

# **Starting and Running a Low Carbon Living (LoCaL) Team:**

## **Leader's Guide**

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## What Is the Low Carbon Living (LoCaL) Program?

The recent surge of information on global climate change or global warming in the mainstream media has greatly increased awareness of the seriousness of the issue and the need to make changes rapidly to prevent worse impacts later. Yet most people have been slow to act. What can be done to change this?

The Massachusetts Climate Action Network (MCAN) has developed a program to prompt people to reduce their individual carbon emissions (also called a “carbon footprint”). Since carbon dioxide emissions (mostly created by burning fossil fuels including gas, oil, and coal) constitute the biggest contributor to climate change, reducing carbon emissions is critical to solving the problem.

The [Low Carbon Living \(LoCaL\) project](#) focuses on helping individuals to reduce their carbon emissions quickly. LoCaL is not about general energy efficiency education, which typically does not result in people taking action. Instead, LoCaL is based on a successful method called the [Low Carbon Diet](#) (LCD), which helps participants reduce their CO2 emissions by at least 5,000 pounds annually.

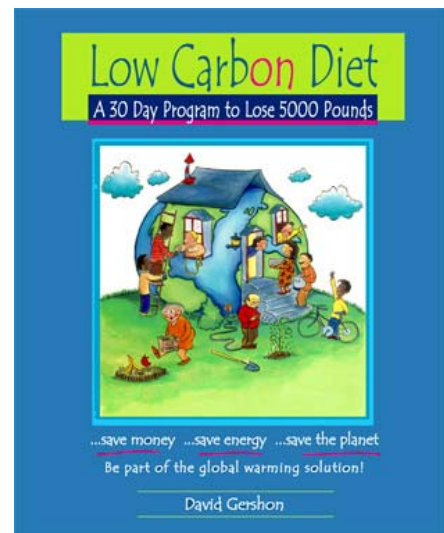
The LoCaL program encourages people to make energy efficiency improvements to their homes and make simple changes to their lifestyles. LoCaL works through small teams, which helps members make commitments and follow through on them.

A single LoCaL team of just five households can easily and quickly lose at least 25,000 pounds of carbon per year, and consequently each household will save money by reducing the amount of energy used.

A LoCaL team meets four times. At the first meeting, members get acquainted and learn how to measure their household’s annual carbon emissions. Then they select actions to reduce those emissions, starting with a goal of 5,000 pounds or more. Households improve their energy efficiency and “lose” carbon dioxide by choosing actions they want to take in a variety of areas, including use of hot water, home heating and cooling, solid waste disposal, and use of vehicles.

## How Does the LoCaL Program Differ from the Low Carbon Diet?

The LoCaL program begins with the LCD diet, but it goes much further by connecting teams and providing support to help them succeed. The LoCaL program trains team leaders from all over the state, gathers their results, will be keeping track of the results for all teams and publicizing them, presenting awards for participation, and attempting to keep the excitement level high for continuing beyond the first 5,000 pounds of carbon loss. Teams get support, outreach materials, and the ability to interact with other people involved in the LoCaL program.



## What Does a LoCaL Team Do?

Typically, a team meets at least four times, for about 1.5 hours each time over the course of a month or more. Here's what happens at the meetings:

- Meeting 1: Introduce team members to each other and build the team; get an overview of the goals and process; learn how to measure carbon footprints; calculate the footprint of one or more households.
- Meeting 2: Share each household's carbon footprints and carbon reduction goals, review possible "cool lifestyle" actions to take from *Low Carbon Diet* book.
- Meeting 3: Discuss actions taken since last meeting; review possible "cool household systems" actions to take from *Low Carbon Diet* book.
- Meeting 4: Discuss actions taken since last meeting; talk about how to empowering others to reduce their carbon footprints; set goals for outreach to others.

At all meetings, members are encouraged to share their thoughts, goals, successes, challenges. The meetings should be fun and positive, so that members get to be friendly with each other, are supported during the process, and are inspired to continue losing carbon.

## Who Can Join a LoCaL Team?

The best participants are people who can actually be persuaded to take action. The LoCaL project *promotes action*—by maintaining each individual's comfort zone within the team, fitting personal actions into a lifestyle, providing hope for positive change, and asking people to do something they can actually achieve. The plan reinforces action by providing immediate reinforcement of positive actions within the team structure and a social framework to celebrate successes.

