

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: A FUNDING HANDBOOK FOR COMMUNITY-LED GROUPS



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DISCLAIMER

This publication contains references and pointers to information provided by other organisations. We cannot guarantee their accuracy. Note that this document is for guidance only and is not a replacement for seeking legal advice should that be necessary.

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Dara Lynott
Deputy Director General,
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FOREWORDS

The EPA is delighted to have partnered with The Wheel in the production of this guidance book which we hope will help groups across Ireland to be successful in securing funding for community-led sustainability initiatives.

Our vision for sustainable communities are ones that are economically thriving; environmentally healthy; and socially resilient. By taking an active role in the management and protection of your local amenities, groups like yours are actively contributing to improving well-being while promoting a clean environment and a prosperous future. This handbook seeks to provide you with guidance to successfully source the funding needed to support the achievement of these goals.

Sustainability is a core principle for the EPA and by partnering with The Wheel and their experience in supporting and developing groups in the community and voluntary sector, we believe that we have achieved a good balance of knowledge which is hopefully reflected in a practical and useful guide.

Exploring both old and new ways to diversify your organisation's funding base, The Wheel is pleased to present this easy-to-use funding handbook. As a follow-on from our *Financing Your Future* guide, this guide is aimed at small community organisations, especially volunteer-led ones.

Proactive community-led groups like yours contribute to sustainability. This handbook provides you with guidance to enhance the financial sustainability of your organisation.

Begin the journey with an open mind, and remain willing to take a long, hard look at your organisation. Are you too reliant on one source of funding? The handbook is packed with ideas and resources. Its tips and tools can be tailored to fit your needs. We hope that it will spark creativity and we wish you well on your journey.



Deirdre Garvey
Chief Executive Officer,
The Wheel

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Is it for us?

This is a handbook for community-led groups throughout Ireland, both urban and rural. By this we mean groups formed and run by communities themselves, instead of statutory bodies or private businesses. It is targeted both at traditional environmental groups and other groups with a broader agenda for sustainable living and community well-being. It provides practical information for ensuring that your group has sufficient funding in order to function, both now and into the future. It is therefore likely to be of particular relevance to those who govern and manage your group's affairs.

How do we make best use of it?

We strongly advise you to read the handbook from start to finish. After setting the scene, we define the concept of a sustainable community-led organisation. We then discuss strategies for bringing more money into your group. Next, we explore grant options, before describing alternatives to seeking grants. We bring theory to life at the end of the handbook, where we provide a number of case studies to show that, despite inevitable challenges, becoming financially sustainable is an achievable goal. We have included quotes, tips and signposts to further resources throughout and we have also provided an index for your convenience.

A note on language

When we use the word *community*, we not only refer to a community of place, such as a village, we also include a community of interest: that is, people who may live in different parts of the country but who share a common interest, such as protecting birdlife. We use the words *group* and *organisation* interchangeably. We use the word *board* to mean the governing body of your organisation, although in practice you may call this your management committee, core group, council, or something else.

Important: the words *sustainable* and *sustainability* have different meanings depending on context; we explore these in more detail in the first section of the handbook.

THE SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION: A CORNERSTONE OF A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

In its most general sense, sustainability refers to a capacity to endure. What springs to mind when you hear the word sustainability?

Global sustainability

Too often, we talk of *the environment*, *the economy* and *society* as if they are three entirely separate things. These distinctions are misleading, because social, economic and environmental factors are in fact completely interdependent. For example, we cannot claim to have a successful economy if, in the process of creating financial profit, we damage the natural environment or do not uphold basic human rights. We must balance the needs of our planet, its people, and the economies that allow populations to function. Not doing so causes deep problems, both today and – crucially – in the long-term.

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987

Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, world leaders committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (The Global Goals). There are 17 goals to address climate change, extreme poverty, inequality and injustice over 15 years. Everyone has a part to play in achieving the goals: governments, businesses and civil society. For more information from an Irish perspective, contact Irish Aid (www.irishaid.ie).



Public Participation Networks

Each local government area now has a Public Participation Network (PPN) to facilitate engagement between the local authority and the environmental, voluntary and social inclusion sectors operational in that area. It is the intention that each PPN has: a Secretariat; a County or City Plenary; Municipal District Plenaries; and Linkage Groups dealing with specific issues. The PPN structure also offers an excellent opportunity to lend your voice to local plans being drawn up and to get to know and work with other community-led groups.

If you have not already done so, you should register your group with your local PPN. Contact your local authority today for further information.

Sustainable communities

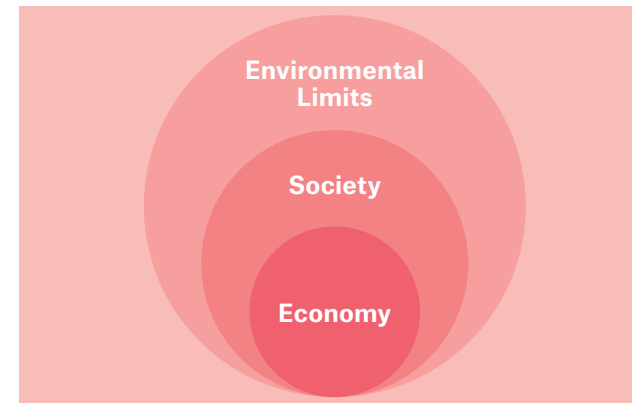
It is tempting to think of sustainability as being only an international issue, and therefore one that is too distant to be immediately relevant to us. But the world is made up of billions of people organised into hundreds of thousands of communities. Each of these communities (including yours, here in Ireland) has a role in ensuring sustainability. A sustainable, liveable, healthy community is not just *reactive* to external events (for example, flooding or economic recessions). Instead, it is *proactive* and empowered to shape its own future for the health and well-being of all members of that community, as well as the local natural environment.

“The sustainability of a community depends on creating and maintaining its economic and environmental health, promoting social equity, and fostering broad-based citizen participation in planning and implementation. Communities that engage citizens and institutions to develop sustainability principles and a collective vision for the future and that apply an integrative approach to environmental, economic, and social goals are generally likely to be more successful.”

Sustainable Communities Online, 2015
www.sustainable.org

Sustainable organisations

Individual citizens can and should take action for sustainability; whether that involves voting in elections, walking to work, or lending a helping hand to those who need it. But people on their own can only achieve so much. It is when people like you come together to take action in the community that a real difference can be made. Community groups, charities, voluntary bodies, associations, nonprofits, social enterprises, Non-Governmental Organisations; they may be known by different names, but they all have a potentially powerful role to play in terms of promoting sustainable living and community well-being.



WHAT DOES A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY-LED ORGANISATION DO?

First and foremost, we should remember that sustainable community-led organisations consider environmental, economic and social aspects together as one. They translate the concept of global sustainability into practical action at community level.

In addition, we believe that the most effective of these organisations share the following eight common characteristics, ensuring that they are robust in their approach. How do you feel your group measures up?

1 Maintains good governance

Establishing any sort of an organisation comes with certain governance obligations. It involves leadership, putting in place appropriate controls, being accountable to those who have a stake in the organisation, working effectively, and behaving with integrity. Everything you need to know about how to govern a community-led organisation well can be found in the sister publication to this one, *Sustainable Communities: a good governance resource book*. Do consider signing up to the Governance Code if you have not already done so (www.governancecode.ie).

