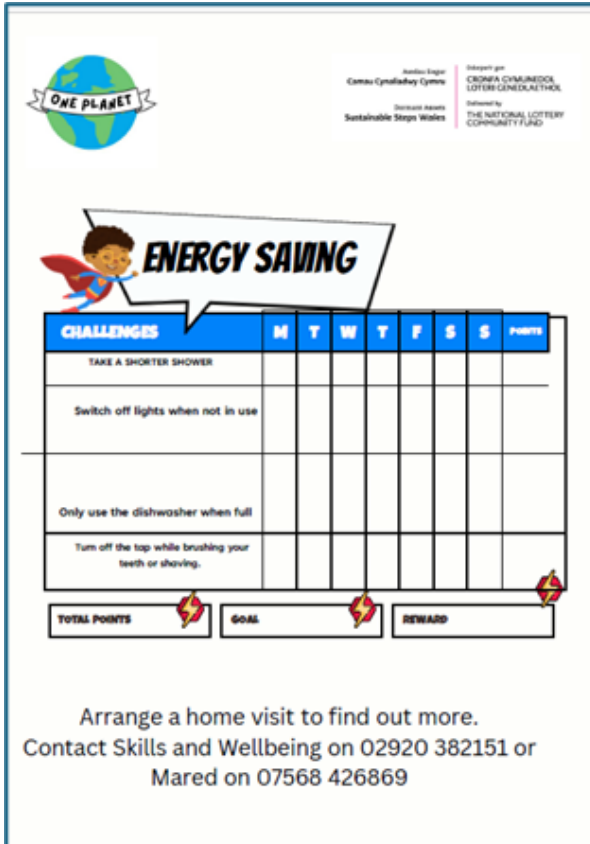
d. A Strengths Based Approach

Innovate Trust are keen that any climate conversations start from a strengths-based perspective i.e. what people can do or are doing already. Emphasising specific, concrete benefits has made individuals more open to discussing climate change and more receptive to moving on to thinking about how it might affect their community, the UK, and beyond.

Down to Zero emphasise the importance of an incremental approach, building on existing and new skills developed through the project.

e. Games and Challenges

Some projects have used friendly competition as a way to encourage engagement and to communicate messages.



ONE PLANET

ENERGY SAVING

CHALLENGES	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	POINTS
TAKE A SHORTER SHOWER								
Switch off lights when not in use								
Only use the dishwasher when full								
Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth or shaving.								
TOTAL POINTS								
GOAL								
REWARD								

Arrange a home visit to find out more.
Contact Skills and Wellbeing on 02920 382151 or
Mared on 07568 426869

Innovate Trust has developed the idea of “energy vampire hunters” as a challenge for participants following a home visit. The challenge involves identifying which appliances or behaviour are sucking energy (like vampires) from the home and encouraging participants to track new behaviours.

Gilfach Goch found that friendly personal challenges were an effective way of keeping people engaged in conversations, for example challenging people to count how much food waste they saved.

Community Impact initiative used a group exercise that matched names to definitions. This helped participants gain a mutual understanding and was completed as a group, so people didn’t feel singled out if they didn’t know.

Innovate Trust challenge to change behaviour away from high energy use

7. Inspiring Others

“Inspiring Others” is a key outcome of the SSW - Action Grants and Egin Grants. This section considers how project staff are achieving this outcome in relation to helping others to talk more accessibly about climate change.

Project staff highlighted examples of how they used networks and events to promote the use of inclusive language to others and better communicate climate conversations more widely.



Down to Zero invited Social Farms and Gardens Camau Gwyrdd Champions (community growing groups) to an event at the Down to Zero site in Pontyclun, in September 2024. This event put the approach of incidental climate change into practice through a site visit. It provided an opportunity for community growing groups to discuss climate change within the context of learning about the growing activities on the site.

Down to Zero presented their incidental climate change concept to the other Action Grant and Egin Grant holders present at the learning event in Newtown on September 23rd 2025. We will monitor the use of the concept in future project reports from these other projects.

Another example of encouraging others to use inclusive and accessible language when talking about climate change comes from Innovate Trust. Innovate Trust, who work with people with learning disabilities, autism and other additional needs, is using their learning to work with Cynnal Cymru and the Carbon Literacy Project and develop an accessible version of their well-established Carbon Literacy Training. This is the first time that the course will be adapted for people with learning disabilities.



