

Introduction



Welcome to our fourth showcase report, where we continue to listen and learn from small businesses and their approach to sustainability.

As 2024 draws to a close, we reflect on the wide range of businesses we've had the privilege to meet and hear from this year. From coffee shop owners and insurance providers to those in farming, manufacturing, and engineering, one common thread has emerged: every business we've spoken to is genuinely committed to sustainability. Regardless of industry, these businesses strive to make a meaningful, long-term difference and place sustainability at the heart of their operations.

Building on the positive response from our previous reports and podcast series, this new edition features the insights and experiences of three new inspiring small business owners. By the very nature of what they do, these businesses are the embodiment sustainability. Whether innovating by producing green classic electric cars, reviving traditional craftsmanship with a modern, sustainable twist, or adopting eco-friendly farming methods, their stories show that sustainability is not just about being green—it's about creating long-term value for both the environment and the community. For these business owners sustainability is central to their business planning and is something that makes sound business sense.

In this report, we feature Richard Morgan, founder of Classic Electric Cars, a company dedicated to converting classic and vintage cars into sustainable electric vehicles. The work they do combines a passion for preserving automotive history with a commitment to reducing carbon emissions. We also learn from Adrian Geach, the founder of Fresh Graphics, who is reviving traditional signwriting techniques, all while making eco-friendly choices with the materials he uses. Finally, we hear from Dean Loury-Jenkins from Celtic Roots Farm, whose regenerative farming has been driven by his desire to create a sustainable, local food system.

At Novuna Business Finance, we believe that sustainability is a core principle at the heart of modern business thinking. For years, we have been committed to helping small businesses embrace sustainability in practical and impactful ways. Whether it's offering financial support for green technologies, providing resources to reduce environmental impact, or helping businesses adopt eco-conscious practices, we make it our priority to understand the unique challenges small businesses face in integrating sustainability into their operations.

The voices of small business owners are vital to support a wider conversation on sustainability, and we're proud to give a platform for these voices to be heard around the UK. The insights shared in this report—and through our podcast series—are just the beginning. We invite you to join the conversation, share your thoughts, and be part of the movement towards a more sustainable and inclusive future.

I hope you find this report insightful, and that the stories of these businesses inspire you as much as they've inspired us. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, we'd love to hear from you.

Geoff Maleham Managing Director Novuna Business Finance

Key lessons on sustainability from small businesses

Reflecting on the inspiring small businesses we have met this year; one thing stands out: a shared commitment to sustainability.

Whether in farming, manufacturing, or creative services, small business owners are not only dealing with challenges but are also coming up with practical solutions that help build a more sustainable future. These lessons can inspire all types of businesses to think more sustainably in their day-to-day operations.

What we have learnt

- Sustainability is at the heart of what they do: For small businesses, sustainability isn't just an add-on—it's a key part of their values. Whether they're growing food, making products, or providing services, sustainability guides their decisions every step of the way.
- Financial hurdles are common:
 Sustainability can be costly, especially for businesses with tight margins. Many owners rely on other sources of income, government grants, or new ways of funding to make their sustainability plans affordable.
- Innovation is crucial: Small businesses are always finding new ways to make sustainability work, even when resources are limited. From using renewable energy in their places of work, to finding ecofriendly ways of farming, their creativity helps them meet sustainability goals.
- Sustainability sets them apart: In a crowded market, sustainability can be a key point of difference in terms of winning business and having a competitive edge. Businesses use their green practices—such as using ecofriendly materials or sourcing locally—to

- show customers that they are serious about sustainability.
- Resilience helps them adapt: Small businesses often face difficult times, whether from economic pressures or changes in the market. However, their resilience is what keeps them going—adapting quickly, learning from mistakes, and sticking to their sustainability goals.
- Community support makes a big difference: Small businesses rely on their local networks to help them achieve sustainability. Collaborating with schools, local councils, and other businesses provides both practical support and a sense of shared purpose in their efforts.
- Traditional skills can support sustainability: Traditional methods—like handcrafting products or using regenerative farming techniques—are making a comeback. These older skills are often more sustainable and help businesses reduce their environmental impact, while also attracting customers who value craftsmanship.
- Working together makes a bigger impact: Small businesses that collaborate with others can achieve greater sustainability results. Whether it's sharing knowledge, meeting up with your fellow small business owners on the high street, teaming up for local environmental projects, or working together to create new sustainable products, partnerships can make a real difference.
- Better support is needed: While some small businesses benefit from government schemes or mentoring, many still lack the ongoing support needed to make sustainability work long-term. There is a clear need for better funding and tailored support to help small businesses become more sustainable.