## Who Leads a LoCaL Team?

Typically one person—a Team Leader—sets up a new team in his or her own community. The team is typically comprised of friends, neighbors, acquaintances from another group, or co-workers. The team leader may do a number of things:

- asks people to join a team, explain what a LoCaL team does and the benefits of joining, and sets up the first meeting.
- makes sure that everyone who needs a LCD book gets one.
- explains the process that the team will go through and emphasizes that this will be a fun, supportive environment.
- helps households calculate their carbon footprints.
- steps the team through the actions suggested in the book.
- keeps track of each household's progress, or make sure someone does this. (See [How Does My Team Document What We Do?](#))
- collects the information about each household's carbon reductions and sends it to MCAN, so we can tell others about your success. (See more about this under [Staying Inspired.](#))

Once a team is up and running, the members share the tasks of leading meetings and discussions; there is typically no need for a facilitator.

## If I Want to Start a Team, Do I Need Training?

You do not need any special skills, and you don't have to be trained, but it's helpful and inspiring. You do need passion for reducing our climate change impacts, willingness to talk to other people in your town during the next several months, understanding of how the program works, and the commitment to following up until you have gathered about 5-8 households and held a first meeting to bring them together. *People who want to join a LoCaL group don't need any special training.*

MCAN provides LoCaL team leader training workshops several times a year, at a very nominal cost. We intentionally keep the price as low as possible, because our goal is to help people reduce their carbon footprints as quickly as possible, not to make money.

Whether or not you decide to attend a training session, you should buy and read the *Low Carbon Diet Workbook*. (It's a quick and fun read, and you can do it in an hour or two.) The book will answer a lot of questions you may have about the LCD, which will help you talk to others about joining a team. You can buy books several ways, including here:

<http://www.empowermentinstitute.net/lcd>

You also can download other LoCaL materials from the MCAN website:

<http://www.massclimateaction.net/lcl/starting>

## How Should I Put Together a LoCaL Team?

No matter whom you choose to talk to about forming a LoCaL team, the absolute **best way to get a group together is by talking to people you already know, either in person or over the phone**. *Resist the temptation to just send email*, unless you plan to follow up with a phone call. Think about talking to people in the following settings:

- your street, apartment building, or neighborhood
- a neighborhood or condo association
- house of worship or other faith community
- arts/culture groups
- local environmental groups or civic groups
- agencies in your town or city government (e.g., public works, energy office)
- social groups in your town
- local schools or parents groups
- youth groups
- sports teams
- people who shop at a local farmers market
- library groups (e.g., a reader's group or writer's group)
- a nearby health program or hospital

You can also think about starting a LoCaL group outside your home community in a place where people gather regularly, possibly through:

- your workplace,
- political groups,

- economic development groups, or
- business and professional associations.

## What is the Best Size for a LoCaL Team?

The ideal size for a group is 5 to 8 households, but it can be done with fewer or more. Five households is enough so that everyone can share responsibility. It becomes harder to coordinate meetings with more than 8 households, so that's a reasonable limit, especially for the first team you run.

## Is There a Best Time to Run a Team?

Fall and winter are both good for running a team, because people are motivated by the cost of heating their homes. Summer can be a challenging time to get people together, unless you organize a team around regular summer activities like swimming, vacation rentals, etc.

## How Does My Team Document What We Do?

### Carbon Calculator:

The *Low Carbon Diet* book uses a handy, quick carbon calculator, so that each household's carbon footprint can be quickly determined at the start of a LoCaL Team, and again at the end. The calculator can be found online (and filled out there too), at: [http://empowermentinstitute.net/lcd/lcd\\_files/LCDcalcNet.html](http://empowermentinstitute.net/lcd/lcd_files/LCDcalcNet.html)

It's a good idea for the Team Leader to gather the information for your households and run the calculator, rather than relying on team members to do it accurately and in a timely way. In any case, the person who is going to fill out the online calculator will need to have these things in hand before starting:

- The last few payment statements from the household's electricity, natural gas and/or heating oil providers.
- The average weekly or annual miles driven using each of the household's cars.
- The miles per gallon of each car in the household. Help calculating this can be found in the Low Carbon Diet workbook (the "Think Before You Go" chapter).
- The number of airplane miles traveled per year.

When the calculator has done its work, the result should be printed out so it can be saved and compared to the carbon footprint at the end of the Team. (It will *not* automatically save itself once the person closes the window.)

