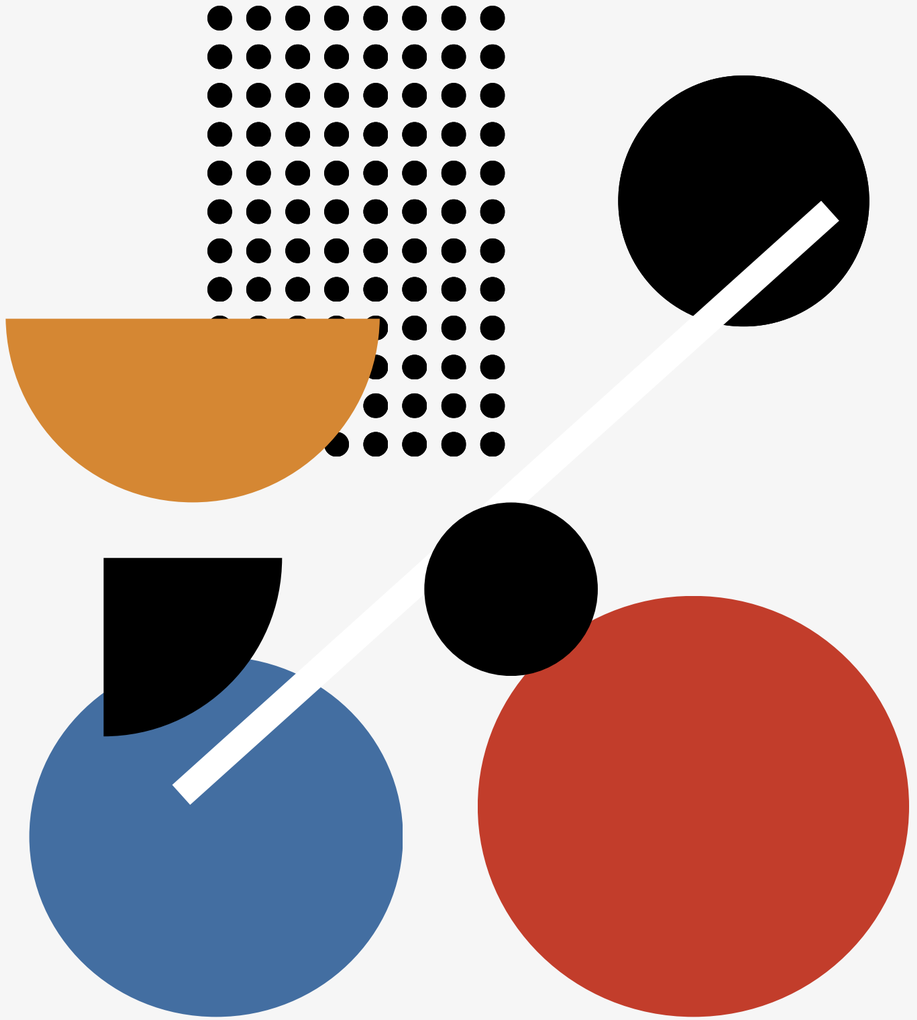
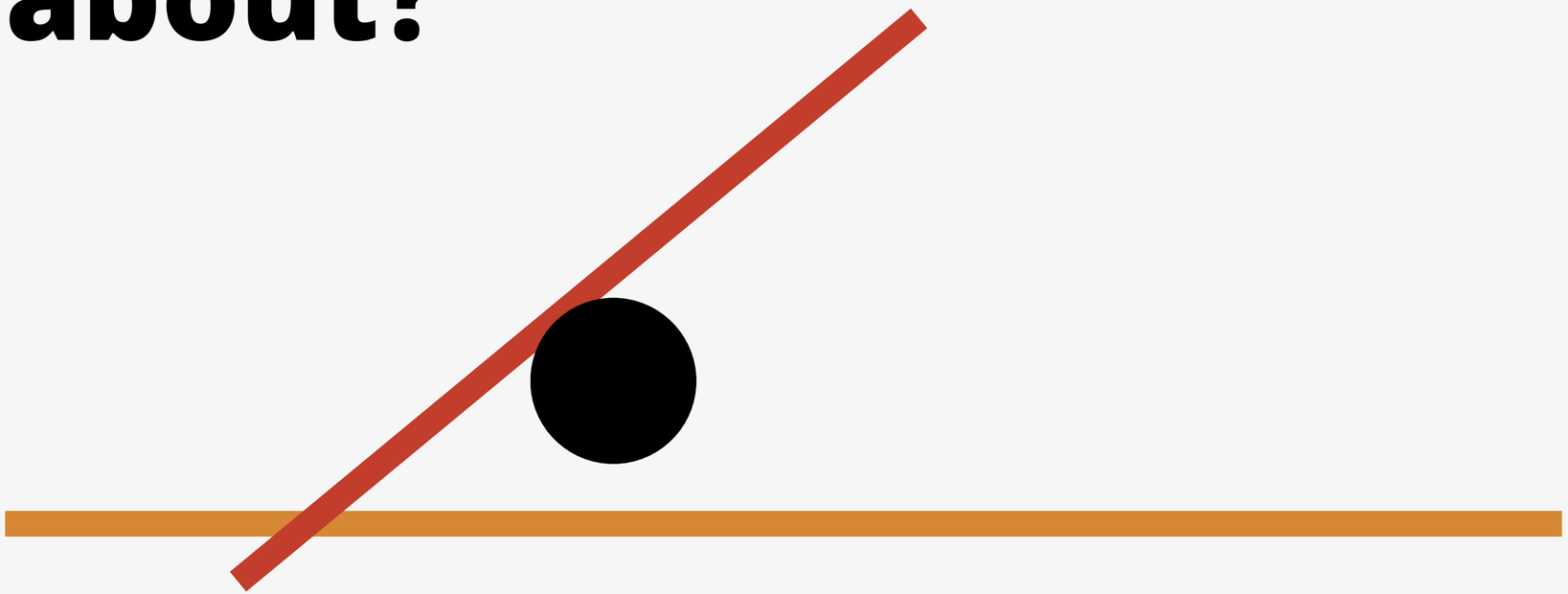
How to organise a policy dialogue?