A conversation with Richard Morgan, Founder and Owner of Electric Classic Cars

The world of vintage cars has a dreamy quality to it. A blend of timeless style, classic design, and a spirit of freedom from a bygone era. These rolling works of art exude elegance and nostalgia, but they also come with engines that often belong to a less environmentally conscious time. Imagine, then, the dream of combining the best of both worlds: the undeniable charm of a vintage car paired with the clean, sustainable power of modern electric technology. For Richard Morgan, affectionately known as "Moggy," this isn't just a dream—it's his everyday reality. As the Managing Director of Electric Classic Cars, based in Newtown, Wales. Richard is at the forefront of a movement that reinvents classic car ownership, seamlessly merging automotive nostalgia with eco-friendly innovation.

Richard's love affair with classic cars began in an unconventional way. "When I was 17, I obviously passed my test, which is a big thing in Wales. If you don't pass your driving test, you don't go very far," he recalls with a chuckle. But youthful exuberance led to a mishap. "Within about a week, unfortunately, I managed to put my mum's car on the roof."

Consequently, his parents bought him a "clapped-out old VW Beetle" that wasn't road legal and required quite a bit of work. They also gave him a welder for his birthday. "Basically, crack on," they told him. This was the start for himhands on experience that also led to a deep appreciation for the vehicles he worked on. "Once it was on the road, oh, I looked after that car," he says. "I'd put so much effort into it, so many hours and love, sweat, and tears building this thing."

From there, it turned into a lifelong passion. Throughout his professional career in the energy efficiency industry, Richard continued to restore and modify classic cars. The fusion of these two worlds—mechanics and sustainability—eventually led to the birth of Electric Classic Cars.

About eight years ago, Richard decided to leave the "suit and tie world" of helping large organisations reduce their carbon footprints. He saw an opportunity to turn his hobby into a business that aligned perfectly with his environmental ethos. "I've always restored, modified, tried to make classic cars go faster," he explains. Discovering a YouTube video of someone fitting a forklift truck motor into a VW Beetle sparked an idea. "I thought, that's interesting," he says, "it's a motor the size of a biscuit tin, and with a huge amount of power."

He embarked on his own project, documenting the journey online. "People followed me, followed the journey, found it interesting," Richard notes. Unexpectedly, someone offered to buy the finished car. "That was a surprise to me because I didn't really start this as a planned business." But the demand was there, and Electric Classic Cars began to take shape. "It's a hobby that's got out of control, as my wife likes to call it," he jokes.

The company's ethos revolves around sustainability, not just in the end product but throughout the entire process. "We are taking essentially a classic car that's come to the end of its life, and we are melding that with an electric vehicle that's come to the end of its life," Richard explains. They repurpose battery packs and motors from crashed electric vehicles, "shoehorning" them into vintage cars. "You are second-life-ing two things that have come to the end of their life," he emphasises.

Even in the workshop, they are building sustainability into the process. "We've got, for instance, a wire cut-off box," he says. "Whenever somebody's doing additional wiring on the car, that's the first place they'll look... rather than just use a new wire."

Richard acknowledges the importance of support for small businesses in sustainability and innovation. "It's always nice to have some more support. Having that backing from Welsh Government to take steps forward and achieve these goals is very much appreciated."



One might assume that the clientele for such specialised vehicles would be a niche group of environmentally-conscious wealthy individuals. However, Richard notes that the customer base is surprisingly diverse. "It's everything from multi-millionaires down to a teacher... that just drives a lovely little VW Beetle back and forth to work," he says.

The reasons people choose to convert their classic cars vary widely. Some are motivated by environmental concerns. "They've done their research, and they can see the benefits," Richard explains. Others are classic car lovers frustrated with the unreliability and maintenance demands of vintage engines. "They might have a Tesla already and be driving that thinking, 'If only I could have this Tesla reliability and zero maintenance in my old Ferrari, it'd be fantastic."