2 Focuses on its strengths

We often find it far easier to identify and focus on unmet needs and associated problems than on potential solutions. However, many solutions are already lying in wait within the community. The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach encourages communities to focus on their strengths and to mobilise available resources, thereby becoming active agents in the process of improving those communities. To find out more, take a look at the website of ABCD Europe (www.abcd europe.ning.com).

3 Collaborates

Just as collections of people can usually achieve more than individuals, so groups of organisations can often create bigger and better results than those working alone. You do not need to 'own' every initiative yourself. Pooling resources can deliver efficiencies, achieve economies of scale and bring about greater impact. Resources do not just come in the shape of money, but also land, equipment, knowledge, contacts, time, energy, and so on. Partnership working can take many forms, from informal information-sharing to formal mergers. Partners can be other community groups, but can also be local businesses, statutory bodies, educational establishments, the press, and so on. In order for collaboration to be truly effective, there must be trust between partners.

4 Innovates

There are many tried and tested ways of doing things. Those that work well should, of course, be continued. However, there is almost always room for improvement. Also, the world around us is changing constantly, meaning that we have no option but to keep up with those changes. Groups that are open to change, creative and prepared to find innovative solutions to problems in their community, are likely to be the most successful. This does not always mean having to come up with brand new ideas; it may simply mean being prepared to research and adopt initiatives that have been shown to work elsewhere (testing and adapting them as necessary).

5 Embraces diversity

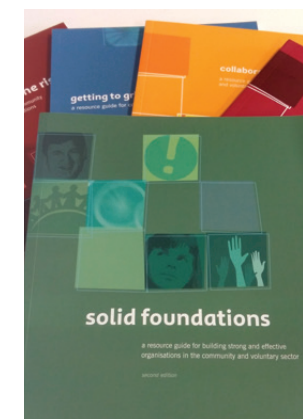
People in communities are diverse and community groups should strive to reflect that richness. At the very least, they must not discriminate on any of the nine grounds laid out in Irish equality law (gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community; for further information contact the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission – www.ihrec.ie). But diversity is about far more than legal compliance. Sustainable community groups understand that diversity is an asset. Not only does it demonstrate a commitment to equality and social justice, but very practically, it brings different points of view, skills, and contacts into the organisation, which are all highly valuable.

6 Shows visible results

As a community group, you need to be absolutely clear what your purpose is and what it is that you intend to achieve. Socio-economic and environmental progress can often take a very long time to bring about. However, you should nonetheless strive for early visible results, however small. This will help to convince others of your worth and make it easier to garner further support. You should also celebrate your successes, because doing so will help to keep people motivated. Have a party! If success is limited, you should try to understand the reasons for this and adapt the way you work.

Solid Foundations

The Wheel provides a range of information and supports to its members and to the broader nonprofit sector. One resource that is of particular relevance is its *Solid Foundations* series of good practice publications for community, voluntary and charitable organisations. In addition to an overview guide, there are six further guides focusing on: governance; human resources; financial planning; risk management; collaboration; and outcomes and impact. Order yours now - they are free for members of The Wheel (www.wheel.ie/about/publications).



THE ROAD TO FINANCIAL SECURITY

7 Demonstrates resilience

Inevitably, there will be crises and your group needs to be sufficiently tough in order to cope with these hard times. To a certain extent, resilience is about practical preparedness (for example, holding some financial reserves and having appropriate insurance cover), but that is not all. Resilience is also about not being overly dependent on others, about being self-reliant and about being adaptable in a context of uncertainty. And in this context, remember that a little bit of humour can go a long way!

8 Secures sufficient resources

Even the tiniest community group needs resources in order to function. These can be non-financial resources, such as the time provided by volunteers, or financial resources to pay for things like room hire, printing, equipment and refreshments. Bringing money into the organisation once or twice may not be that difficult. Doing it year after year can be more challenging. What is even more challenging is avoiding the pitfall of 'chasing the money' – applying for funding that distracts the organisation from its core purpose. In addition to all the forms of sustainability already discussed, community groups themselves need **financial sustainability**. The rest of the handbook focuses on this issue.

All hands on deck

Whose job is it to make the group financially sustainable? This is too big and too important a task to be left to one person. It is in everyone's interest that there is enough funding for the organisation to do its work. It therefore follows that everyone in the organisation will probably have some sort of a role to play. The ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the organisation is financially secure is that of the board, however. The board can delegate *the work* associated with securing funding (for example, it can ask a member of staff to submit a grant application or it can ask fellow volunteers to organise a fundraiser), but it can never delegate *the responsibility*.

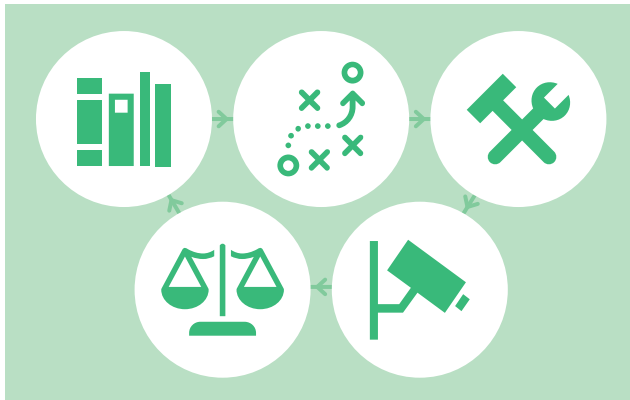
"IF ONLY WE HAD MORE FUNDING"

Statutory services are funded by the taxpayer. Businesses make money by trading. Community-led groups, on the other hand, may have a really important social and/or environmental purpose, but they have no automatic way of funding their work.

Community groups often survive on a hand-to-mouth basis. An irregular cash flow and a lack of certainty about income can be very stressful. Paradoxically, it can be especially challenging for groups that have secured funding for one or more paid members of staff. This is because they have ongoing legal obligations as employers that all-volunteer groups do not have, not least having to pay salaries and associated costs every month.

Some groups may have a relatively good level of funding, but may also be overly dependent on one income source, which is very risky, because there is no guarantee that this income source will always be there. In any case, groups often want to do more than they presently do, in order to meet the community needs that they can see. They often feel that they cannot progress their ideas because they do not have enough funding.

Much energy can be spent worrying about insufficient funding and a lack of financial security. This can sometimes lead to organisational paralysis. Far better to use this time productively to actively grow and diversify the group's income.



Research, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating cycle

"Sustainable financing is a process of looking beyond the here and now and adopting a long-term dynamic strategy for resourcing your organisation. It is about no longer burying your head in the sand about money, not blaming others for your lack of funding, and not being caught completely off-guard by external forces.

A more sustainable model involves ongoing researching, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the best possible income streams for your particular organisation. It almost certainly includes diversifying your income portfolio ('not having all your eggs in one basket'), but this does not mean you should spread yourself too thinly. Certainly, it is an approach designed to limit risk, but not avoid it altogether. It is about balancing prudence with creativity and thinking big. It recognises that in order to get money, you must spend money (and time and energy).

Any choices for growing your income should therefore be made with a very clear eye on the potential, and actual, return on investment. Hopefully, you will reap the rewards, but do accept that sometimes, plan A will fail. If this happens, act quickly and try plan B."

