



Environment Jobs Scotland

An Overview of Skills for Sustainable Communities

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Introduction

This report is one of a series of studies commissioned by Forward Scotland as part of its Environment Jobs Scotland Initiative. In particular, this report is intended to provide an overview of published research on identifying community skills requirements; some of the policies that are intended to support community capacity building and; to provide some indications of the assistance available to communities to help build their skills.

Forward Scotland has worked to promote community involvement in sustainable development since 1996 and carries out its work through a mix of development projects and grant schemes, supported by information exchange.

Working with strategic partners, our development projects research key themes and issues of sustainable development to produce innovative and practical solutions. Through the design and delivery of grant schemes we help communities across Scotland improve their local environment and achieve a better and more sustainable quality of life.

Legislative Background

The concept of sustainable communities features heavily within the policy framework for sustainable development in Scotland.

In April 2002 the Scottish Executive published "Meeting the Needs", which provides a set of indicators that can be used to measure progress towards sustainability. Interwoven throughout the strategy are the key strands of social and environmental justice which form important pillars for building sustainable communities. Community participation is highlighted as one of the strategy's main sustainability indicators.

These themes have been reinforced by the UK sustainable development framework, published in March 2005 and the Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy, which was launched on December 14th 2005. Like "Meeting the Needs", the concept of environmental justice has been highlighted alongside how Scotland and the UK will meet the targets on natural resource use and climate change as well as issues around sustainable consumption and production. The creation of sustainable communities; developing awareness and; encouraging engagement have been highlighted as main priorities for action.

These strategies not only recognise the effects that not addressing sustainable development can have on communities themselves, they recognise that the community should have an equal part to play in planning, developing and implementing actions in the same way as government, business and civic authorities.

What is a Sustainable Community?

Given the very specific references to Sustainable Communities within these government strategies, it is useful to understand what the term refers to and what its implications are.

While the sustainable communities policy agenda tends to be very much integrated towards housing, homelessness and housing environment, it is recognised that defining the components of a sustainable community requires a much broader approach. Studies such as Kearns and Turok, (2003) and the Egan Review, (2004) include components such as; a vibrant economy; quality of the surrounding environment; sufficient transport and connectivity; inclusiveness; and effective governance.

What is more often implied than stated in these studies is the importance of the community's ability to sustain itself. That is that a sustainable community will have the required skills to enable it to recognise its immediate and future needs, while having the capacity to deal with them.

Community Skills

Increasingly, the community sector in Scotland has taken a direct approach towards sustainable development, through the management of local projects concerned with issues such as; community waste management, housing, natural heritage, energy and sustainable travel. Such projects tend to have additional benefits that go beyond the delivery of a service. They can also provide a catalyst for local democracy, ensuring that all members of the community get the chance to share their ideas and opinions and to determine actions which are tailored to local need. In addition, they often provide a vehicle for the development of skills, sharing of experience and provision of training for members of the community who might not otherwise have such opportunities.

Table 1: Generic Skills, Behaviour and Knowledge considered essential for delivering sustainable communities. The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities. April 2004

Skills	Behaviours		Knowledge of
	Ways of thinking	Ways of acting	
Inclusive visioning	Creativity	Entrepreneurial	The seven sustainable communities components and how they interact
Project management	Strategic thinking	Can-do mentality	Sustainable development including best environmental practise
Leadership	Open to change	Co-operation	Housing and the built environment
Breakthrough thinking/brokerage	Awareness of limitations	Able to seek help	Transport and connectivity
Team/partnership working within and between teams, based on a shared sense of purpose	Challenging assumptions	Humility	Wider national and local economy
Making it happen given constraints	Flexible	Committed to making it happen	Governance, citizenship and processes associated with local democracy
Process management/change management	Clear	Respect for diversity and equal opportunity	Spatial planning and master planning
Financial management and appraisal	Decisive	Able to take action	Urban design and urban coding. Attracting financial capital
Stakeholder management – including ability to work with local residents and community groups	Respect for and awareness of the contribution of other professionals	Having a shared sense of purpose	Development Processes
Analysis, decision making, evaluation, learning from mistakes			
Communication – including intelligent listening to the community and promotion of development solutions			
Conflict resolution			
Customer awareness and how to secure feedback			

The success of these projects depends on the community having a wide range of interpersonal skills and experience, in for example having local knowledge and the ability to network with a wide range of partners. Such skills are not easy to define in the conventional way and therefore no formal structures are in place for assessment and training.