Indeed, one of the surprises for Richard was the number of high-end supercars coming through his workshop. "If you asked me when I started the business which classic cars we'd be converting to electric, Ferrari would have been at the bottom of the list," he admits. Yet, they've converted several Ferraris, including Testarossas and 308s. "Some people see classic cars as an investment, a collector piece... That really annoys me," he says passionately. "Classic cars are there to be enjoyed and driven."

Addressing common misconceptions about electric vehicles, Richard is quick to dismiss the notion that infrastructure is lacking. "I always hear the 'there's not enough infrastructure' excuse from people that don't own EVs," he states. On a recent trip to the Cairngorms in Scotland in an electric classic Porsche 911, he had no issues. "We did three stops on the way up... When you are stopping, you're parking the car up, and with an electric car, the only difference is when you park it up, you plug it in."

He is optimistic about the future of EV charging infrastructure. "As more and more people buy

electric cars there'll be charging points next to all of the parking spots in a car park, for instance."

When asked if he could convert one car from history, Richard doesn't hesitate. "Straight away, I know the answer because it's the poster car that I had on my bedroom wall when I was a young teenager," he beams. "It was a Lamborghini Countach. You can't get away from it, if you're a car guy, the Lamborghini Countach being that... It would be fantastic if one of those came into the workshop."

Richard Morgan's Electric Classic Cars is more than just a business; it's a testament to what's possible when passion meets purpose. By breathing new life into vintage vehicles and making sustainability stylish, Richard is not only preserving automotive history but also paving the way for a greener future. As he puts it, "I've brought together my skill set from working on classic cars and rally cars all my life and just melded it to my knowledge of energy efficiency."



About Electric Classic Cars

Electric Classic Cars specialises in converting vintage automobiles from the 1950s to the early 1980s into electric-powered vehicles. Their services enhance reliability, performance, and sustainability by incorporating modern innovations like upgraded brakes, electric heating, power steering, and regenerative braking. Whether it's a standard conversion or a full restoration, Electric Classic Cars brings treasured heirlooms into the 21st century without compromising their timeless appeal.

Discover more at:

Website: www.electricclassiccars.com

Instagram: @electricclassiccars Youtube: ElectricClassicCars



A conversation with Adrian Geach, Founder and Owner of Fresh Graphics

In an age dominated by digital design and mass-produced signage, one Cardiff-based artist is breathing new life into the art of traditional hand-painted signs. With over five decades of experience, Adrian Geach, the founder of Fresh Graphics, is not only reviving a timeless craft but also offering businesses an environmentally conscious way to stand out.

"I was more artistic than academic in school," Adrian recalls. "I wanted to do something along those lines and was always fascinated with fairground art and lettering." His passion ignited at the tender age of 14 after watching a documentary about a signwriter. "Something clicked, and I just thought, that's what I want to do."

Opportunity knocked when a friend of his father's, who owned a signwriting company with an 80-year legacy in Cardiff, offered Adrian a five-year apprenticeship. "I started when I was 16," he says. "I was really lucky; I got taught by three master craftsmen. I used to run to work every morning—I only lived 10 minutes away—but I just couldn't wait to get in and start."

Back in 1980, the world of signwriting was entirely handcrafted. "Everything was handpainted, drawn by hand. There were no computers," Adrian reminisces. "We did cinema posters, church posters, facias, but not much site work. Everything was done in the workshop."

The late '80s and early '90s brought significant changes to the industry with the advent of computer-cut vinyl lettering. "It absolutely killed

the industry because it was quick, cheap, and you didn't really have to have any experience if you wanted to set up a company doing it," Adrian explains. "For the next 15 or 16 years, I very rarely picked up a brush."

Despite this, Adrian never lost his love for traditional signwriting. "I think with the advent of social media and craft in general in the UK, it kick-started people's interest in traditional methods," he notes. A pivotal moment was the release of the independent film Sign Painters Movie in America. "I think it just reignited people's interest," he says. "A lot of graphic design students maybe watched it, and it sparked something."

Businesses began seeking unique, character-filled signage to differentiate themselves. "The proliferation of coffee shops, tattoo parlours—they were looking for something a bit more traditional or unique," Adrian observes. "Because it's not perfect, hand-painted signage has a lot more character than a computer-generated or printed sign."

