

A guide to approaching sites

Step 1

Do your research

Find out as much as you can about the organisation from their website. In particular: their sustainability goals.

Do they have any stated environmental objectives on their website?

Read their mission statements.

Have they announced any environmental sustainability based initiatives?

Do their social media feeds suggest environmental sustainability awareness within the organisation?

Also look at the LinkedIn (or other social media) pages of people connected to the organisation to identify people in sustainability roles or people at managerial levels who have an interest in environmental sustainability issues.

Step 2

Develop an approach

Look for several ways into the organisation.

What drives and motivates them, and how can you link these to the Big Solar Co-op's objectives.

It is money/cost saving? Or, the public perception of their organisational environmental sustainability goals?

Do they have a "do well, by doing good" ethos?

Can you tap into the persona, of the social role that they've adopted?

Step 3

Find a counterpart

The Big Solar Co-op is national but it's best to find a local contact, within the host site, who is fully invested in environmental sustainability.

The lines of communication are much shorter.

Any misunderstandings are easily and quickly corrected, when you have a 'friend on the inside'.

Trust bonds are stronger with 'local to local' than 'at arm's length' relationships.

Locally backed projects and initiatives often carry national kudos for the individual host sites. Once internal agreement has been secured they can quickly gain momentum and scale up through the organisation.

Shared local knowledge can often overcome centrally administered blindspots.

Step 4

Establish common ground

'First contact' should be a purposeful introduction that explores their organisational goals.

Discuss the Big Solar Co-op's capital free, low carbon, low risk approach and its implications for their organisation.

Field objections, concerns, misconceptions and reasons for mistrust, with respect and sincerity.

Suggest a risk free next step, and deliver on it when you say you will. Such as a follow up email with a precis of the call.

Ensure that your starting point for the next step is clarity, and honesty around the time frame involved.

Step 5

Build a shared vision

Do lots of listening and learning.

Pick up on the strongest themes and orientate your approach around these.

Is it money, community, environmental sustainability or all of the above and more?

Work through local and organisational difficulties and points of unwillingness, and look for the 'path of least resistance'.

Clarify and agree a common approach that works for both sides.

Don't let the 'perfect be the enemy of the good', so agree to iron out the indeterminable when you've both got some of the answers to each others questions.

Agree to meet, often.

Step 6

Collaborate on a plan

Meet with answers to at least some of each others questions.

Define and request the information needed to start the ball rolling. Eg. Electricity consumption data and Meter Point Administration Number (MPAN).

Develop a rough high level 'plan on a page' to accompany the outline proposal offer. Ensure it highlights key milestones, information exchange points, required documents and key people.

Help with selling this into the organisation if you are asked to.

Celebrate the project approval or look for an alternative approach based on the objections.

Be at the project kick off meeting.

Remain a resource and keep accessing the expertise within the Big Solar Co-op throughout the project lifecycle.