This issue of how to define skills has fostered a significant amount of research in the fields of community development and regeneration. The general consensus emerging suggests a broad approach. That is one which maps the relationship that generic skills such as behaviours, attitudes and experiences, have on various community development processes and how they sit with more easily definable skills and competencies.

The Egan Committee (2004) commissioned by DEFRA and ODPM, produced a review of the skills needed by built environment professionals to deliver sustainable communities. This report reviewed the skills, behaviours, knowledge, and training of more than 100 professional occupations involved in planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities. The review was able to define 13 generic skills which were critical for the delivery of “common goals”. Underpinning these skills, however, the review recognised that positive behaviours and attitudes as well as knowledge of key issues were essential for effective delivery. (see table 1) The report concluded that amongst the professionals surveyed, specialist and technical skills were well catered for, however there was broad agreement that generic skills were in short supply.

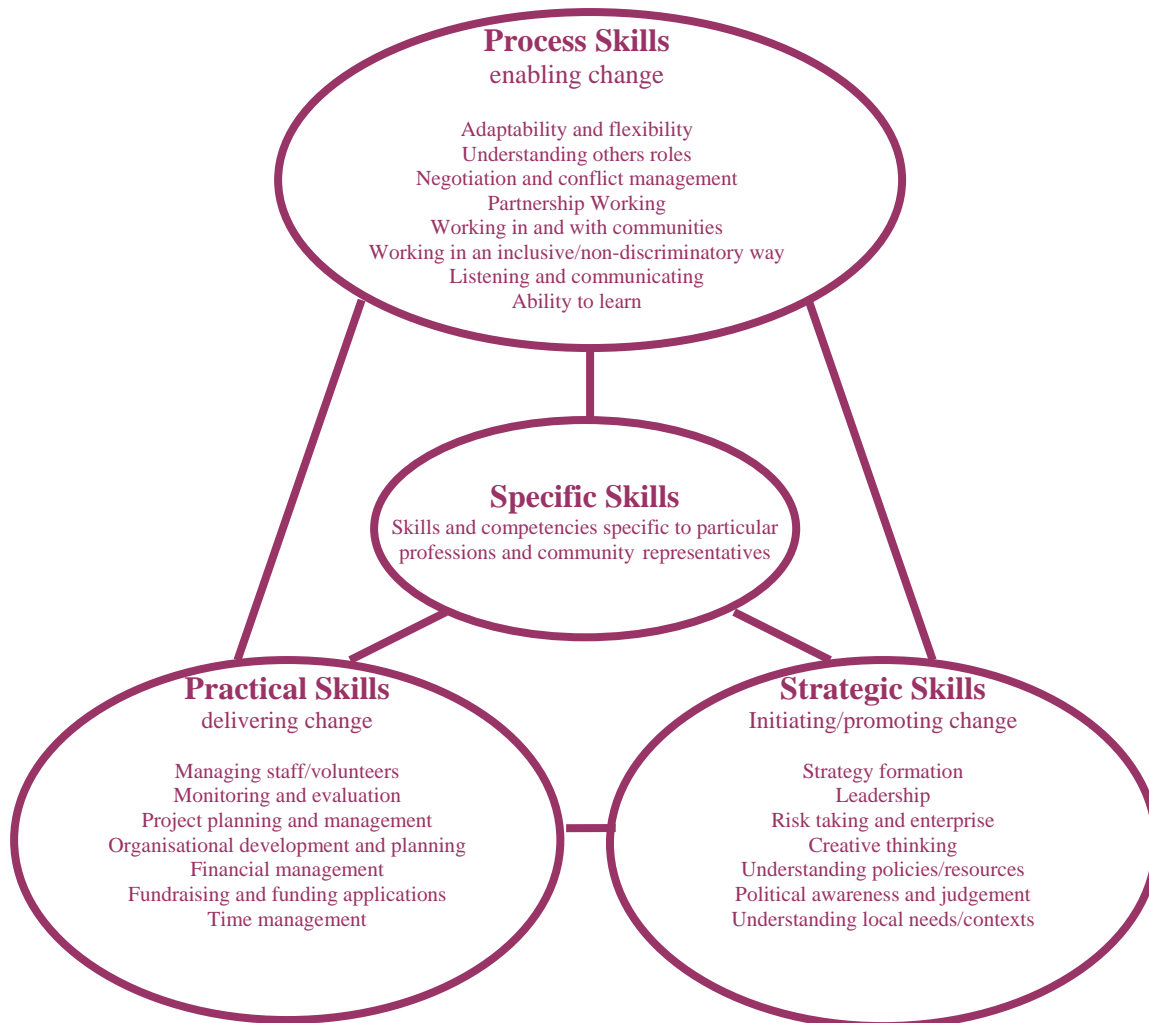
Communities Scotland (2004) carried out a similar study, which again attempted to define generic skills needs but which focused a broader representation of the community to include a combination of professionals, volunteers and community representatives. The resulting “Skills Framework for Regeneration” is acknowledged as a fair representation of community skills across a wide range of activity.