Social media amplified this resurgence. "It's such an interesting thing for people to watch," he says. "A lot of signwriters post short films of them actually signwriting, and people find it fascinating."

Today, Adrian's work is as diverse as ever. "It can be from a coffee shop to work for a big housing association where I put painted illustrations on their office walls," he shares. He particularly enjoys collaborating with small businesses. "I really like it because you form a relationship, and as they grow, they can give you more work," he says. "I tend to like doing restaurants, cafes, shops—that sort of work."

In an era where sustainability is paramount, traditional signwriting offers an eco-friendly alternative. "Signwriting in general is a very environmentally conscious way of doing things because a lot of the time it's just paint," Adrian explains. "The materials you use are environmentally friendly. Now, a lot of the



signwriting products are water-based, whereas years ago they used to be oil-based with lead."

He contrasts this with his work he did in the past. "When I didn't have signwriting work, I did a lot of exhibition work, which was really environmentally unfriendly," he recalls. "A lot of exhibition stands made with plastic and all sorts of materials were thrown away at the end of a three-day event. I've gone from one extreme to the other."

Adrian is mindful of his environmental impact. "I try to leave a small carbon footprint," he says. "I'm very conscious of any waste that I make. A lot of the time, I'll go to do a job, and it might

be on the side of a wall, so all I'm using is paint. There's no plastic background or metal background."

Nestled on Tudor Lane in Cardiff, Adrian's workshop is part of a vibrant scene. "Where I am is full of artists and creatives, so we all really do look after each other," he says. "Everyone's in the same boat when you're in small business—chasing money and trying to get value for your worth."

This camaraderie extends beyond professional support. "We go out litter picking on the lane and talk to Cardiff Council about any waste that appears," Adrian shares. "It's a really good community spirit here."

Despite the supportive local network, Adrian acknowledges challenges that small businesses face, particularly regarding governmental support. "We pay a lot of rates but don't get anything for it," he laments. "If there was a part of your rates that handled the rubbish, that would help massively. It just seems so wrong that you're paying all this money, and you don't get any help, and then you have to pay to have any rubbish removed."

However, he appreciates past support during difficult times. "During COVID, I thought the Welsh Government was really good," Adrian notes. "They helped with the rates, gave everyone business grants and low-interest loans. I feel that they should really carry on that momentum of helping smaller businesses."

Looking ahead, Adrian is excited about venturing further into the world of television and film. "It's something I really enjoy that I've been in and out of for the last five years."

After 44 years in the industry, Adrian is embracing a new approach to his work-life balance. "I'm slowing down, if you like, and I just want to do what interests me now," he admits. "The word 'no' comes out of my mouth now, whereas before it was just 'yes.'"

His specialised skills are in high demand. "I'm

lucky that there's not many time-served signwriters around, so I do feel like I can pick and choose," he says. Currently, he's working on "Young Sherlock," a Guy Ritchie production set to air on Amazon next year. "It's a huge production, bringing a lot of work and money to the area," Adrian notes. "A lot of specialist trades are settling in this area because of the amount of work that's going on."

Adrian's journey is a testament to the enduring appeal of craftsmanship and sustainability. His workshop is a kaleidoscope of colourful, diverse signage—a living gallery that captures the essence of his art. "I love being surrounded by fantastic, different signage," he says, "it's very colourful, so diverse."

As businesses strive to stand out while embracing sustainability, Adrian's handcrafted signs literally do this. In a world increasingly dominated by the digital and disposable, Adrian's work is a refreshing reminder of the beauty and value of traditional crafts.



About Fresh Graphics

Fresh Graphics is a Cardiff-based company founded by veteran sign writer Adrian Geach, specialising in traditional hand-painted signage that merges timeless craftsmanship with modern sustainability. With over five decades of experience, Fresh Graphics offers businesses unique, environmentally conscious signage solutions that stand out for their character and artistry. For those interested in experiencing Adrian's work or commissioning a piece, he recommends visiting his Instagram profile.

