

What works?

Co-producing Bradford's Just Transition to Net Zero, Dr. Kelli Kennedy

Project summary:

This project looked to bring benefits to both the community and decision-making around achieving net zero in Bradford. This was accomplished through creating a training program that allowed for the development of skillsets and experience for a cohort of researchers in co-production to work with communities. These 'community researchers' held a series of workshops in areas as the least 'ready' for net zero and who will struggle to make the needed changes (e.g. due to low income/lack of funds or already experiencing fuel poverty). The project also held a follow up workshop with Bradford City Council to facilitate the inclusion of community voices in the city's Climate Action Plan. In so doing, this project has set forth insights into how to engage more deprived communities in net zero conversations and bring their voices to benefit city plans to reduce carbon emissions.

[The project community workshop handbook can be accessed through the tool resources.](#)

What challenge did this project set out to address?

The core challenge was creating evidence that could be implementable into the Bradford Climate Action Plan (CAP). The CAP needs to be equitable and inclusive, reflecting the needs of communities most at risk of being left behind in the transition to net zero. Structural inequalities, e.g. low income and poor housing, mean certain groups may not benefit/may face harm from

climate policies. This required developing a method to achieve authentic, ongoing community dialogue and incorporate the voices of residents not traditionally heard in climate. Meaningfully translating these voices into policy evidence was the challenge.

What worked, for who and why?

- Using a 'person-first' and 'Areas of Daily Life' approach: this successfully reframed climate discussions around issues residents already care about, like housing, travel, energy costs, and safety. This approach worked best for the residents and community researchers, making the abstract concept of net zero accessible and allowing engagement to start from their personal experiences.
- Adopting a Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach: this involved equitably engaging local community organisations (The Sutton Centre, The Anchor Project) and six local residents, who were trained as climate community researchers then hired as casual workers at University of York. This worked well for the research team by ensuring the project was guided by local voices and contexts.
- Developing ethical, progressive community partnerships: This included consulting on ethical pay and using a progressive pay model that recognised the intangible benefits of the partners' existing relationships and trust within the communities. This model worked excellently for the community partners and participants, resulting in an extremely low drop-out rate and fostering long-term, trusting relationships.

What didn't work and why?

Starting again, we would aim to involve other sectors in the Council and other actors to feed in earlier on in the process. Our project's Steering Group included key Council officers from the Sustainability Service, but perhaps greater early involvement from local ward councillors or politicians would promote the recommendation to empower local government via national and regional government earlier in the process.

We recognise as well that many of the ideas and programmes participants suggested are likely occurring or being debated in other areas of the Council - next time, we'd aim to pull in the Council staff from these areas more deliberately.

What changed as a result of your project?

The project successfully produced two distinct community climate manifestos for the Tong and Bowling & Barkerend wards. The findings led to three key recommendations for Bradford Council: adopting a 'person-first' framing, prioritising coordinated multi-actor partnerships, and establishing meaningful two-way communication and trust-building. The research has provided the Council's Sustainability Service with essential community-based evidence it required to develop a more equitable and inclusive Climate Action Plan.

What next?

A direct follow on is we are working on a pilot with the Council's Sustainability Service to run Climate Fresk and Biodiversity Collage training with various audiences to include knowledge and engagement.

Thanks to funding by the BiB Centre for Social Change, we are now working again in the same communities in Bradford to trial a co-produced animation approach to climate policy influence. This avenue may be useful as a way to convey stories and ideas straight from the communities in a powerful, dynamic form.

Progress towards equitable and responsible research practices

This project challenged hierarchies by embedding local residents (who are at risk of being left behind) as paid climate community researchers, elevating their lived experience as knowledge and

understanding of their communities as essential.

The research promoted equitable practices through its CBPR approach, ensuring that local voices were given priority in policy action. The use of a progressive pay model for community partners, which valued intangible assets like community trust and relationships, demonstrated a highly responsible and ethical financial approach to collaboration.

We received multiple instances of feedback from community partners about how this partnership felt like they were properly valued.