For people who like details and more precise feedback about their efforts, there are many carbon calculators. Carbon footprint calculators provide powerful feedback about how the specific actions lower carbon footprints. (Note that the results can differ substantially between any two calculators, however.)

Also, a spreadsheet developed by several MCAN members provides a more detailed way to track emissions and cost savings (which the LCD calculator does not do). For every suggested action in the LCD book, there is a line in the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet is easy to use and interactive, so when you enter an action, you can instantly see how many pounds of carbon your action

saved, AND about how many dollars you saved by doing this. Some people readily enjoy being able to see how much they can save by the specific actions they take. In fact, you can use the spreadsheet as a planning tool as well. If a Team is trying to figure out which actions to take, you can enter a "1" into an action and see what the result will be.

Links to several spreadsheets are available on MCAN's LoCaL website.

### **Household Information:**

MCAN also has a household information form to help us keep track of what every team is doing, and how many tons of carbon are being lost all over the state. Please make sure the forms are completed for each household; you can complete them for each household, or you can have household members complete them during the last meeting. Filling out the form together can be an inspiring way to end the team, as everyone can see and get excited about their results. This can be the first step to losing the NEXT five thousand, ten thousand, or fifty thousand pounds. MCAN also is working to make other tools available (e.g., Kill-a-Watt meters, a blower door test) that will help teams measure and improve their energy efficiency.

### **What makes a Team Succeed?**

Teams are more likely to succeed when you follow these easy guidelines:

- Members have something in common: neighbors, friends, fellow church members, co-workers, belong to same organization, etc.
- Members are supportive of each other.
- Meetings are fun, success is celebrated, and guilt is banished.
- These values are communicated up front.

### **What Happens After a LoCaL Team Reaches its Goal?**

Part of the program involves spreading the word and helping other people to reduce their carbon footprints as well. So, when your team members have lost their first 5,000 pounds, they are ready to start other teams—for instance, with their own neighbors, friends, co-workers, or faith community.

### **What are MCAN's Plans for the LoCaL Program?**

The LoCaL Program will run for three years, beginning in fall 2007. In the first year, MCAN plans to set up teams in at least ten towns across the state. Members of these teams alone should be able to lose 400,000 pounds of carbon—more than the weight of 20 cars. Over the three years, MCAN plans to expand the LoCaL Program throughout Massachusetts, and expects the state to become the country's "Biggest Loser" of global warming emissions.

### **How Can I Publicize My Team's Efforts?**

One of the benefits of the LoCaL program is that MCAN will help you promote your teams and publicize your success. The MCAN website provides materials to use for publicity, including flyers and press release templates, which you can quickly adapt for your circumstances. Here are some things MCAN will be doing for the LoCaL project:

- writing press releases and keeping a copy on the website for you to adapt to your needs,

- sending press releases and other information to media contacts around the state and to appropriate other contacts and non-profit groups,
- writing pieces about specific local teams, including interviews, and
- tracking, analyzing, and publicizing results for all local teams.

You will also want to let your local newspaper, town website, and appropriate municipal leaders know about your team. Getting members of your local government to play a leadership role in your team or support it publicly will help to inspire your community as well as your team. Seeing stories in the local media featuring the team and its members will inspire the team to achieve more, and will also help to attract new people to the program. As you make progress, you will be able to let people know about it and communicate how easily the members of the LoCaL team have made progress. More public relations tips are available on the LoCaL website, at:

<http://www.massclimateaction.net/lcl/resources>

## **What Else Can I Do to Keep My Community Inspired to Reduce Carbon Emissions?**

The LoCaL program has more ways to help you stay inspired while you work to reduce carbon emissions. MCAN hosts a discussion group for group leaders, and runs workshops for new and experienced LoCaL trainers, to help you maintain your motivation to work with others.

You could also go on to start a [Global Warming Café](#), a [Cool School program](#), or another program developed by the [Empowerment Institute](#).

## **Where can I get more information and resources?**

You can find many resources on the MCAN website to help you, for example:

- This Leader's Guide
- A brochure containing energy tips
- A link to several tracking spreadsheets you may want to use
- Resources for tools and technology designed to help increase energy efficiency

If you have other ideas for how to further improve the LoCaL program or have other questions or ideas to share, please contact us at:

[local@massclimateaction.net](mailto:local@massclimateaction.net)

This email address should be active by the end of October 2007.

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