Discover more at:

Website: www.freshgraphics.co.uk Instagram: @freshgraphicssignwriter



Planting seeds of change: how Celtic Roots Farm cultivates sustainable agriculture

A conversation with Dean Loury-Jenkins, Founder and Owner of Celtic Roots Farm

In the rolling hills of Wales, a quiet revolution is taking place. Celtic Roots Farm, a community-supported agriculture initiative led by Dean Loury-Jenkins, is redefining what it means to farm sustainably. Committed to ethical animal treatment, environmental stewardship, and food security, the farm provides fresh, local produce directly to residents within a seven-mile radius. By connecting closely with the community, Celtic Roots Farm is not just producing food—it's lowering carbon footprints and building resilience within the local food system.

Dean's journey to sustainable farming began long before the farm's inception. "It was

something I was passionate about back in 2015," he reflects. However, it wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic that his vision truly took shape. "The pandemic really showed that food insecurity was at an all-time high. Everyone was rushing out to get food, everyone was scared, and there weren't enough local producers to pick up that slack," Dean explains.

At the time, Dean was working as a funeral director, witnessing first-hand the pandemic's toll on his community. This experience deepened his resolve to help. "I truly had that thing that I wanted to help people in the local community," he says. This led to the establishment of Celtic Roots Farm with a firm commitment: to serve only those within a seven-mile radius. "I think that's important as well," Dean emphasises. "We're focusing on the community right here."

Building a community-supported farm comes with its own set of challenges, particularly when competing with the convenience of supermarkets. "It's changing the way people buy stuff," Dean acknowledges. "The biggest problem we've got is supermarkets. Everyone can go to Tesco, Asda, Morrisons—they've got a wide range of products."

With a smaller selection and a focus on sustainability over variety, Dean admits it's been a struggle to shift consumer habits. "It's been a challenge to get people to change the way they buy," he says. However, he's noticing a gradual shift. "More and more people are buying into box schemes now and having stuff directly sent to them. People are looking at local food and more organic food as well."

One of the standout features of Celtic Roots Farm is its commitment to ethical livestock practices and innovative farming methods. "We move our stock around quite a lot," Dean explains. Pigs play a crucial role in soil management. "We use the pigs to work our vegetable beds. We put in what's called green manure—a crop like red clover and radish that helps the nutrients in the soil—and then the pigs rotate that back into the soil, building up the structure."

This method not only enriches the soil but also reduces the need for chemical fertilisers and pesticides. "With their manure, it's fertilising the soil, giving us around five years' worth of growth without having to use chemical fertilisers or pesticides," Dean notes. "They also get rid of pests within the soil, which stops our root crops from getting damaged."

Dean's approach is a blend of traditional practices and modern sustainability, often learned through trial and error and a bit of digital exploration. "I love being on YouTube and watching people all over the world using different sustainable models," he says. "You've got to try; some things have failed, and some things have been positive."

For instance, after losing a crop of sunflowers to slugs, Dean devised a natural solution for next year. "We're going to be using our alpacas out with the ducks. The ducks will get rid of the slugs, so we're saving our crops without using slug pellets. The alpacas will protect the ducks from foxes."

Running a sustainable farm is not without its financial hurdles. Dean balances his time between the farm and his landscaping company, which helps fund the farming operations. "For the last two years, I've had to run my landscaping company as well as the farm," he shares. "There's not a huge amount of money coming into the farm at the moment."



Administrative tasks add another layer of complexity, especially since Dean is dyslexic. However, he's found tools to help manage these challenges. "ChatGPT has been helping me write my messages and get stuff out there," he says. "That's taken a lot of the admin side of the business away from me, so I can focus on the actual running of the business."

Despite these challenges, Dean remains committed to his mission. "I've just had to go out and work hard to build those funds and put it in," he says. "I think doing that, you feel a lot prouder of what you're doing and more passion in what you're doing."

While Dean hasn't received financial support from the government or local council, he benefits from programs like Farming Connect, which offers mentorship and funding for educational programs. "They give us support; I'm funded for different programmes I can go on," he notes. "We can go out to other farms, see what they're doing, and get mentorship."

Collaborative projects also play a significant role in the farm's sustainability. Celtic Roots Farm has partnered with Veg for Schools, an initiative that supplies organic produce to local schools. "We're working with them now for next year to grow veg that will only go to local schools," Dean explains. "Programmes like that are helping us build into more of a sustainable model."

