

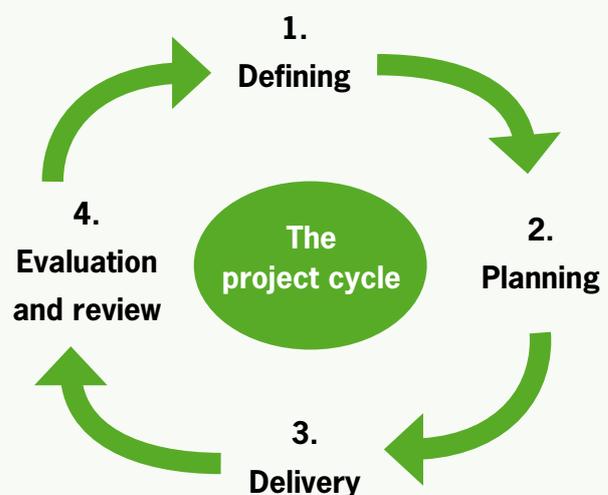
Planning a community project is vital but quite often groups don't spend much time or effort on it. There is an old maxim that a project needs 90% planning and 10% doing. It may seem like too much time talking but if a group does focus on planning and sees it through, then a project is more likely to succeed.

It's up to you to decide how much time to spend on planning and this will depend on how complex the project is. Plans have to be good enough, not perfect!

The stages of planning

Four key stages are usually identified as being part of the 'Planning Cycle'

1. **Defining:** What need will the project meet, what will it do?
2. **Planning:** How will it be done?
3. **Delivery:** Doing it
4. **Evaluation and review:** How well did it meet the need?



When you reach stage 4 you can use what you've learnt from doing the project and what it has achieved to perhaps adapt the project for the future or to make new plans for a different project. Whilst doing the project, you can already be reviewing how it's going and perhaps alter your plans. Plans should not be carved in stone!

Shaping our communities - a toolkit to help community groups turn ideas into action

A brief guide to project planning

1. Defining: what and why?

It may be obvious what needs to be done (e.g. getting a new bus shelter, clearing a pathway) but in some cases it may be less clear (eg improving community spirit).

Getting people together: It's best to start by getting people together to share views and ideas. Word of mouth is much more effective in finding people than posters. Try to speak to people about the problem or project idea and see if they want to do something.

What do you want to achieve? Once you have found some like-minded people, meet and try to get a clear picture of the benefit the project will have (e.g. protecting people from bad weather waiting for a bus or people feeling the street is more friendly).

You can then get ideas of what will best achieve that aim. It may not be the first thing which comes to mind but a more imaginative solution. If the need is to provide shelter for those waiting for a bus, someone may suggest moving the bus stop to where there may already be some shelter instead providing a shelter at the existing bus stop.

Define your objectives: Start to firm up what you want to do by defining clear objectives. These break down the steps of how you will get from where you are now to where you want to be.

2.Planning: how?

What needs to be done: Share ideas within your group and agree what needs to be done. Also try to speak to others who have done something similar before. They may help you avoid the mistakes they made!

Split your project into actions: For each action you should be clear:

What is to be done

Who will do it

By when and

What resources are needed.

Look at what you will need including help from others eg volunteers or experts or professionals (architects, builders etc), cash, meeting place, etc. Some of these may come free and others may cost so a budget can be developed. It's better to cost the separate actions than to try to cost the whole project. This way the final budget is likely to be more realistic. A common mistake is to under-estimate costs, so try to get quotes from those who know. Also VAT is often missed off budgets, as are on costs (employers national insurance) for staff.

Share the workload : Does it seem there's a lot to do? Try to spread tasks around the group as one person can't do everything. See what skills there are in the existing group or who knows someone with a digger or who is a solicitor. This way you can involve more people and perhaps save money.

Extra tasks: As part of your planning you may find you need to do things you had not originally thought of. These may include more research on need and solutions, the need for evidence of support from local people, finding out what organisations could help with the project or researching funding sources as the project is more expensive than first thought. These will then be additional actions to be carried out.



3. Delivery: doing it

Managing your project: If there are a number of people working on actions you will need to work out a way of keeping in touch particularly if some actions will depend on others. You might decide to designate a single person as overall co-ordinator or manager or have a steering group that meets regularly.

Working as a team: In general it is a good idea to keep everyone up to date with progress so there is a sense of moving forward, particularly if some actions are proving difficult to do. Knowing that others' actions are being done can be a morale booster.

Staying flexible: As you carry out your agreed actions you may have to change your plans. This is quite alright as long as you've learnt from the experience and keep your sights on the big picture. As you deliver the project try to remember to record what you've done by taking photos or videos and keeping copies of any press coverage, attendance forms and feedback from users. It will help you enormously with the next stage.

4. Evaluation and review: did it work?

When you've finished your project spend some time looking back at what was done. Talk amongst yourselves and use any feedback from others. Ask yourselves did it all go to plan. If not, why not? Would we have done something differently and, most importantly, did we achieve the end result we wanted.

Answering these questions will help you learn how to continue the project in the future for the better and how to do other projects. Also don't forget to celebrate what you have achieved and learned. It may be a bash for yourselves or for those who benefited or a press release to share your good news.

Some practicalities

Insurance: If your project involves anything with volunteers and/or the public make sure you have some Public Liability insurance cover. You could consider whether an existing group's insurance will cover you. If not, you will have to take out some. Think about this early on and cost it in your budget.

Funding: If you have real proof of the need your project will meet, evidence that people want your project, clear plans and costs you have the key elements of a funding application. There are organisations and people in the county who can advise you on where you could find funds. But don't underestimate the need to think ahead. Many funders will have set dates when decisions are made, most will not give immediate decisions and the success rate for applications to funders is usually low. You may have to apply to several funders before getting the money you need.

Constitution: If your group is likely to have a longer life or the project is complex and will involve money then you should become a formal group with a set of rules or constitution. There are lots of simple constitutions you can use. Dorset Community Action and local community workers can help you chose the right one.

Volunteers: You may need volunteer help for your project beyond what you have within your own group. Or you may want more guidance on looking after your own volunteers. Dorchester Volunteer Centre can advise on 01305 269214 dorchester.vb@btopenworld.com

Who can help

Community workers who may be able to offer further advice and support include:

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