What is the European Day of Sustainable Communities about?



The European Day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC) aims to foster a Europe where local communities lead the transition towards more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive societies. To achieve this, ECOLISE has organized the EDSC every September for the last ten years, supporting communities in sharing their stories of transformative action and promoting their visibility through media, social media, and political spaces. These activities seek to increase citizen engagement in community-led initiatives, strengthen an active European network of sustainable communities, and secure institutional recognition and support for their crucial role in the ecological and social transition.

In line with ECOLISE's commitment to inclusion and equity, the EDSC communication campaign applies a gender mainstreaming approach by systematically considering the different needs, experiences, opportunities, and impacts on people of different genders throughout the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of campaign activities. The campaign also promotes inclusive representation by ensuring that stories and visuals reflect the diversity of European communities across gender, age, ethnicity and racial backgrounds, abilities, socioeconomic circumstances, and other lived experiences. Particular attention is given to whose stories are told, who is quoted, and who is represented as a leader, while avoiding stereotypes and ensuring that a wide range of voices and perspectives are visible and valued.

EDSC 2026: 10th Anniversary

EDSC 2026 will take place from the 21st to the 27th of September. We will encourage participants to host policy dialogues all around Europe at local, regional or national level, around any of the following 10 topics: Renewable energy, Biodiversity, Climate Adaptation, Circular Economy, Food, Agriculture, Ecological Lifestyle, Water Management, Housing and Sustainable Building, Culture and Arts.

These topics are key sustainability themes that help achieve the three core values of the New European Bauhaus: beautiful, sustainable and inclusive. The NEB connects the goals of the European Green Deal with the design of places, products, and ways of living.

Later on, in November 2026, ECOLISE will bring community-led challenges, needs, solutions and impact at EU-level, at a policy event in Brussels.

Through the Funding Fairer Futures project, ECOLISE will ensure that at least 70 dialogues will take place in Spain, France, Croatia, Finland and Portugal. These will be added to a live online map on the ECOLISE website.

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2 Find your stakeholders
3 Pick a format
4 Identify your audience
5 Follow-up
6 Inclusive Events & Communication
7 Connect with the Campaign

Frame your argument

Name your topic

Your work may span several themes, but your EDSC dialogue needs one sentence. Pull from across your themes if needed, but compress to a single, specific, stakeholder-actionable ask.

Frame your argument

Ask yourself: what's standing between this stakeholder and a yes? A rule blocking you, a lack of trust, a need for proof, or two institutions that've just never been in a room together?

Overarching themes

1. Renewable energy
2. Biodiversity
3. Climate Adaptation
4. Circular Economy
5. Food
6. Agriculture
7. Ecological Lifestyle
8. Water Management
9. Housing and Sustainable Building
10. Culture and Arts

Content

Find your stakeholders

Who counts as a stakeholder

- Elected officials or public servants: both count, and public servants are often more reachable and more useful (they hold the operational knowledge, not just the title).
- Any level: local, regional, national, or EU, depending on who actually controls the thing you're asking for, not who sounds most senior.
- Staff and assistants of policymakers, (frequently our real point of entry, not a fallback!).
- Adjacent actors who aren't policymakers but shape the decision: agency technical staff, LAG coordinators, university researchers with institutional weight.