The Wheel, Financing Your Future: a guide to building a sustainable income for community and voluntary organisations, 2015

Not having all your eggs in one basket

Diversifying your income stream spreads risk, which is obviously a good thing. But too much diversification can be risky too, as you may not be able to manage the complexity that goes hand in hand with that. You should only diversify if, by doing so, you gain significantly more than you would by not doing it. You have to find the right income mix for your particular set of circumstances. Just because something worked well for one organisation at one point in time does not mean it will be similarly successful for you now, and vice versa. Always be alert to funding opportunities and to funding threats and accept that your income mix will probably never remain constant.

Seize opportunities

Planning is vital, but this does not mean you must stick slavishly to a plan. Amazing opportunities present themselves from time to time. When they do, be ready to seize them with open arms (if your board decides doing so is the right thing for your group). Sometimes, you need to react quickly, but at other times you can foresee opportunities some time ahead. For example, did you know that 2017 has been designated as the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development? Is this sometimes that your community group could optimise on? Also, Sligo has been named European Capital of Volunteering for 2017. Could you get involved in this somehow?

Building a compelling case for support

Regardless of what funding method you decide to pursue, you will need to be armed with a persuasive case for support. Just because *you* understand and believe passionately in your cause, does not mean that others outside of your group will automatically do the same. It is up to you to craft a compelling written argument that includes the following:

The reason you exist

You cannot assume that other people will understand this without further explanation. You must describe the problem that your group was set up to address. It is important here to focus on the need, not on the organisation itself. Demonstrate that the need is real by using whatever evidence you have at your disposal. Robust external research is far more useful than vague statements or personal anecdotes.

Your vision for the future

This is where you can paint a picture of how things could be if the problem was solved (or addressed as well as it could be, as some needs will never disappear completely). Again, focus on the cause here, not on the organisation itself.

Your solution

This is where you can focus on the way in which your organisation will tackle the issue. What you are trying to do here is position your group in between 'problem' on the one end of the spectrum and 'no problem' at the other end of the spectrum. Your project idea needs to be good, but it is just as crucial to show that your group has the capacity to bring it to fruition, possibly more so. It is therefore important to focus on your group's strengths and highlight its previous successes.

TEN STEPS TO BECOMING FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE



Step 1 Make a commitment

Accept that you will not become financially sustainable overnight and that it will not be an easy ride. You will have to be prepared to commit both time and money to this process. All board members should make a joint decision about starting the journey and should agree a timeline for action. This should be revisited at every subsequent meeting (make it a standing agenda item) and people who have agreed to perform tasks associated with the funding strategy should be held to account. If you do not have the skills in-house, you will need to source them from elsewhere. For example, you may need to pay a consultant or seek a voluntary mentor (try contacting your local volunteer centre – www.volunteer.ie/about/volunteer-centres).



Step 2 Articulate your purpose

Your conviction that what you do is important is not enough. You need to be able to clearly state what your purpose is, so that you can persuade others to share your passion. You may be fortunate enough to already have a well-written mission statement, but many groups do not. Even if they have one, it is often overly long and full of jargon. Can you simply and clearly state what change your group is trying to bring about? Do you have a sensible strategy for achieving that goal? Can you describe the value of your work, for example, in terms of social or natural capital? Do you have evidence of positive outcomes that you have already generated? Grantspace provides some very good resources on how to develop or improve mission statements (www.grantspace.org/tools).



Step 3 Analyse your current resource profile

Before looking for new money, it is important to take stock of your present situation. You need to be sure how much it costs you to operate and what resources (financial and non-financial) you are currently in receipt of. You need to know if any of these are likely to end and if so, when. You also need to have clarity on how you are spending these resources at the moment. A word of caution: being overly optimistic at this stage will not serve you well. There are tools that can help you in this process, such as:

– **Matrix Map** (a visual tool that plots all of the organisation's activities into a single compelling image – <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/04/01/the-matrix-map-a-powerful-tool-for-mission-focused-nonprofits>)

– **Nonprofit Finance Fund's Self-Assessment** (a worksheet that helps you to capture a snapshot of your organisation's financial strengths and weaknesses – www.nonprofitfinancefund.org/sites/default/files/docs/2010/Self-Assessment_Landscape.pdf)

– **Sustainable Sun Tool** (an attractive tool that helps you to plot your relative financial health in different categories – www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/funding/sustainable-funding/Sustainable%20Sun%20Tool.pdf).

The value you will create

Here you can emphasise what will be changed as a result of your project being funded and you being able to carry out the funded work. Change happens at different levels. At its most basic level it is about the *outputs* (for example, the number of people you will help), but you should try to think deeper than that. What *outcomes* will there be (for instance, how will the lives of those people be changed after receiving a service from you)? What will the broader *impact* of that be on the local community? Can you estimate what *social value* will be created as a result?

How much it will cost

Even the most excellent ideas can fail if they have not come under sufficiently close financial scrutiny. Potential supporters need to know that you have done your sums properly. Clearly describe and justify the size of the project that you are seeking funding for.

The call to action

Organisations sometimes make a really persuasive case for support and then forget to include a call to action. You need to spell out exactly how people can support you. Are you asking for money? If so, how much money and what are you asking them to do next? Are you asking people to volunteer their time? If so, what is involved and who do they contact? Convey a sense of urgency.

The basics

People also need to know a little basic information about your group. This might include things such as: how and when it was established; its legal status (a company limited by guarantee? registered as a charity?); what activities you undertake; what your website address is, etc.

When writing your case for support, focus on the person who will be reading it (you can tailor the message for different audiences). Use clear, simple, active language and avoid technical terms and abbreviations. Make the document attractive. Edit and re-edit it thoroughly.

Remember that there are two ways to convince people to support you, both of which are important. The first is the 'emotional' **appeal to the heart** (think human stories, powerful images, testimonials from people who have used your service, etc). The second is the 'rational' **appeal to the brain** (think logical information, key statistics, outcomes data, etc). And finally, always be positive. People want to be associated with a winner, not a sinking ship.



Step 4 Make savings where possible

There is a reasonable expectation that community groups should not be lavish and should use their limited resources wisely. Saying that, shoestring budgets are not likely to result in significant impacts. Most community groups are already very 'lean' and there is little that can be done to reduce their expenditure, so the implications of any proposed further cutbacks should be considered very carefully. However, it is always worth seeking out the following:

Charitable discounts (for example, software – www.enclude.ie/technology-donations)

Pro bono support (for example, legal assistance – www.lawlibrary.ie/Legal-Services/Voluntary-Assistance-Scheme.aspx)

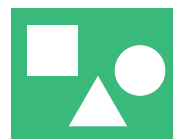
Group savings schemes (for example, various goods and services – www.wheel.ie/ResourcePoint)

Resource sharing (for example, office accommodation and related services – www.carmichaelcentre.ie).



Step 5 Calculate how much you need

Your earlier analysis will have pointed to any shortfalls you need to cover and to any plans you have for development over the coming years. Do not ever say: "we need as much money as possible". Even the most generous, unquestioning donors would like to know what the money they are thinking of parting with will be spent on. You need to know exactly how much money you are looking to raise at any one time and be absolutely clear how this will be used.



Step 6 Generate options

Can you retain the income streams that you currently have and if so, is there any chance they could be expanded on? Even if the answer to these questions is yes, it is more than likely you will wish or need to explore other options too. Generate as long a list as you can, seeking the input from as many people as possible: the board, other volunteers, staff, members, users of your service, etc. You can use brainstorming sessions, questionnaire surveys, suggestion boxes or simply talk to people informally. You may be surprised where the best ideas come from and how one that seems outlandish on first hearing, can turn out to be excellent.