The framework includes 22 skills within 3 skills sets. The skills sets have been named as “Strategic” skills, “Practical” skills and “Process” skills. Strategic skills help to initiate and promote change and include leadership, creativity and influencing skills. The Practical skills set describes the ability to deliver change.

These are skills that would enable a person to contribute to the day-to-day running of an initiative and would include managing staff and finance. The process skills set help to enable change and include such skills as communication, the ability to adapt and partnership working.

This study also recognised that there were specific skills relating to particular professions or to being a member of the community which, although not relating to the three skills sets outlined nevertheless make a valuable contribution.

Figure 1: skills required for community regeneration. Communities Scotland. Skills and Competencies for Community Regeneration. August 2004.



The study concluded that there is an opportunity for general enhancement of skills and competencies but that there was a need for appropriate support structures , in particular through an experiential learning culture, to encourage the development of knowledge, motivation, attitudes, values and behaviour.

The findings of these studies were reflected recently during the workshop “what makes you a sustainable developer” held as part of a Forward Scotland conference. Participants highlighted leadership, communication skills and knowledge of sustainable development issues as qualities which required further development. A number of options for achievement were also indicated including formal accreditation, experiential learning, peer group networks, secondments and more networking opportunities.

Forward Scotland's work and experience with community groups in other areas also highlights the crucial role that capacity building plays in determining the success of community activity towards sustainable development.

The report on the Sustainable Communities programme, on which Forward Scotland co-ordinated the Scottish pilot case studies, highlighted skills such as financial management and project management the training for which could be provided through existing training structures. However, other groups favoured more informal approaches to training and information exchange, such as mentoring and other forms of supportive action. (Encams 2003)

CAG Consultants conducted an evaluation for Forward Scotland in 2005 on community based environmental improvement activity in Scotland. This report which evaluated 40 groups and their activities, suggests that the dynamics of community based activity can be complex and often problematic.

Community Leaders, such as elected representatives, would seem to have a valuable role to play as advocates for the community as they can inspire volunteers and increase the confidence of the community to enable them to take the lead role within the partnership process. The partnership approach allows a community to carry out larger and more complex activities and in general, having access to professional expertise to provide technical advice can be invaluable to a group in helping them to get a project started or to help them improve their own organisational structure.

Partners are not always viewed favourably however, and it seems that communities feel that sometimes it's best if they are left to their own devices. It also seems that partnerships can be perceived to be unequal with professional stakeholders often having much grander ideas than those perceived by the community (CAG Consultants 2005)

Support workers as a community resource can be similarly useful in that they too can help instigate complex activity but the relationship seems to work better when the support worker is employed by the community as external employment can sometimes result in a conflict of interest for the support worker. (CAG Consultants 2005)

