

Carbon Conversations: a brief introduction

What is Carbon Conversations?

Carbon Conversations Groups help people halve their personal carbon footprint. The groups are based on a psychological understanding of how people change.

Groups of 6-8 members meet with trained, volunteer facilitators in homes, community centres, workplaces or other venues. The 6 meetings create a non-judgmental atmosphere where people are encouraged to make serious lifestyle changes. The groups offer:

- **space** for people to explore what climate change means for themselves, their families and their aspirations.
- **permission** to share their hopes, fears, doubts and anxieties.
- **time** to work through the conflicts between desire, intention, social pressure, status and need.
- reliable, **well-researched information** and practical guidance on what will make a difference
- **support** in creating a personal plan for change

The meetings use professionally designed, reliable materials to cover the basic climate change problem, ideas for a low-carbon future and the four key areas of the footprint – home energy, travel, food and other consumption. Carbon reductions of 1 tonne CO₂ are typically made by each member during the course, with plans developed to halve individual footprints over a 4-5 year period.

Discussions of practicalities are woven together with discussions of how people feel and what these changes mean personally.

The combination of innovative learning materials and basic facilitation training equips suitable volunteers to facilitate effective, stimulating groups. Carbon Conversations groups operate well as a cascade scheme. Typically 10% of participants train to become facilitators of further groups, thereby stimulating substantial savings.

The materials

Carbon Conversations materials consist of:

- **Carbon Conversations:** 130 page course member's handbook with detailed information, 'at-home' activities', resource lists and FAQs, illustrated throughout with stories taken from our story-collecting and Akashi projects.
- **3 interactive games** for group discussion, each on a brightly coloured, cloth board with laminated playing cards, instructions and players notes.
- **The facilitators' guide:** 50 page booklet providing guidance on the emotional dynamics of a group, on the psychology of climate change and on the course content, including outline programmes for each meeting; guidance on recruiting members, supporting facilitators, using Carbon Conversations in different settings and embedding it in other activities.
- Access to **Carbon calculator** from the Centre for Alternative Technology, provides a base-line footprint for each participant.

Individual copies of the Carbon Conversations handbook, Facilitator's Guide and Games Pack can be purchased through our office. Multiple copies are normally only available on completion of training. Please see our website or the accompanying price list for prices.

Facilitation and training

Carbon Conversations groups need good facilitation if they are to work well. They are usually delivered in the community by pairs of trained, volunteer co-facilitators who receive ongoing mentoring and support. Groups can also be delivered by professional facilitators, commercially or as part of their job.

The approach is sometimes called 'psycho-education', a term that expresses the combination of exploratory, participative learning coupled with psychological understanding of how groups work and people change.

Volunteer facilitators need to be people with good, intuitive 'people' skills. It is an advantage if they have prior experience of small group facilitation. They also need to be prepared to

master the basic content and point people to reliable sources of information.

Training in the material and methods is provided by Cambridge Carbon Footprint and its network of designated trainers. On completion of training, facilitators sign an Agreement about use of the scheme. They are then added to CCF's list of 'Approved Facilitators' and can purchase multiple copies of the materials for use with their groups.

Facilitators are approved at 3 levels:

1) Approved Volunteer Facilitator for community groups. Completion of our basic training equips you to run Carbon Conversations as a volunteer. Basic training consists of either:

- completion of a Carbon Conversations group as a participant followed by a 1-day training course in basic facilitation skills or
- a 2-day course covering basic facilitation skills and an introduction to the materials.

To complete the approval process you need to co-facilitate one group, attending mentoring sessions (where these are available) and complete a short course report. We then issue you with a certificate and add your name and contact details to the list of Approved Facilitators on our website.

In areas where Carbon Conversations is being newly established it is often helpful to run the first group as a 'practice group' with sympathetic friends or colleagues who can provide friendly feedback. Mentoring is best done by someone with groupwork experience who can provide insight into the dynamics of the group and psychological processes. The alternative is peer support but this is not usually so effective.

2) Approved Professional Facilitator, working commercially. We welcome people with existing facilitation training and experience who would like to add Carbon Conversations to their repertoire and take it into workplaces or other commercial settings. To be approved at this level you need to attend the basic training course above, send us your c.v. with details of your previous experience and qualifications, facilitate your first group, complete a short course report and send in the participant evaluations from the group. If appropriate, we will then issue you with a certificate and add your name and contact details to our list of facilitators approved to undertake paid Carbon Conversations work. This list is made available on our website. The decision of whether to add

someone to this list is taken by our training advisor and is final.

3) Designated Trainer of Carbon Conversations facilitators. We are keen that regional and local groups are able to train and support their own facilitators. The process for becoming a Designated Trainer is:

- approval as a Carbon Conversations facilitator,
- submission of c.v. showing prior group work or facilitation qualifications/experience,
- co-facilitation of a 1-day or 2-day training with an already Designated trainer and submission of a short report on the training.

We then add your name to the list of Designated Trainers on our website. The decision of whether to add someone to this list is taken by our training advisor and is final.

Who do the groups appeal to?

Carbon Conversation's primary appeal is to people who are aware of or becoming concerned about climate change (in Defra's audience segmentation terms the 44% of the population who are 'Positive Greens' 'Concerned Consumers' or 'Waste Watchers'). Although more aware of climate change than the average, these audiences do not have correspondingly small footprints. Involving other audience segments is also possible but is likely to require extended engagement activity first. Activities and games from the course can also be used as part of an engagement strategy with less aware audiences.

Group members can be recruited through outreach work, marketing, publicity, networking and by word of mouth. Any local community group with an active membership would be well placed to run a group.

Costs

Carbon Conversations materials are made available on a sliding scale of prices, basically at cost to small, unfunded community groups and with mark-ups for funded organisations and commercial use.

Carbon Conversations groups are usually offered to the public for about £15-20 with the price including a copy of the Carbon Conversations book.

2-day basic training weekends are offered on a sliding scale with the price starting at around £165 per person for self-funded facilitators. A few bursaries are sometimes available.

Want to know more?

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