8. Key Insights

The key learning points for other projects can be summarised as follows.

a. Use simple language

Simple, stripped back language works best, supported by appropriate resources to back up messages.

b. Start with what matters to people

Language and conversations need to start from the reality of people's lives, taking note of their experiences and values.

c. Tailor the language

Different groups of people need different communication approaches. Those projects working with children for example use techniques such as storytelling. One size does not fit all. Those projects working with a range of audiences need to adapt their communication and resources according to different target groups.

d. Be strengths based

Have conversations that start with people's strengths (what they are doing already), rather than focussing on what they cannot do. Only then, move to focus on skills development.

e. Use "Incidental Climate Conversations"

Climate conversations are best introduced during practical sessions and focus on the practical non-climate benefits of a changed behaviour, for example saving money or growing better vegetables. "This is why we do this" is a good way in.

9. APPENDIX: Summary of Projects

Down to Zero



Down to Zero is a not-for-profit Community Benefit Society established by Cynon Taf Housing Association in 2022 as a subsidiary company. Down to Zero aims to support community led environmental activities that help tackle climate change.

Cynon Taf Community Housing Association was awarded £334,999 over 4 years (March 2023 - March 2027) from SSW. The total project cost is anticipated to be £699,833, with the match funding coming from the Housing Association and from other sources.

Down to Zero set out to engage local communities and citizens in the climate change agenda. The project's aims are to reduce, avoid and sequester carbon through working with local people on land and then share the learning as far and as wide as possible. The project has 4 key outcomes.

Outcome 1: By the end of each year, to have reduced/sequestered carbon emissions by around 189 tonnes of CO₂ equivalents (CO₂e), totalling over 500 tonnes of CO₂ equivalents over the life of the project.

Outcome 2: By the end of year 4 to have worked and engaged with over 150 people of all ages through land-based carbon capture activities, behaviour change education and climate change workshops and voluntary opportunities.

Outcome 3: To share learning locally, nationally, and internationally as part of the project work and through partnerships.

Outcome 4: By the end of year 3/4 to have developed a local food and flower system which limits import mileage and promotes environmentally friendly green circular economies.



One Planet: Innovate Trust



Innovate Trust is a supported living provider that works with people with learning disabilities, autism, and other additional needs to achieve independence the way they want.

The organisation began as a student volunteering project at Cardiff University in 1967. It was the first charity in the UK to set up a supported living home.

Innovate Trust was awarded £148,000.00 over 3 years (July 2023 –August 2026) from SSW. The total project cost is anticipated to be £194,800.00, with the match funding coming from Innovate Trust reserves.

The One Planet project aims to enable 300 individuals with learning disabilities from across Wales to take climate action and live more sustainably. The project has 4 key outcomes.

Outcome 1: Reducing Energy Consumption.

People with learning disabilities and their carers are supported to make reductions in their energy use and learn how to live more sustainably.

Outcome 2: Circular Economy

Participants are supported to reduce the amount of waste they dispose of and learn about the 4 Rs, (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Recover.

Outcome 3: Sustainable Transport

Participants are encouraged to use public transport more frequently and alternative transport options such as walking and cycling.

Outcome 4: Low Carbon Gardening

People with learning disabilities and their carers are supported to garden the low carbon way, carrying out initiatives that have a direct beneficial and proven impact on the climate.



Sustaining a Legacy: The Community Impact Initiative



The Community Impact Initiative C.I.C. (known as the Cii) is an award-winning, not-for-profit social change organisation committed to the development, improvement, and sustainability of our communities.

Their Vision is "We believe in a future where our communities flourish and prosper."

Their Mission is "To improve our communities through innovative solutions, providing opportunities for individuals to make a meaningful contribution to society."

The Community Impact Initiative: Sustaining a Legacy project operates across the South Wales Valleys.

Sustaining a Legacy is an innovative project that supports local community members to engage in climate action. Through regenerating empty properties, the project helps volunteers better understand how individual and collective actions can have a positive environmental impact, and the proactive steps we can take to improve our energy efficiency.

Working with partners and stakeholders, Sustaining a Legacy helps volunteers understand how to effectively regenerate and insulate homes to reduce energy

consumption, having a positive and sustained impact upon our climate and environment.

The project is eligible for anyone aged 16+ who has an interest in understanding more about climate action and what practical measures they can take to reduce their carbon footprint and improve their energy efficiency.

The Sustaining a Legacy project has the following outcomes.

Outcome 1 - 60 households reduce their energy usage and their risk of entering fuel poverty.

Outcome 2 - 60 community members have an increased understanding of how to improve their own carbon footprint and pass learnings onto peers.

Outcome 3 - 3 empty properties in disrepair are brought back into use in a sustainable, energy efficient way.

Outcome 4 - 50 stakeholders have knowledge of how implementing energy efficiency measures during property regenerations can lead to a more sustainable future for Wales.