Step 7 Assess options

Your aim at this stage is to come up with a shortlist of potentially viable options (we recommend fewer than ten). Do not rule anything out too quickly. Only discard ideas once they have been properly assessed. We advise that you use a scoring system – it does not matter if it is hand-drawn table or a spreadsheet, as long as it allows you to do the following:

- **Consider the criteria that are important to you** (for instance: the income potential of each idea, how easy it would be to implement and your capacity to deliver)
- **If necessary, weight those criteria** (are they all equally important or are some more important to you than others?)
- **Score every idea under all criteria** (if using a weighting system, you need to multiply the score by the weight)
- **Add up the results**
- **Place the highest rated ideas on your shortlist.**

Relationships, relationships, relationships

Groups often spend much time looking for new supporters when, in fact, what they should be doing is building on the relationships that they already have. It is much easier to deepen an existing relationship than it is to start a new one from scratch.

Every person involved with your group has a network of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances, all of whom have connections with businesses, agencies and other organisations. Any of the people in their networks could be your next partner or supporter. Therefore, ideally, each should act as an ambassador for your group, explaining what you do, why it is important and what you need in order to do even more.

It is very important to set up and then grow a database of contacts that you keep updated and that you use to send regular updates about your organisation. If you don't have such a list, start it today but don't forget to observe the necessary data protection rules that apply to contacting people.

When it comes down to it, raising funds is all about building relationships and maintaining these relationships over time. People give to people. So ask them for their help.

Above all, thank them, sincerely and in an appropriate manner. You would not be able to do your work without their support, whether it is a few hours of their time, a grant or a corporate donation.

People also want to know what you did with the money you gave them. Tell them and show what impact you have made, using stories, photos or videos. Keep in touch. Provide opportunities for them to stay involved and to help you grow. Let them be part of your success story!



Step 8 Do your research

You now need to do some more in-depth research on all of the items on your shortlist. You will need to consider all the implications of pursuing your ideas, including legal matters and other risks. You will need to find out exactly what is involved and who might be able to assist you. This will enable you to draw up a priority list. Do not skimp on this stage of the process – all this background research will help you to make the right decisions.



Step 9 Develop and implement an action plan

You can then draw up a realistic action plan with agreed targets, timelines and responsibilities. Now is the time to trial the first one or two ideas. Do not try to do everything at once, as this can become overwhelming. It is really important that you keep the process manageable.



Step 10 Monitor progress and adapt

Monitor progress carefully. Be honest: look at net income, not gross income. This also means being realistic about the time you invested into making things happen (this is what is called an 'opportunity cost'). Did things go according to plan? If so, that is fantastic: keep ploughing ahead. However, the most useful insights can sometimes be gained by figuring out what did not work, and why. New initiatives that fail the first time round could possibly become successful with some minor adjustments. Now may also be the time to try the next item(s) on your priority list.

"A case statement is simply a written document that states the most important facts about an organization. It can range in length from a wallet-size card to twenty pages or more. Preparing such a statement provides the opportunity to amass data that will best illustrate the competence of your staff and the effectiveness of your work."

Michael Seltzer, Securing Your Organization's Future: A Complete Guide To Fundraising Strategies, 2002

"Donors give to your organization because they believe you are making a difference in a cause they care about. They value your work and want to support you in changing the world. Their gifts are investments in the work they expect you to accomplish. So it follows that results are the best way to show your recognition and appreciation for your donors."

Terry Axelrod, The Joy of Fundraising: How to Stop Suffering and Start Enjoying Asking for Money for Your Favorite Cause, 2006

APPLYING FOR GRANTS

THE NATURE OF GRANT-AID

A grant is a subsidy: a funder provides money in the expectation that the recipient will do something beneficial with it. There are many kinds of grants given out by many types of entities, ranging from tiny voluntary sector grants on one end of the scale to enormous grants by international foundations on the other end, with much in between (for example, see below a spotlight on LEADER grants). Some are for individuals and others are for groups. Some are for once-off capital expenditure (for example, a building), others are for programming (for example, running a pilot project), whereas yet others are for longer-term support (for example, core staffing costs). Most grant schemes are only open for applications at certain times. Although most schemes have a one-stage application process, some have a two-stage process, starting with a short pre-application before inviting a smaller number of full applications.

Whilst grants are an attractive option that your community group should definitely consider as a part of its income mix, it should be remembered that they are always time-limited. Also, there is often fierce competition for grants, which may mean putting in significant effort, yet still being unsuccessful. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the grant scheme will be repeated; even if it is and you were lucky previously, you may not be the next time round.

However, by doing your research properly you should be able to pinpoint those grants that are appropriate for your particular community group and make strong grant applications that will be successful at least some of the time. Getting your first grant will probably be the hardest. Many grant-makers like to invest in projects whose worth has already been shown.

Where do we find out which grants are available?

- Subscribe to the Wheel's Fundingpoint service, which is a continually updated online database of 840+ grant schemes (www.wheel.ie/funding)
- Sign up to receive Activelink's Community Exchange into your email inbox each week (www.activelink.ie/content/newsletter-info)
- If you are based in rural Ireland, check out the website of the National Rural Network for information on grant schemes such as LIFE and LEADER (www.nationalruralnetwork.ie)
- Ask to receive the newsletters and e-zines produced by relevant umbrella bodies and membership bodies, such as the Irish Environmental Network (www.ienv.ie), as these often contain information about upcoming grant schemes
- Network! Speak with other similar organisations, relevant statutory bodies and anyone else you can think of who might be able to provide leads. Engaging with your local PPN (see page 8) can also help you to identify grants.

Spotlight on LEADER

LEADER is an EU funding stream that has existed since 1991. Although LEADER funding has decreased over time, it still offers significant funding opportunities for community-led groups in rural locations. Finding transnational partners is not essential for LEADER. In Ireland, the new Department of Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht will coordinate the programme (information currently found here: <http://test.ahg.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/leader/>), with some programme functions being administered by Pobal (www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/LEADER/Pages/LEADER.aspx).

Under the previous 2007-2013 LEADER round, the average amount of funding that was granted per successful project was just under €30,000. The range was large though, with the smallest award being €30 and the largest €500,000! The most commonly-sized award was €150,000. Groups used this funding to support a wide variety of initiatives, from feasibility studies and training courses to construction projects and events, and all the costs associated with delivering these.

EUROPEAN UNION GRANTS

“... EU programmes could be a source of increased funding for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland in the period to 2020.”

Hugh Quigley, *Accessing EU Funds 2015-2020: Research Project for The Wheel, 2015*, www.wheel.ie/news/download-new-report-eu-funding-programmes

The European Commission offers a huge array of grants (www.ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/grants_en.htm). Some funds are centrally managed from Brussels, whereas others are managed within the country itself by what are known as National Contact Points. For instance, Horizon 2020 is managed from Brussels, but LEADER is managed in-country. Applying for European Union (EU) funding and subsequently managing these often bewilderingly complex funds is not for the faint-hearted, but if the net projected benefits outweigh the costs of applying, and you are willing and able to grapple with the inevitable bureaucracy, it can be a very fruitful income stream.