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Where to start looking

1. Your own network first. Check with your Hub, fellow CLIs, or anyone who's already spoken to someone relevant.

2. Institutional and party websites. Ministries, local councils, regional government pages, political party sites. Look for who is currently working on your specific issue, not just who holds the relevant title: check their public statements or past initiatives to confirm the fit.

3. Contact details and social media. Most contact info is public. Where it isn't, social media (especially for elected officials) is often the fastest way to make first contact or confirm someone's current role.

Once you've named candidates, narrow before you reach out. Match the person to *what they control*, not their rank: a technical officer with the right portfolio is usually worth more than a mayor with none. And prioritise 2-5 real conversations over a long list of names.

How do I write to a policy-maker?

1. Introduce your organisation and why you are reaching out.

2. Say how your policy dialogue connects with their priorities.

3. Explain what it will bring to them, for example:
   - connect with active citizens;
   - get a tour of your initiative;
   - get inspired by the actions you carry out;
   - be part of a pan-European action for the European Day of Sustainable Communities
   - get their views carried up at EU-level through ECOLISE

Pick a format

You choose what's best for your context

- In-person or online
- Meeting or roundtable vs. larger conference/public event
- With or without an audience
- Type of policymaker in the room

A bigger event is not a better event. The right people and the right synergies matter more than a full room. A 5-person roundtable where everyone present can actually act on what's discussed beats a 50-person event where most attendees are there to listen, not decide.

How to choose

Match the format to your engagement level and your topic, not to what looks most impressive:

1. Opening a relationship? Smaller, informal, in-person if possible — a site visit or small meeting builds trust faster than a stage.

2. Deepening an existing relationship? A working session or roundtable where you can actually work on something together, not just present.

3. Building an alliance? This is where a larger event can make sense — but only if the people in the room are the ones who can commit, not just attend.

What else to weigh

1. Who needs to witness it, not just attend it. Sometimes the value of a format is visibility (press, community members, your own network) rather than the policy outcome itself — decide which you actually need.

2. What you can realistically follow up on. A big public event generates a lot of names and no time to follow any of them up properly. A small one lets you actually do the follow-up work that makes the dialogue count.

3. Your own capacity. A small org running a polished roundtable beats the same org overstretched trying to run a conference.

4. The throughline for the whole slide: format should serve the level and the topic you've already picked — not be chosen first and then have a topic stuffed into it.

Content

Identify your audience

A stakeholder is not your audience.

Your stakeholder is who needs to act. Your audience is everyone the dialogue needs to reach, beyond them.

Audience is...

- Synergies: other CLIs, allied organisations, or networks who could connect with or amplify what you're doing
- Legitimacy: people whose presence signals this matters: local press, community members, peer organisations watching how it goes
- Campaign: anyone who becomes part of the longer story you're building, beyond this single event - your Hub, the wider ECOLISE network, eventually Brussels

Audience isn’t...

- Quantity. One person who stays committed beats five who forget about you the next day. A long invite list is not the same as a real audience.
- Everyone who could theoretically be interested. If their presence doesn't build a relationship, add legitimacy, or carry the story forward, they're not your audience for this event, they're a future invite for something else.
- A passive crowd. An audience that just watches adds nothing. The people in the room should either be able to act, vouch, or carry the message somewhere you can't.

Content

Follow-up

Within a week

Send a thank-you that restates what you asked for and the agreed next step, with a date.

Report to ECOLISE

Who came, what was discussed, what's next. (We will share a template!)

Track the Outcome

Yes, maybe, or no. Yes → confirm the date. Maybe → set your own follow-up date. No → ask why if you can.

Stay in touch beyond the ask

The stakeholders who help you later are rarely the ones you only contact when you need something.

