



Abbeyleix Climate Action Walk

 Abbeyleix, County Laois

The project involves an interactive Climate Action Walk through the town of Abbeyleix, which features QR codes to raise awareness of what climate change looks like on the ground. The project involves Dr Niamh Shaw, Science Communicator in Residence with Abbeyleix Climate Action Project.

The Climate Action Project was supported by Creative Ireland Laois as part of the Creative Ireland Programme (2017–2022) in partnership with Laois County Council, Abbeyleix Tidy Towns and Midlands Science. The walk was created thanks to the support of Healthy Ireland, an initiative of the Government of Ireland with funding from the Healthy Ireland Fund and the Sláintecare Fund delivered by Pobal, administered by Laois County Council.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you as a community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

The Abbeyleix Tidy Towns group, in partnership with Laois County Council, is driven by accessing funding opportunities and they collectively agreed to submit an EOI (Expression of Interest) application. The key objective was to implement an expert in the community and activate the community to take climate action, which is what Laois County Council and the Tidy Towns group collectively aimed to do.

How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?

The project was funding driven, therefore when the opportunity came from Creative Ireland to provide a science communicator to animate climate action locally, the Tidy Towns group identified this has a great opportunity in partnership with Laois County Council.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?

Abbeyleix Tidy Towns, alongside the Abbeyleix SEC, had a small reach in relation to climate action. The project enabled Abbeyleix Tidy Towns to raise awareness and gain consensus to take further climate action in the community. This has led to an increased awareness and involvement of the community with little challenge to taking climate action.

How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

Dr Niamh Shaw, in partnership with Laois County Council, Abbeyleix Tidy Towns and wider community groups to raise awareness and build consensus. Therefore, the planning and project management approach was highly collaborative, although it was driven by Dr Niamh Shaw as a strong public communicator.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

The project management approach had to be highly adaptable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr Niamh Shaw created a mini-TV series and gained traction with the local community. This was followed by a magazine article and engagement with local TV producers.

How did you identify a funding need?

Creative Ireland was identified via horizon scanning for funding by Laois County Council and Abbeyleix Tidy Towns. The project team at Laois County Council, in partnership with Abbeyleix Tidy Towns, were both important in identifying the initial funding opportunity and chance to procure a science communicator in residence on a 6 month basis.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Although the EOI was submitted by Abbeyleix Tidy Towns, the bidding process for community projects is typically highly collaborative involving Laois County Council, the Local Enterprise Office and SECs (Sustainable Energy Communities). Communities need to be closely involved in the process and become co-developers in applications by meeting regularly.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project? If so how did you handle that and approach experts?

Dr Niamh Shaw was the specialist advisor following an open e-tender process administered by Abbeyleix Tidy Towns and the Abbeyleix Sustainable Energy Community (SEC). Niamh successfully drove the awareness activity in the project as an internationally leading communication expert.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

Identifying and accessing funding is critical for launching climate action projects in towns and communities similar to Abbeyleix. Making connections to Laois County Council, Laois LEO (Local Enterprise Office) and the SEAI was important in identifying funding opportunities, including the opportunity via Creative Ireland.

Has the community managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

The Abbeyleix Tidy Towns and Abbeyleix SEC remained true to their vision of launching and developing a climate action project. To do this, these two interlinked community groups worked in close partnership with Dr Niamh Shaw, Laois County Council and Midlands Science and had a strong collaborative approach for designing and implementing the specific activities.

The expertise of Dr Niamh Shaw was critical for delivering the project and for achieving the original vision.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

The most important learning was the need to be adaptable and to develop new formats for communicating climate action due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and physical meeting restrictions. Therefore, when communities are developing similar climate action and communication projects, they must consider alternative formats for delivery when designing the project. For example, Dr Niamh Shaw delivered an online and live TV mini-series, named Abbeyleix Almanac TV (<https://www.abbeyleixtidytowns.net/climate-action-project/almanac-tv>).

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

Procuring Dr Niamh Shaw as an expert science and climate communicator was a critical decision in delivering the project and the success of the project would have been constrained without a leading communicator.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your community as you moved through the different phases of the project?

Case studies are very powerful for other communities to learn. Therefore, reaching out to other Tidy Towns groups, County Councils, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and similar community organisations can be very helpful for developing initial project ideas for replication and potential funding opportunities.

Key contact

Mark Clancy, Abbeyleix Tidy Towns
clancy.mark@gmail.com

Links

Website: <https://www.abbeyleixtidytowns.net/climate-action-project/climate-action-walk>

Press Release: <https://www.laoistoday.ie/2020/10/16/in-pictures-all-smiles-as-abbeyleix-climate-action-project-launched/>

Creative Ireland: <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/event/science-communicator-in-residence-abbeyleix-climate-action-project/>