Note that the EU rarely provides core funding, but funds projects instead. Ask yourself if any of your current or planned projects might be of interest to the EU, for instance:

- Do they involve the development of/research on some new idea that may be beneficial to other organisations in the EU or to policy makers?
- Are they sufficiently innovative that they could be transferred to other organisations across the EU?
- Are there new developments taking place elsewhere in the EU that you wish to link into through participation in a joint project?

Various support organisations may be able to help you to identify appropriate grant streams and seek out potential European partners (which is nearly always a requirement for EU grants). For example, you may decide to contact Access Europe (www.accesseurope-ireland.org), The Wheel (via www.wheel.ie) or any EU networks you are a member of. Most National Contact Points run information sessions a few times per year.

Expect to spend a considerable amount of time on the application process, both in terms of gathering administrative information and on the online process itself. Once a proposal is submitted, sit tight. Nothing further can be done until the European Commission (or the relevant national authority) makes its decisions. This can take up to six months. A project may be approved subject to certain conditions or changes to the initial proposals. This can involve negotiations that can add a further delay to the final decision.

For the purposes of LEADER 2014-2020, the country has been divided into 28 subregional areas, each of which has a Local Action Group (LAG) that has been tasked with drawing up a Local Development Strategy (LDS), focusing on these areas:

- Facilitating diversification, creation of new small enterprises and job creation
- Promoting local development in rural areas
- Enhancing accessibility to, and use and quality of information and communications technology in, rural areas.

Sub-themes include: rural tourism; enterprise development; rural towns; access to broadband; basic services targeted at hard to reach communities; rural youth; protection and sustainable use of water resources; protection and improvement of local biodiversity; and development of renewable energy. There are three cross-cutting themes: innovation; climate change; and environment.

During 2016, ‘project promoters’, which include community groups, will be able to begin applying for funding from their LAG (not from the Department of Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht). The total fund until 2020 is €220 million+, with LAGs receiving between c. €5 million and c. €13 million each, depending on population density and deprivation levels. Keep your ear to the ground to find out if your LAG is offering any funding opportunities for you.

In most cases, groups will have to secure 25% of matched funding for their LEADER grant, which can be sourced, for instance, through other grants (see pages 27-31), traditional fundraising (see pages 33-35), corporate support (see page 36) or trading activities (see pages 36-39). It may also be possible to access loan finance in order to get the project off the ground in the short- to medium-term (see page 37). For example, these 2007-2013 LEADER-supported initiatives all used social finance provided by Clann Credo:

- Ballaghderreen Community Park, Co. Roscommon - LEADER funding: €19,499
- Dungarvan Scouts, Co. Waterford - LEADER funding: €181,264
- Kildare Arts In Context Musical Instrument Bank Scheme, Co. Kildare - LEADER funding: €19,960.

Also see the case studies in this handbook (pages 41-46) for more real-life examples of how LEADER funding has brought about meaningful change.

Remember: For LEADER, as with any funding, you need to convince the reader of the proposal (the evaluator), of the merit of your project and how it fits with the overall objectives of the programme. Evaluators need to be convinced that your proposed project adheres to the funding guidelines and themes and truly adds value to the community. So pay attention to how you write your case for support and application (see pages 16-18 and 27-30).

More information on LEADER best practice will be available on www.nationalruralnetwork.ie, a hub of information and support for the Rural Development Programme in Ireland.

Examples

- Erasmus+ – For organisations involved in any type of educational activity (www.leargas.ie/programmes/erasmusplus)
- Europe for Citizens – Funding activities such as town twinning and civil society community projects that have a European theme (www.europeforcitizens.ie)
- Interreg V – A substantial funding stream: small groups may be able to enter or apply to larger consortia, but only in specific geographic areas (see www.seupb.eu/Home.aspx for further information on the Ireland-Northern Ireland-Scotland programme – for border counties only – and www.southernassembly.ie/en/programme for further information on the Wales-Ireland programme – South and East Region only)
- LIFE – An important programme for environmental groups (www.housing.gov.ie/environment/life-programme/eu-life-programme)

STATUTORY GRANTS

The state is the most significant provider of grants to nonprofit organisations in Ireland. This includes government departments (for instance, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs), public service bodies (such as the Health Service Executive), local authorities (city and county councils) and other statutory agencies (for example, Pobal). The National Lottery raises significant amounts of money for charity (www.lottery.ie/en/Good-Causes-and-Winners/Good-Causes), but there is not one single fund that groups can apply to: it depends on the nature of their request (see: www.nicdtf.ie/RESOURCES/upload/National_Lottery_Grants.pdf).

In addition to monetary grant schemes, the state also offers human resource opportunities in terms of its various training and employment schemes. These change constantly, but at the time of writing consist of: Community Employment (CE); Community Services Programme; First Steps; JobBridge; Rural Social Scheme and Tús (have a look at www.welfare.ie to see if you are able to avail of any of these).

Note that both monetary and non-monetary statutory schemes can have a lot of bureaucracy associated with them.

Tips for writing a successful funding application

Training Decide if you have the capacity to prepare a winning application. If you are concerned that this is not the case, do some reading and/or seek formal training in order to prepare yourself. See <http://wheel.ie/content/your-non-profit-training-needs> for ideas.

Legal and financial paperwork Organise the relevant paperwork well in advance. You may not be eligible if you are not legally constituted or if you do not have charitable status (for further information, see the sister publication to this one, *Sustainable Communities: A good governance resource book*). The funder will probably want to see a copy of your latest accounts.

Study the small print Carefully read the details before you do anything else. Are you eligible to apply? Does your application have a realistic chance of success? Could you meet the funder's requirements should you be awarded the grant? This stage is absolutely vital - many applications fail simply because the group or its idea was never eligible in the first place.

Contact the funder If you are unsure about anything contact the funder (unless you have specifically been asked not to). You can also ask groups who have more experience in applying for grants than you for their advice.

Tailor your response Be guided by your case for support (see pages 16-18), but make sure to tailor your response to match the criteria laid out by funders. If you would have to compromise your mission or values in order to fit into the funder's criteria, do not proceed with the application.

Readability Strive to make it easy for the people who will be reading the proposal, because they may know very little about the issue, will have limited time and will probably have many other applications to consider.

Write in stages It is highly unlikely that you will finalise a grant application in one sitting. Draft the key points that you need to make in each section of your application before plunging headfirst into writing the detail.

Title If possible, give your proposal a snappy name that encapsulates what you are aiming to achieve. Focus on outcomes. For example, 'Happy & Healthy Howth' sounds better than 'we need funding for a staff member, computer and fitness equipment', even if the budget shows that these are costs you will need to cover.

Provide a well-constructed persuasive argument Your application should not read like a hard luck story.

Demonstrate your competency Having a good idea is not enough. You also need to show that you are a competent organisation that has the capacity to deliver (by highlighting relevant skills, organisational policies, codes of practice you adhere to, results of evaluations, etc).

