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## Building Awareness and Education

Working towards a more environment-friendly office doesn't need to be a drain on resources and staff time. Building awareness about why the issues are important to your organisation and the people it serves is critical for success. Behaviour change is likely to be more long-lasting and people more motivated if they appreciate there are clear benefits from sustained effort.

These frequently-asked questions provide some pointers to re-energise your work.

**Question:** We are a community organisation with our own building, 20 staff and lots of volunteer help. We have a simple Green Policy prepared 3 years ago but we need to refresh it for a fundraising application. What can we do?

**Answer:** Having an existing policy in place is a good start. The issue of energy and climate change is much more prominent now and every organisation needs to check it is doing all it can to reduce its own carbon impact. As you run your own building you have more freedom to change things. Many suggestions on this website will save your organisation money in the long run, something that will appeal to the Management and/or Board of Trustees. Some steps, e.g. low energy light bulbs will have immediate benefits.

Use the 5 EAC themes (Save energy; Travel wisely; Shop ethically; Save resources, and Care for your area) as a checklist and action guide. Encourage everyone to informally participate in the updating process by having a suggestions box as well as whatever meetings are appropriate for your group. Select a mixture of immediate, medium and longer-term actions to keep staff motivated.

Once you have an updated policy, don't leave it on the shelf. Be ready to explain to potential funders how you are putting it into practice and publicise it. Incorporate a regular review of the policy into your organisation's policy and procedures. This could be delegated to a 'General Purposes' committee depending on your structure.

**Question:** We're starting from scratch – there's lots of enthusiasm but little spare time or money. We have 5 staff, depend on volunteers and share office space. We need an issue to get us started?

**Answer:** Build on what motivates you to do more. One idea for making an impact and influencing others is to switch to only using Fair Trade items for tea and coffee breaks. Check the Fairtrade Foundation website for more information, especially [www.fairtradeatwork.org.uk](http://www.fairtradeatwork.org.uk) and find out if there is a local group. The local authority may be trying to secure Fair Trade status; evidence that organisations in the area are using Fair

Trade helps. This may not seem like a big move but if you share an office space, you may be able to influence others to support local Fair Trade retailers too.

Buying Fairly Traded items is a 'no-brainer'. It's ethical, the products are good and you can have fun with 'tasting sessions' at tea-time to convince the unconverted.

**Question:** A few of us want to see our organisation be more 'green', others don't seem to care. What can we do?

**Answer:** Encourage rather than cajole. Is there a similar organisation to yours already on the 'green track' that you could learn from? Log on to the 'Every Action Counts' website for ideas used by other groups. Find out if any of the EAC partner organisations have produced useful publications or other tools (e.g. case studies, media resources, 'how to' kits, website) that might provide an impetus. Securing leadership from the Board/Trustees or Management Group is another option to overcome inertia – unless you are trying to convince them too! If this is the case, you need to mention that funders are increasingly keen on VCS organisations reflecting environmental considerations within their work. Some expressly ask for copies of policies or other evidence before funding.

Start small and take time to do it well. Is there something that can encourage 'buy-in' from the disinterested e.g. reuse/recycling that supports a local charity or a cause close to the organisation's heart.

**Question:** Will our efforts really make a difference or is this a distraction from our core activities?

**Answer:** VCS organisations generally have social justice as a core value of their organisation. A commitment towards environmental protection is another facet of that work. Collective action is idea behind Every Action Counts. Large or small your efforts are important. Everyone can do something even if it's just talking to others in your network or letting people know what's going on locally. You never know where a timely conversation or intervention might lead. And don't be put off by the information overload. Sticking to trusted information sources or organisations can be one way through the complexity.

**Question:** People in our organisation would be willing to do more if there were clear financial benefits. We constantly hear about the things we should be doing 'for the environment' but it's hard to know what to do that directly benefits my organisation?

**Answer:** If you own or run your building, a simple action – switching to a low energy light bulb – will start saving energy immediately. The payback time is short and benefits multiplied by the number of lights in your building. Energy efficiency always pays. You don't need fancy gadgets to start saving energy; a simple finger will do. Visual reminders help prompt people to turn off equipment off when not in use, avoid the stand-by button and unplug phone chargers. The Carbon Trust has awareness raising posters to download from <http://www.carbontrust.co.uk/energy/startsaving/posterfacts.htm>

If you don't own your building, reducing your paper use starts saving you money immediately. Think before you print!

There are lots of other options covered in this website. But savings are not the only defining success factor driving your organisation's performance. Your reputation is important for securing funding, new partnerships and clients/service users. Are there opportunities to include environmental awareness in your organisation's 'walking its talk', demonstrating how its core values are embedded throughout its work? Increased sensitivity to wider issues, including social equity and the environment, can lead to a more engaged and motivated workforce which, in turn, means less staff turnover and less money spent on recruitment.

Environmental actions don't need to cost money – there is lots of free advice and training available. Partnering up with other organisations can capitalise on ideas and produce in-kind benefits.