

# Quick guide to project planning

This document is designed to provide some guidance to organisations when planning a project. Projects can be large or small, capital or revenue, simple or complex. A definition is as follows:

*“A project can be defined as a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service. Projects are different from other ongoing operations in an organisation, because unlike operations, projects have a definite beginning and an end – they have a limited duration.”*

In summary, a project is a piece of work carried out **over and above** the normal day to day activities of your organisation. Below is a list of handy tips to help you plan, develop and deliver projects.

## 1. Establish need for project

It is important to establish a need for your proposed project from the outset. This can be done in number of ways including:

- Public meetings
- Carrying out a survey
- Conducting research
- Undertaking community consultation

However you identify the need, you should invite feedback from your users or local community to ensure what is being proposed will address the need identified. It is important to record the needs identified as this data may be useful evidence as part of a funding applications or other documents.

## 2. Make strategic links

Projects should be able to contribute towards or deliver on local/national strategies. Projects with good links to strategic documents should have a better chance of attracting funding.

## 3. Project plan & timetable

It is advisable to put together a plan and timetable when developing a project. The plan should include information such as what you intend to do, how you are going to do it, when it will be done and by whom. It is helpful to put the project plan into a timetable with key actions or “milestones” listed alongside a timeline and person(s) responsible. For larger projects or capital projects, you may need to seek professional advice or other specialists or factor in considerations such as statutory consents.

## 4. Identify resources required

To carry out a project you may need some resources to deliver it. This could be things such as people, materials, meeting space, or staff costs. The level of resources required will probably be linked to the size or complexity of the project. The bigger and more complex the project, the more resources are likely to be needed. It is better to identify resources needed at the outset as it allows you to budget and plan accordingly.

## **5. Cost project accurately**

An important part of any project is calculating the cost to deliver it. This can be done in a number of ways. For smaller projects you can look up materials or equipment costs with local suppliers or online. With larger value projects you may require going to market and seeking tenders from potential service providers or contractors. Remember to include VAT in project calculations.

If applying for funding it is likely that you will be asked how the project cost has been calculated so ensure that you have your workings to hand along with a copy of any price guides, quotes or tenders that have been sought. Also, if seeking funding to pay for your project remember to factor in cashflow to the arrangements. Allowing a contingency for unforeseen costs is also good practise.

## **6. Project management**

Project management is another key ingredient when developing projects. You should have sound systems in place such as bookkeeping, communication and so on. It is good practise to have a project overseen by a sub-group within your organisation as opposed to the whole committee. This should enable the sub-group to focus on the project, while the wider committee can oversee day to day activities. Setting out roles and responsibilities prior to commencing works should help make sure that the project runs smoothly.

## **7. Ensure project is sustainable**

When developing a project make sure it is something that can be sustained going forward. If the project is to end after it has been completed you should ensure there are adequate resources in place to conclude matters.

You should avoid projects that have the potential to become a burden to your committee. When designing your project, it should ideally be a “spend to save” or a “spend to earn” so that the activity or service can be sustained both in terms of money and people beyond its initial period. You may need to consider things such as an exit strategy; i.e. how the project will operate when funding ends or think about future running costs and workload.

## **8. Outcomes - show the difference your project will make**

Projects should take into account whether it has had a positive or negative effect, and whether it has addressed the need identified. Projects should be designed to show what “outcomes” have been delivered or “what difference has been made” on its service users, community or members.

In order to do this, you should have an understanding of the position prior to starting your project and then be able to track what has changed during the life of the project. Outcomes should be measurable and use language such as improve, increase, reduce when being described.

When applying for funding towards your project most funding bodies will want to know what outcomes are being delivered, and if your project has made a difference. Therefore, it is important to develop systems and ways to capture what the project delivers.