Examples

- Dormant Accounts Fund – A scheme disbursing unclaimed funds from accounts in credit institutions in Ireland (www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/DormantAccountsFund/Pages/default.aspx)
- Heritage Council – Supporting community-based projects that conserve Ireland's heritage (www.heritagecouncil.ie/grants/grants)
- Local Agenda 21 Environment Partnership Fund – Important scheme that assists small-scale environmental projects at local level, administered via local authorities: further information is available from your local Environment Awareness/Education Officer (www.housing.gov.ie/environment/awareness/local-agenda-21-environmental-partnership-fund/local-agenda-21)
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland Better Energy Communities – For community-based energy efficiency projects (www.seai.ie/Grants/Better_Energy_Communities)

GRANTS FROM TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS

There are numerous trusts and foundations that make grants. These range from local family trusts to major global foundations. They are traditionally philanthropic in nature, although recent years have seen a growth in corporate foundations. Most, but not all, of the trusts and foundations that operate in Ireland can be found on the Philanthropy Ireland website (www.philanthropy.ie/our-members), but you may have to undertake other searches for additional organisations, including those with an international remit. The Wheels' Fundingpoint service is of particular relevance here (www.wheel.ie/funding).

Some trusts and foundations are highly conservative in their grant-giving, whereas others allow themselves to take greater risks and be more innovative. Some are as bureaucratic as the EU or the state, whereas others are far less onerous in their demands on grantees, especially if the grants awarded are small.

Examples

- Community Foundation for Ireland – Administers a range of grant schemes (www.foundation.ie/apply-for-a-grant/types-of-grant)
- NTR Foundation – This foundation provides multi-annual support for innovative environmental projects, but unfortunately, it does not accept unsolicited applications (www.ntr-foundation.org/projects-we-support)
- Social Entrepreneurs Ireland – Provides two awards programmes comprising funding, training and supports for outstanding social entrepreneurs (www.socialentrepreneurs.ie)
- The Ireland Funds – A large global fund from which many Irish community groups working across all types of fields have benefitted (www.theirelandfunds.org/seeking-grant)

Budgeting Include an accurately costed budget, including the cost that any salaried staff will have to spend on delivering the project. Rough guesses are not good enough. Check whether there is a requirement for match funding and if volunteer hours or other in-kind contributions can be included as a matched income source.

Stick to the rules Do not ask for more than the maximum available grant as this will likely automatically disqualify your application.

Monitoring and evaluation Decide if you will be able to monitor and evaluate the project internally yourselves, or if you will require external support from a third party. Think about the methods you will use (project records, questionnaires, focus groups, etc) and what the cost implications of these will be.

Complete all sections If a form is provided use it and fill in all sections (if not, use your case for support that we referred to on pages 16-18). Stick to the word count if there is one. Do not feel you have to fill every last bit of space. Succinctness is good, but do provide sufficient detail for the assessor to be able to understand your proposal.

Write clear, concise statements Do not repeat yourself. Avoid jargon. Only include acronyms after writing them out in full on first usage.

Seek help Enlist people to comment on the draft and ask them to look for weaknesses, which you can then address.

Proofreading Spelling and grammar errors will call into doubt the quality of your proposal and your team, so be meticulous. Ask a competent person to proofread the form. Neatness and consistency matter.

Supporting information Provide supporting material if it has been requested and if it adds value to your application, but not if you have explicitly been asked not to. You can always offer to send more information on request. You can also issue an invitation to visit you.

Meet the deadline Funders are extremely strict about this.

Keep a copy of your application and records of any correspondence or telephone communications you have regarding the application.

Submit Cross your fingers and wait. You should also consider what grant scheme you might apply to next.

Feedback If not successful, consider seeking feedback from the funder. Stress that you are not making a complaint about being unsuccessful, but really want to know how to improve the application for future attempts.

OTHER GRANTS

There are other support schemes that do not fit neatly into the above categories. Some companies run grant schemes, but have not set up a separate foundation for this purpose. There are also grant schemes within the nonprofit sector itself, usually modest in scale and run by infrastructure organisations such as The Wheel. And some grant-giving organisations operate across sectoral boundaries: for example, credit unions, which often allocate part of their annual surplus to local community initiatives, can be regarded both as financial institutions and as community-owned, volunteer-involving cooperatives. If you are located near a large facility such as an airport, incinerator or stadium, a top tip is to investigate any community engagement funds that may be in place.

In addition to grants, or in place of them, some organisations offer in-kind support: consider things such as employee volunteer time (www.volunteer.ie/who-we-help/companies/employee-volunteering) or Google Ad Grants (www.google.ie/grants/details.html).

Finally, there are many award schemes, some of which offer prize money for winners, but even if they do not, they can be very useful in terms of helping groups to raise their profile. The Supervalu-sponsored TidyTown initiative (www.tidytowns.ie), for example, offers cash prizes to winning towns each year. In addition to the main competition, Special Awards are held that highlight particular local environmental activities.

Examples

- Aviva Stadium Community Fund – Supporting community groups operating in the immediate vicinity of the stadium (www.avivastadium.ie/stadium-info/community-grants-scheme)
- Coca-Cola Thank You Fund – Supporting nonprofits with ideas to get more people more active (www.coca-cola.ie/packages/thank-you-fund)
- Lush Charity Pot – Providing funding for small grassroots groups working in the fields of the environment, animal protection and human rights (<https://uk.lush.com/article/charity-pot-funding-guidelines>)
- Tesco Community Fund – Donating up to €1,000 every eight weeks between three local good causes (www.food-and-community.tesco.ie/home/supporting-local-communities/community-fund-stories)

OTHER WAYS OF GENERATING INCOME

TRADITIONAL FUNDRAISING

When we refer to 'traditional fundraising', in essence we are talking about people (usually individuals) choosing to donate money to a cause.

There are many benefits to this popular way of raising money for community groups. People like to give to projects that they already know about and for initiatives whose value they can see with their own eyes. Many simple, tried-and-tested fundraising techniques are available. It is possible to raise considerable sums of money, especially if your cause is popular with people and those you target are in a position to give. Any money raised is an unrestricted funding stream for your group (although ethically, you should spend it on what you told people you would).

However, none of this comes easily. It is really important that you concentrate your efforts on those that offer a maximum return on the resources that you have invested to raise the funds. This holds especially true for events, which can be lots of hard work and which often fail to make money after all the costs have been accounted for. The Wheel has a useful article on successful fundraising events: www.wheel.ie/funding/fundraising-guide/how-plan-fundraising-event-or-activity-0.

If you raise funds from the public, you should definitely consider signing up to the Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising (www.ictr.ie/content/fundraising-codes-practice). ICTR has also produced a useful factsheet about good practice in handling cash and non-cash donations (www.ictr.ie/files/Cash%20handling%20post_web.pdf).

Make the ask!

Asking for money (or some sort of other assistance) might make you feel uncomfortable. But you have no choice about this, because generally, **people will not donate unless they are asked**. And remember, people actually like to give as it makes them feel good about themselves! You are not begging; you are providing them with an opportunity to make a difference.