The process of accessing funding is viewed as a difficult area for communities as the structure of public funding favours a package or cocktail of funding linked to a series of measurable outputs. This can prove to be a very time consuming activity for communities who must source each fund, fill out individual applications for each and try to highlight how their project fits with each funders criteria. An evaluation of the Forward Scotland managed Community Environmental Renewal Scheme, which provides funding for communities affected by quarrying, found that this process was particularly daunting for marginalised, socially excluded communities. (CAG Consultants, 2004)

Existing Capacity Building Work

Since 2000, every local authority in Scotland is responsible for the development of a community learning strategy, a large part of which addresses the learning needs of the community within the context of social inclusion, lifelong learning and active citizenship. Community learning plans are directly linked into the community planning process, the objective being to build community capacity to encourage active participation and involvement in decisions about local services and issues affecting the community. (HMIE 2002).

In 2004, the Scottish Executive, along with Communities Scotland, produced “Working and learning together to build stronger communities”, a guidance document setting out a long term framework for Community Learning and Development (CLD). This document builds on the success of Community Learning Partnerships by strengthening the links between community learning, community development and the community planning process. Community Planning Partnerships are expected to produce a CLD strategy which builds on the aspirations of all sections of the community and which demonstrates “substantial community involvement” in its planning and implementation.

Local authorities throughout Scotland have now published their CLD strategies. As the strategies are based on local needs, each is unique in terms of priorities and the method of delivery. For example, Glasgow’s CLD strategy focuses to a great extent on maximisation of its existing online learning resources. Shetland will also make use of ICT but will also focus on community colleges and community lecturers. North Lanarkshire aims to provide an online network which will link to all of the training and educational providers in the area, a service which is apparently the first of its kind in Europe. In many areas, these services are likely to be funded by European funding.

So there is a strategy in place for community learning in Scotland. As well as generic skills development such as communication, decision making, negotiation and learning skills, community learning is likely to take advantage of specific skills development if there is demand. Below is an overview of some organizations which provide specific skills training for communities:

- Community Recycling Network Scotland provide regular seminars on all issues concerning recycling
- Wrap – provide a range of services on waste reduction and recycling to businesses and the not for profit sector. Training currently available includes the recycling managers advanced training course which is designed to equip managers with the skills to apply cost effective systems for waste collection, sorting and composting in line with market demands.

- Energy Savings Trust, through its Community Action for Energy programme (CAfE) run a range of training courses in line with demand. Two examples are “Finding out about Energy” an energy efficiency and renewable energy seminar which outlines the opportunities available for community buildings including funding and grants information. “Making it Happen” is a networking day designed to provide an overview of renewable energy and to give tips on how to work with partners on community renewables. Scottish Communities and Household Initiative will provide advice and development support for new community and household renewable energy schemes
- Friends of the Earth, through their ARK project will provide training on how to monitor pollution
- Keep Scotland Beautiful run regular seminars in management of fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, graffiti and fly posting
- BTCV Scotland specialise in training for environmental and conservation activities. They provide a wide range of training opportunities, many of which are accredited. Some of these include: managing conservation projects, wardening (trees, paths, ponds and beach), composting, environmental education, construction and use of hand tools. They also provide training in general community activity such as publicity and fundraising.
- Forest Education Initiative offer several training courses including the Forest Schools Skills award (ONC level 1) which is appropriate for people working on projects involving schools and nursery areas. The initiative also offers training in basic woodland skills and “games within a safe forest environment”
- Paths for All Partnership have several courses based on community access to paths and path networks including a “Scheme Initiator” course, “developing a walk for health scheme”, “marketing walking to wider communities” and “how to engage with traditionally hard to reach groups”. They also run courses on planning and legal issues
- Greenspace Scotland provide regular training seminars on designing greenspaces around issues such as access, inclusion, community spaces and safety for children
- Black Environment Network (BEN) have developed a training module that helps facilitate participation with Ethnic minority groups on environmental themed activities

- The Sustainable Development Research Centre run a number of training courses for communities and businesses. Of initial interest to communities might be the “introduction to environmental awareness” programme and “What does sustainable development mean”
- Ecoschools Scotland run a volunteer assessor training programme for those interested in becoming an ecoschools assessor
- Scottish Business in the Community do not provide formal training courses but have an ongoing scheme that provides employee secondments for community projects. This scheme encourages businesses to share their technical expertise, passing on skills to the community
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation (SCVO) offers training courses in a wide range of skills including training such as; minute taking, presentation skills and management; informative training in for example data protection and freedom of information; and courses designed to improve techniques such as networking skills and facilitation.

