

Community-led Behaviour Change – Policy Note 2

Climate Challenge Fund: The role of models of change

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December 2018

Changing our everyday habits – whether related to transport, heating or consumption – is important to reduce carbon emissions, and a key motivation behind the Scottish Government's [Climate Challenge Fund \(CCF\)](#)¹. The CCF supports community-led organisations to run local projects to reduce carbon emissions. Since its launch in 2008, total funding has reached £101 million, with 1,097 grants across Scotland (as of May 2018).

In this brief, we take a closer look at the **models of change that are underpinning community-led action** funded by the CCF. 'Models of change' are ideas about possible pathways for societal transitions. Understanding these helps us explain how and why people do – or do not – engage in pro-sustainability action². Ideas about how change happens can be expressed by individuals (e.g. in conversations) and by groups (e.g. through project proposals). They are also articulated through governmental policies and guidance documents. This policy note considers the diversity of such models of change, with the aim to explore the CCF projects' reach and potential impacts.

We followed five CCF projects through repeated workshops and interviews with project participants and other community members. We also analysed written material, including project proposals and the online guidance provided by the CCF and Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB). While we have not explicitly examined the ways in which community initiatives use the materials provided by the CCF and KSB, we compare how both documents and participants talk about the changes needed to curb carbon emissions and achieve wider sustainability objectives. As in other studies³, we found that many people talked about climate change and other environmental issues (such as air and marine pollution) almost as if these were interchangeable, because they were seen as closely connected. At the same time, the idea of a carbon footprint was widely known.

1. Many people agree that we need to change everyday behaviours – but ambitions are limited

Among our study participants, many expressed the view that we need to change everyday behaviours to reduce carbon emissions, or more generally, address the environmental problems of our time. While a small number of our participants emphasised the urgency of societal-level transformation, most did not give much attention to the size or nature of the change needed. They instead talked about the mechanisms through which everyday behaviours could be changed. The most prevalent of these were:

- People need to be more aware of problems, and of the options available to address these
- Financial motivations are a good starting point for changing behaviours

¹ <https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/sustainability-climate-change/climate-challenge-fund/>

² <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.04.008>; <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1448559>

³ <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1585>

- Small steps by many people will add up to significant change
- People learn through social interactions
- Younger generations changing their behaviour will be the most effective pathway to change
- Government has to do more to support behaviour change (through more funding for community action, and more/stricter regulations)

Overall, it is probably fair to say that most of our participants spoke about the changes required in a way that reflected existing options and activities working towards incremental change in very small steps. In this sense, they expressed limited ambition to rethink and alter existing systems and approaches in a more substantial or even radical way.

2. These ideas about mechanisms of change align well with those of the CCF

We found that the ideas of change expressed by our participants generally aligned with the pathways of change that are (implicitly or explicitly) described in the online guidance offered by the CCF and KSB⁴. The material provided thus seems to match the expectations of applicants and their mental models of how change occurs – probably an important precondition for an effective application of this guidance.

3. Do these ideas of change reach far enough?

It could be argued that the models of change promoted by many of our participants will not be effective in achieving the large-scale shift to lower carbon emissions envisioned in the Climate Change Act (2009) and more generally, to embed a low carbon economy in wider society. And indeed, a small number of our participants, as well as some of the background papers provided by the Scottish Government⁵ (see box), made a very strong case for a much more fundamental shift in lifestyles and, to some extent, structures and systems. However, matching this larger vision and longer-term ambition with what is seen to be achievable at a project design stage is more challenging. Our research suggests that the aims – of the guidance documents for and the CCF projects – are more limited to embedding current levels of change rather than engendering more substantive progress towards lower carbon emissions.

“Meeting Scotland’s ambitious climate change targets of 80% reductions in carbon emissions by 2050 will therefore require patterns of household consumption to change radically from the current baseline.”⁵

4. Going forward

The current CCF guidance aligns well with the pathways of change put forward by the existing projects. It should thus be maintained to not alienate these audiences. However, there is a risk that some participants in community initiatives limit themselves to moderate levels of change proposed by the guidance issued by CCF and KSB, as research suggests for other, related fields⁵. Development of guidance that is more stretching and visionary in its ambition, and that encourages creativity in finding innovative ways for community action, may help to foster further and more profound change.

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/publication/2013/03/low-carbon-scotland-behaviours-framework/documents/00415744-pdf/00415744-pdf/govscot%3Adocument?forceDownload=true>
<https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00481836.pdf>

<https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/sustainability-climate-change/climate-change-fund/climate-change-engagement/carbon-literacy-guide/>

⁵ <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0041/00413385.pdf>