An A to Z of fundraising ideas

... **A**bseiling, angling competition, antiques roadshow, aqua aerobics, art exhibition, auction of promises ... **B**ad hair day, baked beans bath, bake off, barbecue, bike ride, bingo, book sale, break a world record, bridge night ... **C**ake sale, car boot sale, carol singing, car wash, Christmas cards, clay pigeon shoot, coffee morning, concert, cook book, crafts fair ... **D**ance marathon, darts tournament, dinner dance, disco, dog walking, Dutch auction ... **E**gg-and-spoon race, expert talk ... **F**ace painting, fancy dress party, fashion show, fête, fifty-fifty sale, film festival, flag day, flower show, football match ... **G**ames night, garage sale, garden party, gift wrapping service, gig, golf classic, guess the height/weight/amount/name game ... **H**air plaiting, head shaving, hockey match, Halloween party ... **J**azz event ... **K**nitting ... **L**ine dancing ... **M**agic show, marathon, market, masked ball, midnight feast, mile of €1 coins, movie night ... **N**on-uniform day ... **O**dd jobs, onion peeling competition, open garden day ... **P**antomime, penalty shoot-out, pet show, plant sale, plastic duck river race, pram push, pyjama party ... **Q**uiz night ... **R**ace night, radio controlled car racing, raffle, raft race, rapping competition, rockabilly night ... **S**anta's grotto, school fair, sheep shearing competition, shoe shining, silent auction, skipathon, slimming challenge, swim, sponsored anything, swap shop, swear box, sweepstake, supermarket bag packing ... **T**alent contest, tea dance, teddy bears' picnic, ten-pin bowling, theatre night, three-legged race, tombola, toy fair, treasure hunt, tug of war, TV-style game show ... **U**gly face pulling contest

Do not think too narrowly about money either. Some of the most useful resources can be in-kind. Consider, for example, a solicitor providing you with free or reduced rate ('pro bono') legal advice or someone giving you some much needed office equipment. Also, some people may not have money to give, but they do have time.

Treat any offers of voluntary help with open arms! Volunteer teams can work particularly well for fundraising. It may be appropriate for you to put together a fundraising pack for them, which may include things such as an ideas generator, a key messages sheet, a sponsorship form, health and safety advice and a branded t-shirt. Make sure volunteering with your group is a positive experience. Volunteer Ireland provides a wealth of useful resources that you can start implementing straightaway to make yours a truly volunteer-friendly organisation (www.volunteer.ie).

"Volunteers will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no volunteers."

Ken Wyman, twitter.com/KenWyman

Examples

- **Cash collections** – These include things like static collection boxes in public places and flag days. Ensure collectors have proper name badges and/or easily identifiable clothing and use sealed collection tins.
- **Crowd funding** – This is a relatively new way to raise funds online which may be worth exploring for new initiatives (for example: www.fundit.ie; www.kickstarter.com).
- **Raffles** – You are allowed to run a raffle (or something similar that is down to chance) amongst your members without permission, but in order to run a public lottery, you must seek a Garda Superintendent's Permit or a District Court Licence.
- **Sponsored events** – The list of options limitless. Online giving platforms have made the collection of funds easier (for example, www.everydayhero.com, www.idonate.ie; www.justgiving.com).

... **V**alentine's ball, variety show, vintage car/bike rally ... **W**alk, wear a welly full of jelly, welly throwing competition, wheelbarrow racing, win a lunch with a celebrity, wine-tasting evening ... **X**-treme sports, xylophone concert ... **Y**acht race, yogathon ... **Z**any races, zip line challenge ... and many, many more ...



Positive corporate partnerships

When thinking about which businesses you might approach to support you, do plenty of homework first. Companies receive many requests, so you have to make sure that yours stands out of the crowd and offers tangible business benefits, as well meeting your own needs. Use whatever contacts you have to full advantage. Remember that most companies will only consider sponsoring groups that are based in the same geographic area.

See if your values are compatible with theirs. Companies that have already made a commitment to being socially and environmentally responsible may be a better bet than those that have less progressive business practices. Look, for instance, at companies that have been certified with the Business Working Responsibly Mark (www.bitc.ie/csr-certification/certified-companies), or verified Origin Green members who have a proven commitment to sustainability in food production (www.origingreen.ie/companies/verified-members). Also keep an eye on B Corp Ireland (www.bcorp.ie).

Finally, consider the realities of the commercial environment. It is highly unlikely that two commercial competitors will want to support the same organisation at the same time!

CONTRACTS

Sometimes an organisation can earn money by entering into a contractual arrangement to provide a service. By 'contracts' in this context, we mean formal, written, legally binding agreements that have been voluntarily entered into between two or more parties in order to exchange something that is of value. As such, the levels of obligation, and associated risks, can be much higher than with grants or traditional fundraising.

Saying that, the rewards of entering into contracts to deliver services to statutory agencies or companies can be high. **It is essential that you seek appropriate legal and financial advice before entering into a contract.**

Examples

- **Tendering** – Public services are constantly being put out to tender. Details of these can be found on the eTenders government procurement website (www.etenders.gov.ie). You can sign up to receive daily updates. Be under no illusion that this is an easy or common way for community groups to bring in money. As with grants, it is very important that if you do decide to go down this road, you produce professional tender documents.
- **Subcontracts** – A community group may not have the capacity to put in a tender or may be outbid by a larger provider (possibly a private company). However, it may have useful local knowledge and skills, for which it could be subcontracted in order to deliver part of the programme.
- **Corporate sponsorship** – This is when a company pays to have its name associated with a group in order to meet its own business objectives (for example, increased market exposure or media coverage).
- **Cause-related marketing** – This is less common: it is when a group endorses a company or one of its products/services in return for receiving a defined benefit.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Social enterprise is **not** a legal structure or a tax designation.

"A social enterprise is an enterprise that trades for a social/societal purpose, where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity, is separate from government and where the surplus is primarily re-invested in the social objective."

Forfás, Social Enterprise in Ireland: Sectoral Opportunities and Policy Issues, 2012

If you are able to earn your own income you will be in a strong position to become and remain financially self-sufficient. Your income will be unrestricted and you will not have to deal with the bureaucratic demands of funders or contractors. Saying this, you will need to have a viable entrepreneurial concept, bring it to fruition, find customers and keep them happy, so do not expect this to be an easy journey.

Trading can be your sole income source or it can be a relatively small-scale activity that is a welcome add-on to other streams of funding. Your customers can be individuals or organisations. Some of the most effective social enterprises combine their social mission with their enterprise activity, for instance, by providing employment opportunities for marginalised people as part of running their social business.

Social finance

You have secured a grant, but it has been stipulated that you must match the grant offer with, for instance, 33% of matched funding. You know you can raise that money using traditional fundraising techniques, but this may take you a while. Or, you have completed a promising feasibility study for your social enterprise, but you now need some upfront investment to get the project off the ground. It is in instances like these that social finance can act as a really effective enabler.

Social finance delivers resources to community groups often overlooked by conventional financial outlets. Providers ensure that all investments produce social gain. Interest rates are competitive, personal guarantees are not ordinarily required and terms are tailored to suit the borrower. Products may include: bridging loans; match funding loans; capital equipment or property loans; finance for working capital or cash shortfalls; and debt restructuring.

There are currently two social finance providers in Ireland: Clann Credo (www.clanncredo.ie) and Community Finance Ireland (www.communityfinance.ie). Between them they have helped hundreds of organisations over the years, as diverse as Leitrim Sports and Recreational Development and East Clare Community Cooperative, to Thomastown Town of Food and Meath Accessible Transport Project.

Far more community groups could be availing of social finance opportunities than do at present. Could yours?

In deciding what idea to pursue, think about what you have or what you can create that someone else wants. What assets does your organisation possess? They may be visible (like property) or invisible (like knowledge). Be creative and ambitious, but also be entirely realistic about the ability of your idea to generate a profit. And even if it can, are you certain that it can do so without doing any damage to your social/environmental mission? Consider doing a detailed SWOT analysis to see if the positives of your idea outweigh the negatives.