This list is not exhaustive and there are many other organisations offering courses and one off seminars to their local area. In addition, there are a number of tools and information networks including:

- Community Webnet - an online resource designed to help share information, experience and best practice. The webnet offers a number of resources including case studies and an online surgery which allows people to get expert advice on their projects.
- Sus It Out - a facilitated toolkit, currently being developed by the Future Scotland partnership. The toolkit encourages community groups to think about sustainable development and what it means for them. Groups highlight areas where they are being sustainable in their actions as well as areas where improvements could be made. The process encourages debate and discussion and can therefore be carried out as part of the groups business development activity.
- CAfE Network – provides a range of resources including news, publications and guides to setting up and running community renewable energy projects
- Waste Aware Scotland - offers a surgery on composting, an A – Z disposal guide, a recycled product finder, information on Reduce, Re-use and Recycle issues and a well used message board for questions and advice.

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- Scottish Renewables Forum - a membership forum encouraging development within the renewable energy sector at both business and community level. The forum website provides information on legislation and policy, research reports and job vacancies in the sector.
- Community Recycling Network Scotland - a membership organisation for community led groups involved in waste reduction, re-use, recycling, composting and waste education activities. The network provides support and information on funding, best practise and national markets for waste as well as providing and promoting training educational awareness and local contacts.

Funding

Very often, the courses offered through community learning initiatives are free of charge although there are instances when there would be a charge, in particular for accredited courses. Since 2004, the Scottish executive has provided Individual Learning Accounts worth £200 per year to people earning £15,000 per year or less. Individual Learning Accounts are aimed at improving skills for work and to enable them to build careers. For most community groups, training has to be financed through grants. A large amount of grant funding is available for training and capacity building activities through both private and public funds and a selection of the most popular schemes is outlined below.

Awarding Body	Awards	Criteria
Scottish Community Foundation – Community Grants	Up to £5,000	General but with specified impacts that show group have achieved their objectives
Scottish Community Foundation – Womens Fund for Scotland	£1,000 - £5,000	Activity must support womens' development
Scottish Community Foundation – You and Your Community	£1,500	For individuals wishing to learn a new skill, study or travel in order to help their community
Scottish Community Foundation – Your Community Your Environment	Up to £5,000	Capacity building activity for sustainable development
Community Recycling Network Scotland - Increase Fund	£5,000 - £30,000	Capacity building activities leading to waste reduction, re-use or recycling
Big lottery Fund - Awards For All	£500 - £5,000	Activities that get people involved in the community including training
Community Fund	Variable	Provides funding for both capital and revenue projects and includes capacity building activity
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation	Variable	Grants for training under Social Change, Enterprise and Independence programmes. Will not fund general capacity building activity alone but these activities can be part of a project
Lloyds TSB Scotland	Variable	Funding for charities involved in grassroots activity. Priority is given to selected criteria one of which involves development of people as a resource
Forward Scotland – small grants scheme	Up to £1,000	Capacity building activity to encourage sustainable development. Includes: training, conference attendance, carrying out feasibility studies etc
Scottish Community and Household Renewables Initiative – Technical Grants	Up to £10,000	Capacity building activities including training and funding for scoping and feasibility studies leading to community renewable energy initiatives.
Scottish Natural Heritage – Community Grants	Up to £3,000	To help people take a more active role in their natural heritage. Support communities to develop their long term capacity to undertake and deliver projects

Conclusions

Sustainable development is a process which relies heavily on a community's ability to understand their long term needs, to be able to play an active role in planning and to communicate effectively with partners to achieve their goals.

As with all community activity, the skills required by communities to carry out sustainable development activities are both generic and specific in nature.

It is recognised that these skills are difficult to comprehend and it seems clear that there are different set of processes involved where different skills and training structures should come into play.

