



Guide to forming a local BCSEA Chapter

Introduction

The BC Sustainable Energy Association (BCSEA) is a non-profit association of citizens, professionals and practitioners committed to promoting the understanding, development, and adoption of sustainable energy and energy conservation/efficiency in British Columbia.

The BCSEA envisions a future in which all of BC's energy comes from clean, renewable, efficient sources. Our mission is to facilitate the transition to a sustainable energy future in British Columbia through education, advocacy and tangible community projects.

The BCSEA is committed to serving the whole of B.C. To this end, we encourage members to form local Chapters wherever you live.

Suggestions to help you form a Chapter

You want to start a Chapter in your community. Where to begin? How does one go about forming a Chapter? How can the provincial body help?

Forming a Chapter may appear to be a daunting task (or not), and it is with this in mind that we have developed a step-by-step "how to" for helping you get started.

To start a Chapter:

1. If you haven't already done so, explore the BCSEA website, particularly the 'Get Involved' and 'Learn More About Us' sections. Here you will find important information about the organization's history, activities, Leadership, Structure and other Chapters.
2. Pick up the phone and give us a call. Peter Ronald is our provincial coordinator and staffs our office in Victoria. He is very approachable and enthusiastic about helping Chapters get started. He can send you a list of your local members and refer you to others members who have started Chapters.
3. Spread the word in your community that a new Chapter is forming. The more participation you attract the better. As soon as there are 10 members in your community, you may form a "prospective" Chapter. You will quickly realize that all kinds of citizens are enthusiastic about sustainable energy – from engineers to educators to activists to homeowners to parents to students.

4. A Chapter will form in three stages:
 - (a) In Stage One, people meet to share their interests, explore what they want to do together, and find their feet.
 - (b) In Stage Two, you become a formal Group. You select a Steering Committee, and start building the framework you will need to become a functioning local organization.
 - (c) In Stage Three, you sign a formal agreement with the BCSEA Board of Directors to become a recognized Chapter.
5. A good way to build local memberships is to write an email, using your own words and those from the BCSEA website, and send it to everyone you know, encouraging them to join. You could ask your friends to forward it to their lists.
6. If you already have enough members, it may be as simple as sending an e-mail to existing local members, inviting them to an initial planning meeting. (We can send you sample emails that have been used in other communities. Contact our office at 250-744-2720 or info@bcsea.org)
7. To widen your reach for the first meeting, set a meeting place and time and advertise it in as many ways as you can: notify local media, put up flyers, talk to friends, use your existing network of contacts, etc.
8. Develop an agenda. Agendas are important because they keep meetings focussed and on track. Without one it is easy to wander, and before you know it the meeting time is over and you haven't had time to discuss important issues. The agenda need not be overbearing; good agendas can be as simple as four or five broad topics that require discussion. (We have sample agendas we can send you: modify them as you see fit.)
9. At your first meeting, stay open to a wide range of perspectives. Give everyone the floor for a few minutes to introduce himself or herself and express their views on why sustainable energy is important. Get a sense from each person as to what they would like to see a local Chapter accomplish. You may want to show a short video or have a presentation from a member or other knowledgeable person. This can help inspire discussion and be the basis for other activities.
10. A Chapter, like any new group, will succeed if it satisfies two essential needs:
 - (a) People's need to get engaged with issues around sustainable energy;
 - (b) People's need to enjoy the company of others.

Make sure there is time for people to meet each other, to share refreshments, and to enjoy jokes and pleasantries. Make sure you speak to everyone in person, and that whenever a new person shows up, make sure they are greeted and welcomed into the circle.

11. Take notes at the meeting, for two reasons:

- (a) Meeting summaries help you keep track of what is important to the members, as well as decision items and action items. Keep a record of what was agreed to, who will do what and what needs following up at the next meeting. This will also help you shape the agenda for the next meeting. (We have sample meeting minutes that can serve as a guideline for your own meetings.)
- (b) It is important that each Chapter communicates its activities to the provincial organization. Two-way communication is essential. The provincial body is committed to keeping you informed of what is happening at the provincial level, and they need to hear from the Chapters so that they know what is important to members at the community level.

12. After one or two meetings, or when people are comfortable, establish a steering committee. Starting and co-ordinating a Chapter is a lot of work for one person, but shared among many, the job is quite manageable. We suggest you establish a five or six-person steering committee comprised of: Chair, Co-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership/PR officer, and Member-at-large. It is important that the steering committee members know their responsibilities, and are willing to commit to share in leading the Chapter.

13. Develop a plan. This can be as simple as deciding on one or two projects the Chapter wants to undertake. Or, it can be more complex and include developing programs areas, with long- and short-term objectives, tasks and activities. Let the membership decide. They will be the ones doing the work; so let them determine their own plans and structure. The key thing is that you have a roadmap for the future. Success always begins with a solid plan.

14. Finally, strive to make every meeting fun in some way: Remember, as the Fifth Law of Sustainability says, **“If it’s not fun, it’s not sustainable!”**

Remember to contact the BCSEA office if you have questions or need any assistance:
250-744-2720 or info@bcsea.org