

- [Thinking it through](#)
- Choosing project leaders



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Thinking it through

If you are about to start a community action project, these questions, which you can work through by yourself or with others, may help. It will help you think carefully through what you want to achieve, note some initial ideas for how you can achieve it and highlight potential problems you might encounter.

Motivation

Try and answer these questions to ascertain whether there’s enough commitment to see the project through.

- Why are you thinking of doing something for your community?
- Where is the enthusiasm coming from to start this project - who is driving the thinking?
- Is your PCC behind it?
- What made you think of this particular type of project?

Vision and direction

Write down what it is you want to do. It makes it clear to you and everyone involved, even if the leadership changes over time.

- What are you thinking of doing/what sort of service do you intend to provide?
- How does it fit in with other activities in your parish and with your parish development plan?
- What do you want to achieve ultimately?
- What does success look like, and how would you measure it?
- How would you know you were moving in the right direction throughout the project?

Resources and context

You'll need money, people and time. Where will those resources come from?

- List what you think you'll need to make this happen - premises, people, skills, funding?
- How far is what is needed (premises, funding, skills, volunteers etc..) already in place or already accessible? What have you already got to offer?
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Are there potential partners around who could help?

- Are there other churches or faith groups nearby that would want to collaborate?
- Are there potential funding sources? In what form might they come - donations, grant aid, contracts, earned income?
- Do the people involved have the time and commitment necessary for the task?
- Who will ultimately be responsible for the project?
- Are there any special regulations that need to be taken into account (e.g. child protection, or building regulations)?
- What risks are involved in this project? Listing them can help you devise plans to reduce risk and also to apply for insurance when the time comes.

Facts and figures

Research, facts and figures are valuable evidence of need. It could help secure funding.

- Have you got any evidence of a need/usefulness that will convince potential funders and/or partners?
- Have you checked that no one else is meeting that need, or are there organisations in the area that are already providing a similar service?
- If you have any anecdotal evidence, is it backed up by other sorts of information, such as demographics, service data or deprivation statistics?

Choosing project leaders

Projects can be managed in a variety of ways and have different degrees of independence from the local church. It could be run by:

- The Parochial Church Council;
- A sub-committee of the PCC;
- The diocese where the staff member is managed by the Diocesan Social Responsibility Officer;
- A steering group with membership from the Department for Social Responsibility;
- A steering group of participating Anglican churches;
- A steering group of representatives of Churches Together;
- A committee of management linked with the Mothers' Union.

In these cases, the projects use the church's charitable status for fund raising. Other projects are:

- Registered charities
- Charitable companies limited by guarantee;
- Registered community interest companies.

The boards of trustees/directors of these will usually have some link to/cross membership with the sponsoring church(es) as well as other partner organisations.

Often initiatives are driven by a small number of individuals, and a time comes when they can't continue. This is perfectly acceptable! Succession plans are great if they can be arranged, but voluntary initiatives often have a life cycle of their own: they're born, they live, they die - and another is born somewhere else. It is helpful to remember this is not an institution, so be ready to let things go when the natural course is run.



Legal setup and admin

Most initiatives start with an idea and a group of motivated people doing something for others. Where this is built around a parish and its Parochial Church Council (PCC), its set-up and administration can often be covered by the PCC administration and accounts. However, often initiatives grow beyond the scope of their PCC or are not linked to a local parish. If that's where you are, here are some thoughts:

Registered Charity

It's not nearly as daunting to set up a registered charity as you might think, but it does provide a recognised structure that will attract tax relief on donations. You'll need to be clear about your purpose and objects. The **Charities Commission** provides a simple guide on how to do it. You will normally need a “company limited by guarantee” to provide the body corporate - this is a good thing as it avoids you taking personal liability for anything that goes wrong. If you need help with this, or with charity registration, a local charity-focused lawyer can help you.

Community Interest Companies (CICs)

CICs are limited companies that are created for the use of people who want to conduct a business or other activity for community benefit, and not purely for private advantage. This is achieved by a “community interest test” and “asset lock”, which ensure that the CIC is established for community purposes and that the assets and profits are dedicated to these purposes. Registration of a company as a CIC has to be approved by the Regulator who also has a continuing monitoring and enforcement role.

People

Many projects are staffed entirely by volunteers. But there's no reason why your work can't be extended by employing people. The **National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)** provides helpful guidance and templates for employed and self-employed contracts, which set out the expectations in an agreement before you start. Don't forget to take at least two references to confirm that someone is an appropriate person (it's a good idea to take a reference for volunteers too) and, if your work involves children, you will need to carry out CRB checks. Ask your PCC or Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser for help with this. You may find the **NCVO website** helpful for many other aspects of managing your project, including training.

Paying people

This involves setting up payroll, and it's best to use a bureau such as **Moorepay** for this - then you know that all the HMRC calculations are being made correctly. Those wanting to get more involved might use **Sage**, a popular payroll system used by many small organisations.

Accounting Systems

Those putting funds into your initiative - and the Charities Commission - will need to be satisfied that your accounts are kept properly and are correct. There are many accounting system packages you can use to keep this in order, for example, **Paxton Computers** who specialise in charity software. A local accountant or your PCC Treasurer may be able to help you with the accounts - at least to show you how to set them up and maintain your 'cash books' and bank reconciliations. Try to use a bank account for all transactions, as accounting for notes and coins can be difficult.

Audit/Examiners

It's not necessary to get a full audit for a small charity, but it is important to have an independent review of your accounts to confirm that it's all correct. **Independent Examiners Ltd.** is specially set up for low-cost examination of charity accounts and looks after over 700 charities: but you may find that your local PCC Treasurer also has some good ideas on where to turn to locally.

Insurance

Most initiatives contain risk, and it's a good idea to consider where those risks lie before you start. Many risks can be insured against at relatively low cost, and often those associated with a church project can be covered by **Ecclesiastical Insurance**. As projects can differ so widely, it's difficult to point to a single solution, but try also reading the church newspapers to get contact details for insurance brokers wanting to help in this area.

PCC

The Parochial Church Council - each parish has this executive committee, which is made of clergy, church wardens and lay members.

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