Looking ahead, Dean envisions expanding the farm's role in the community by hosting retreats focused on mental health and well-being. "I'd like to do retreats down here for people with mental health issues, to get them into a different space," he shares. "They'd be able to eat the food from the land and engage with the animals a lot more, kind of bring people back down to earth."

Additionally, the farm is initiating a tree-planting campaign, aiming to plant 100 apple trees with the help of community sponsors. "We're getting sponsors—£25 a tree—and they'll have

their plaque on the tree," Dean says. "When people come, they can see they've done it. It helps with our pollinators and builds the orchard."

Dean believes that the challenges of recent years have sparked a renewed interest in community and sustainability. "There's a lot more people out there now that are inspired, especially after the pandemic, to start making changes," he observes. "We're up for speaking to people and looking at different projects, how we can partner up to make a bigger impact within the community."

Celtic Roots Farm embodies the spirit of sustainable agriculture by intertwining ethical practices, community involvement, and environmental stewardship. Dean Jenkins' passion and innovative approaches serve as an inspiring example of how one farm can make a significant impact. As he puts it, "Even if it's only small, that's what I had to do."

By focusing on local solutions to global problems, Celtic Roots Farm is not just growing food—it's cultivating a stronger, more resilient community.



About Celtic Roots Farm and Gardens

Celtic Roots Farm is a community-supported agricultural initiative based in Wales, dedicated to sustainable and ethical farming practices.

Discover more at:

Website: https://celticrootswales.co.uk Instagram: @celticrootsfarmandgardens

Facebook: @celticrootsfarmwales

Assessment



Closing remarks by Jo Morris

Head of Insight, Novuna Business Finance

We are grateful to Dean, Richard and Adrian for sharing their inspiring business stories with us. At Novuna Business Finance, we believe that the future of business lies in practices that benefit not only the bottom line but also the environment and the communities we serve. The businesses featured in this report are a testament to that belief, showing that sustainability is not just a passing trend but a genuine commitment that drives real, positive change.

It is truly inspiring to see the passion and creativity that small business owners bring to their sustainable practices — whether it's through eco-friendly farming, innovative craftsmanship, or forward-thinking engineering. These businesses are leading the way and proving that it is possible to thrive while prioritising the environment, people, and long-term growth. But they cannot do it alone. More support is needed to help these businesses overcome the challenges they face. With the right support, they can continue to lead the way towards a more sustainable future for us all.

By listening to and amplifying the voices of small businesses, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of the support they need to thrive. With the right resources, guidance, and backing, small businesses can continue to be the driving force behind innovation and sustainability.

If you have found these stories as motivating as we have, we invite you to explore the full audio versions available through our sustainability podcast. And if you are a small business committed to sustainability and would like to be part of our next podcast, we would love to hear from you. Your stories are essential to shaping the future of sustainable business.

Website: NovunaBusinessFinance.co.uk LinkedIn: @NovunaBusinessFinance

Podcast

https://www.novuna.co.uk/business-finance/resource-centre/the-sustainable-business-podcast/

Research Insights

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About Novuna

Novuna

Novuna is a trading style of Mitsubishi HC Capital UK PLC, a leading financial services company, authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). We have over 2,250 employees, £8.2bn of net earning assets and over 1.3 million customers across five business divisions; Novuna Consumer Finance, Novuna Vehicle Solutions, Novuna Business Finance, Novuna Business Cash Flow and our European division specialising in Vendor Finance providing innovative finance solutions to enable consumers and businesses to grow and prosper.

We are a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi HC Capital Inc., strengthening our relationship with one of the world's largest and most diversified financial groups, with over 11trn yen (£57bn) of assets.

Novuna Business Finance

Novuna Business Finance provides business finance to SMEs and bigger corporations across the UK. This includes asset finance, stocking, block discounting and sustainable project finance provided through brokers, vendor organisations, manufacturers and direct to the business community.

With an asset portfolio of more than £1.8bn, the business is active across multiple sectors from transport and agriculture to construction and manufacturing and was awarded Best Service from an Asset Based Finance Provider at the 2024 Business Moneyfacts Awards.

The business' Sustainable Project Finance team is also supporting the development and construction of sustainable energy and transport

projects, which are critical to the decarbonisation of the UK's infrastructure.

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Methodology:

The interviews in this report were conducted in november 2024.