Content

Make your Events & Communication Inclusive

Events

- Speak clearly and slowly
- Avoid using idioms and metaphors
- Check that venues are accessible
- Mention the facilities available when publicising an event
- Encourage people to express their needs around language
- Record events so that people can access them at their own pace
- Offer Easy Read materials at all events
- Activate the automated captions & automated captions translation on Zoom

Content

Language

Actively strive to use terms like:

- ‘humanity’, ‘all genders’, ‘chair’ or ‘chairperson’
- ‘they’, rather than ‘he’ or she’, for example
- ‘parents’ rather than ‘mum and dad’
- ‘person with disability’, ‘person living with…’
- ‘person with a mental health condition’ , ‘person with schizophrenia’

Avoid the use of terms like:

- gendered language: ‘guys’, ‘mankind’, ‘chairman’,
- ‘normal’ when referring to a non-disabled person
- phrases like ‘suffers from’, ‘handicapped’, ‘inflicted by’ a disability
- phrases such as ‘special needs’ or ‘differently abled’ in relation to disability

Typography, Colour & Imagery

- Texts should be perceivable and understandable, font size 16px or 20px - header tags bigger.
- Have text aligned on the left and, if needed, within a container to create a sense of it being centred.
- Guarantee colour contrast, providing sufficient contrast between the colours in the foreground and the background.
- Imagery should consider the following diversity factors: gender, age, ethnicity, disability, religion, bodies, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and activities. We are not looking for diversity for its own sake but a real representation of who are our target audiences (look, feel, smell, aspirations, etc).

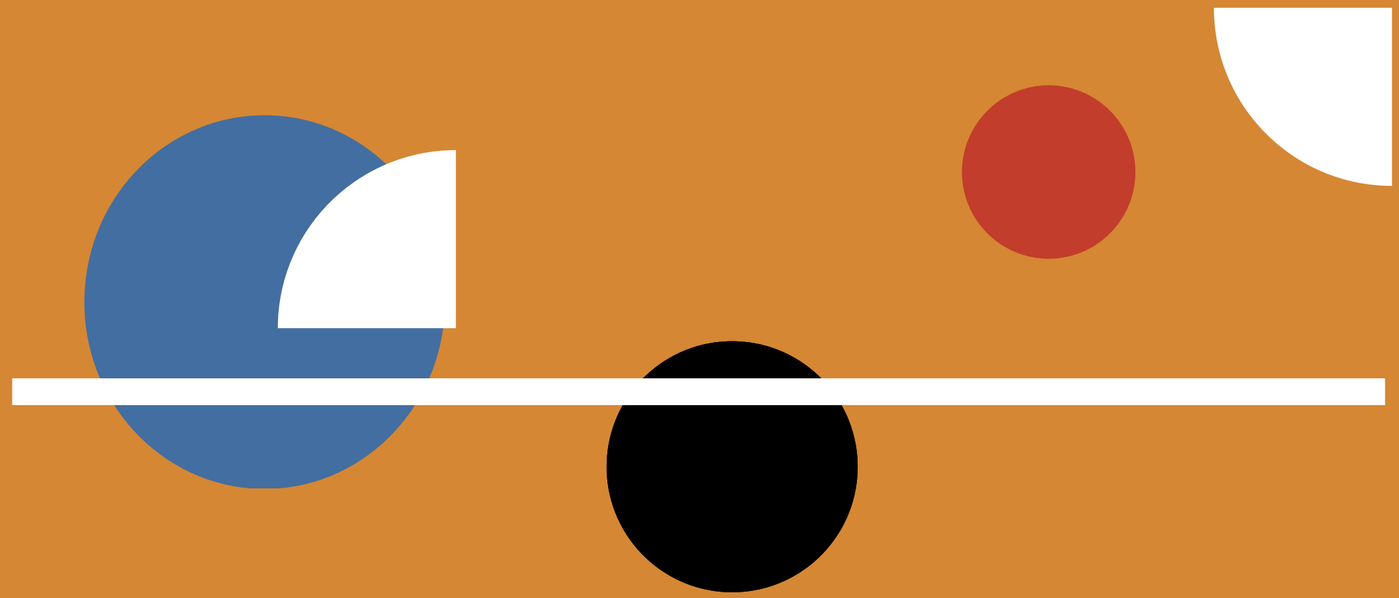
Connect with the EDSC comms campaign

1. Disseminate this toolkit, to encourage others to organize a local, regional or national policy dialogue as part of the EDSC26.
2. Life post your policy dialogue in real time, posting 1–3 key quotes, ideas, or photos during the event.
3. After your policy dialogue, post a short summary (text, photos, quotes, or video) capturing key moments and insights.
4. Use hashtags #EDSC26 #FundingFairerFutures and #EUDEARprogram. Tag ECOLISE for us to like and share on social media
5. Like our daily EDSC26 posts, engage with the online conversation and share on your own channels.
6. Tag other relevant partners, local policymakers, media, and influencers to expand the reach.

Content

How to Organise a Policy Dialogue?

Toolkit



European Day of Sustainable Communities 2026
Funding Fairer Futures policy dialogues

#EDSC26
#FundingFairerFutures
#EUDEARprogram

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