



Renewable Energy Co-operative (R-ECO)

www.r-eco.coop

REconomy Project

Mission

Our mission is simple: To educate communities and enable them to take responsibility for their environment by managing their energy usage. As a co-operative, we take community education seriously, integrating it into every area of the business.

Is there a link with Transition?

We have strong links with Transition Penwith, taking part in local events, attending meetings and giving talks on energy saving and renewable energy.

Your product or service – how much does it help improve resilience in your local community or elsewhere?

R-ECO is a co-operative installer of renewable energy systems for homes, businesses and communities. We're not here just to shift units, we're here to ensure that our customers receive the correct, long-term support they need in order to achieve realistic sustainability, saving money and the environment for the future.

We aim to start at the bottom – working with children and families, conducting creative workshops and demonstrating the links between recycling, energy saving and the environment. Of course, ultimately, we want people to buy our product, but we have a wider community focus – we do not want people blindly purchasing renewable energy systems, we want people to think about their whole house, their lifestyle and their carbon footprint. We work with schools, we provide free, clean energy for community events with our mobile solar PV system, as well as carrying out free recycling craft activities and energy talks at all of our events.

Employees

4 full-time, 8 part-time. 9 of our 12 employees are members, giving them an equal say in the business. We operate a system of rolling Directorships – each year, the longest standing Director steps down, meaning that any member can stand and be voted in by the membership. We actively encourage our workers to become members and, as such, our Directors are also core workers. All members' work volunteer hours, full-time members work at least 10 volunteer hours per week.

Are you in profit? If not, when do you anticipate being so? How long have you been trading?

Turnover of £750,000. We are in profit. We have been trading since November 2008.

What is your company structure and why did you choose it?

We are a worker co-operative, limited by guarantee. We chose to be a worker co-operative as we felt that as a collective, we needed a structure that reflected the democratic nature of the way we intended to do business. Having entered the world of co-operatives from a background of working for traditional corporations, it was a refreshing approach. Our structure has allowed our workers to flourish, from system designers, to office admin, everyone has an equal say into how the business is run. Nobody's voice is lost in the business; all workers are treated as equals, and paid accordingly.

What about financial sustainability? Are you trading or part-trading without money?

The business began, and ran for the first two years, with no external funds, and just a small contribution from members to keep the office going. This amounted to approximately £6000. Members also worked voluntarily as and when possible. In 2010, prior to our first commercial job, we applied for, and received, a small loan, low cost loan from Co-operative and Community Finance. We have since received no external support.

Are you looking to build more common wealth & ownership and is priority your profit sharing and/or community benefits versus more traditional investor returns?

We are a co-operative limited by guarantee, and therefore have no shareholders. We intend to bring in a system of dividends, whereby a certain portion of profit would be shared among the members.

Localisation – are you sourcing, distributing and interacting locally?

We employ local people in the areas in which we operate. Our hub is in Cornwall, and all of our office and site staff, are local people. We source as much as we can from local suppliers, and interact with the local community on a regular basis.

We have recently opened an office in Bristol, as we had some interest from some Bristol based workers. Our Bristol office is now staffed by locals and we have sourced local site workers for our Bristol projects, meaning that not only are we interacting with the local community, but we are also keeping our carbon footprint low by reducing cross-country travel. We have a Bristol Pound Account, giving local customers the opportunity to pay for our services using local currency, therefore keeping the capital in the local area.

Climate impacts – negative, beneficial or neutral?

We aim to keep our carbon footprint as low as possible: our office is heated by solar thermal and solar PV provides the electricity. We don't print brochures, instead preferring to email clients with our brochure, keeping printing at a minimum.

Anything else you want to share with us?

We are a co-operative business, aiming to do our best for the local communities within which we work, both in terms of income generation and climate change.