There are a range of training opportunities available for both generic and for specific skills relating to practical delivery of sustainable development projects. There are also a wide range of options for private funding for capacity building activities in communities. However, while community groups are generally able to access generic skills training cheaply and locally, training in specific skills is often expensive and less accessible. This can be a source of frustration for community groups who will spend a great deal of time and effort not just trying to access this type of training but in applying for grant funding to pay for it.

Individual learning accounts, which have been available since 2004, are small amounts of money which can be used by people on low incomes to buy training which will improve their individual skills capacity. However, Individual Learning Accounts were primarily introduced to help raise individual job profiles, not as a means of building community capacity.

Community learning and development plans are in the initial stages of implementation in Scotland. Each local authority will be responsible for developing and delivering the plans which will be determined on local needs. There does seem to be an emphasis on e learning as a valuable delivery method as it maximises the training that is available. The cost of e learning is unlikely to be met entirely from statutory budgets however, which means that grant funding will need to be sourced. Local authorities which are able to source additional funding will be able to maximise opportunities through e-learning, while those who don't will have to rely on local provision.

Community training might be targeted using Community Learning Accounts. Under such a system, all groups or interests within a local community would take part in developing a sustainable development strategy for their community. On the basis of this, each group would then undergo a training needs analysis and would receive a specific number of credits according to their training needs. Groups would then be able to trade these credits for training. Groups could also supplement their credit allocation by purchasing extra credits, if they had enough income to do so. This type of system would help to ensure an even distribution of training amongst different, perhaps competing interests in the community. It would also help to target training

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against specific community outcomes that had been determined in the sustainable development action plan.

Of course, all credits need to be financed in some way and this could be done by a mixture of public and private funds.

Many grant funders are realising the value of having elements of community capacity building within their funding criteria, so long as an applicant can show how the capacity building activity will lead to the achievement of a specific project activity. Since the community learning account system is directly linked to a local sustainability plan, there is clarity in most cases between the activity to be funded and the action to be achieved. Local funders might even consider allocating part of their fund towards a community learning account for general allocation, if such a system were in operation.

A second issue that could help to maximise community skills is in setting a standard for community training, so that communities can be sure that the training accessed holds validity. That it “does what it says on the tin”.

Organisations such as Communities Scotland have begun to develop frameworks for community capacity building and standards for community involvement. This is important given the move towards online learning techniques, where the trainee is able to access training courses at a national level. There needs to be a framework for community training that ensures that training is relevant to community needs, is valid and is effective.

Finally, it is worth exploring the idea of an online portal for community training and development. Like other community websites, Forward Scotland’s Community Webnet already provides information on events and training where it is known. However, the Community Webnet goes further than other websites in that it is interactive, providing communities with a means of sharing views, ideas and experiences. There is therefore potential to develop the Community Webnet further so that it becomes a national gateway for accessing training and development.

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Shetland Council (2003) Vibrant Shetland: a strategy for Community learning and development

Useful Websites

www.awardsforall.org.uk	Awards for All
www.realworld.org.uk	Black Environment Network
www.btcv.org	BTCV Scotland
www.community-fund.org.uk	Community Fund
www.crns.org.uk	Community Recycling Network Scotland
www.communitywebnet.org.uk	Community webnet
www.ecoschools.org.uk	Ecoschools Scotland
www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk	Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
www.foresteducation.org	Forest Education Initiative
www.forward-scotland.org.uk	Forward Scotland
www.foescotland.org.uk	Friends of the Earth
www.greenspacescotland.org.uk	Greenspace Scotland
www.crns.org.uk/increase.htm	Increase Fund
www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org	Keep Scotland Beautiful
www.ltsbfoundationforscotland.org.uk	Lloyds TSB
www.pathsforall.org.uk	Paths for All Partnership
www.sbcscot.com	Scottish Business in the community
www.civicforum.org.uk	Scottish Civic Forum
www.scottishscf.org	Scottish Community Foundation
www.scvo.org	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
www.sustainableresearch.com	Sustainable Development Research centre
www.est.org.uk/schri	Scottish Community and Household Renewal Initiative
www.snh.gov.uk	Scottish Natural Heritage
www.wrap.org.uk	Waste Recycling Action Programme