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
External	Opportunities	Threats

Grants and other supports, such as business planning advice, may be available to help you establish your social enterprise. To find out more and to link in with other social enterprises, make contact with the Irish Social Enterprise Network (www.socent.ie).

A wealth of information on establishing and running social enterprises is also available from international sources, including the online resource hub seToolbelt (www.setoolbelt.org) and Unltd in the UK (www.unltd.org.uk). When using international resources, always bear in mind that definitions of social enterprise and the associated laws and policies will differ in different countries.

Examples

- **Renting** – Are your physical assets being optimised upon? Do you have land, premises, vehicles or equipment that you can rent out?
- **Goods** – Can you make or upcycle objects for sale? Or can you resell donated goods, like a charity shop does (seek advice from the Irish Charity Shops Association – www.icsa.ie)? Or are you able to collect recyclable materials, such as mobile phones, and sell these on to private recycling operators?
- **Knowledge** – Would someone be prepared to pay you for specialised knowledge that you have, for example, knowledge of your local area or of a particular species of flora or fauna? Could you run training courses?
- **Current services** – Are you providing all your services for free at present? Could you begin charging even a nominal amount for these services (this will of course depend on people's ability to pay)? If you decide to do this, see how you can enhance your service so that people do not feel too annoyed by the change of practice.
- **New services** – Is there a service that is needed in your community that is not currently there? Could you provide this service as a viable social enterprise? The options are limitless: cafés, accessible transport services, tourism facilities, festivals or other events, etc.

CASE STUDIES: IT IS POSSIBLE!

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS: COOLAGOWN DEVELOPMENT GROUP

"We don't let any opportunity pass
... there is such help out there."

John Feeney, Coolagown Development Group

Coolagown (www.mycoolagown.com) is a small village situated in farmlands four miles east of Fermoy in Co. Cork. In the late 1980s, the local national school was under threat of closure and morale in the area was low. In 1990, concerned residents decided to call a public meeting to discuss ways of reversing depopulation, regenerating community spirit, instilling local pride, maintaining rural character and improving the quality of life for everybody in the locality. This led to the 1991 establishment of the Coolagown Development Group, an all-volunteer unincorporated association (www.facebook.com/Coolagown-Community-341234749405523).

One of its earliest achievements was a group water scheme. More recently, the group has been successful in bringing broadband into the village and its surrounds. A woodland walk and cycle trail have been developed, as well as a landscaped picnic area. Significant planting of trees and wildflowers has taken place. The village boasts an award-winning dragon sculpture made out of 1,000 aluminium cans. Students in a local secondary school are creating a horse sculpture for the village made entirely out of horseshoes, which, together with a forge sculpture that was developed to mark the Millennium, reflect the area's equine traditions. Coolagown is also home to an non-instrusive, odourless and vermin-secure recycling centre – one of only two in the country.



Other amenity improvements that have been made by the group include signs, gates, planters and a rainwater harvesting system that runs from the church roof. Additionally, a very successful behaviour change programme was run in conjunction with the local authority's Environmental Awareness and Research

Unit, which significantly reduced household waste and energy consumption. Furthermore, the Heritage Council supported a biodiversity study of the area. Work to enhance the village's biodiversity continues, much of it done jointly with the primary school.

Almost all of this work is completed on a voluntary basis by a group of around 20 volunteers, often using donated materials and borrowed equipment (the group also has a shared equipment bank containing mowers, strimmers, shovels, etc). CE workers from a scheme in nearby Castelyons also make a significant contribution. Over time, construction and maintenance skills in the village have grown enormously.

Positive partnerships, and an unwavering optimism and drive, are undoubtedly the keys to Coolagown Development Group's success. The group has built up strong relationships with many individuals, businesses and other organisations, including the local parish priest, Kilmagner National School, Castlelyons Parish Development (CE scheme), Avondhu Blackwater Partnership Ltd, Cork County Council, Coillte, utilities companies and An Taisce (Green Home - www.greenhome.ie). Any newcomers into the area are encouraged to get involved in some shape or form.

The group admits to having applied for almost every grant it has ever found out about, including numerous local authority grants. In particular, the group has had significant success in attracting LEADER funding. In the 2007-2013 LEADER funding round, it received: €23,156 for the recycling centre; €15,755 for the walking and cycling trail; €13,601 for village enhancement works; €8,251 for planting; and €5,386 for its waste minimisation and energy conservation project. Around four-fifths of the 25% matched funding requirement was provided by accounting for the considerable volunteer labour that was invested into these projects. The remaining fifth was mostly raised through traditional fundraising. The group runs a raffle each December that brings in c. €4,500, with prizes donated by local businesses and tickets sold door-to-door and on-street in Fermoy.

Unsurprisingly, this hard work has resulted in numerous awards. For example, the village has received gold medals in TidyTowns every year between 2008 and 2015 and won a gold medal in the Entente Florale Europe in 2011. In 2015, Coolagown became the first village in Ireland to receive the An Taisce Green Communities Award (www.greeningcommunities.org/category/coolagown).



"When people see that something positive is being done, they're usually happy to put their hands in their pockets."

John Feeney, Coolagown Development Group

CUPS OF TEA AND SO MUCH MORE: THE COTTAGE SHOP AND TEAROOMS

“Bring as many people on board
as you possibly can.”

Mary Fogarty, Co-Founder, Loughmore
Community Cooperative Society Ltd.

On the banks of the river Suir in Co. Tipperary, just south of Templemore, lies Loughmore. Its population is in the region of 800. Like so many small villages in rural Ireland, it appeared to be on a downward spiral. Its three grocery shops (one of which had been attached to a petrol station) had closed, its creamery had disappeared, and only one of its pubs was still in business, though open only at night. Rural isolation was a very real problem, especially for those without a car.



In 2011, local women Mary Fogarty and Maeve O’Hair lamented Loughmore’s decline and dreamt of creating a new community hub. Maeve’s sister kindly offered an eighteenth century property in the centre of the village for their venture and The Cottage Loughmore was born (www.facebook.com/The-Cottage-Loughmore-506732749343475).

They came across the Plunkett Foundation in the United Kingdom, which helps people – primarily in rural areas – to establish and run life-changing community cooperatives (www.plunkett.co.uk). They met the Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation at a rural development conference and eagerly took him up on his invitation to visit some of the projects they had supported in England. They organised a Christmas market, at which they assessed whether there was local appetite for their idea.

North Tipperary LEADER Partnership (www.ntlp.ie) was extremely helpful and provided encouragement, contacts and funding. Refurbishment costs for the cottage were calculated as c. €54,000. The group received 75% LEADER funding (c. €40,000). The Partnership also provided a small grant to fund training for the initial group of volunteers. The group took out a five-year loan with Bank of Ireland for the remaining 25% refurbishment costs (initially in their own name, which is not for the fainthearted and which they do not recommend!). LEADER funding did not cover the costs of stocking the shop and tearooms and additional funding had to be found for this. With the support of the Irish Cooperative Organisations Society (www.icos.ie), the group incorporated as a cooperative (an ‘industrial and provident society’) and invited parishioners to become shareholders in the initiative: shares were sold at a cost of €10 each and this raised a further c. €4,000.

After months of hard work, the doors of The Cottage opened in August 2012. Today, the tearooms are open 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, seven days per week, with the shop staying open until 6.00 pm. The tearooms provide a welcoming place for locals and visitors and serve an array of tasty offerings. The shop sells basic grocery items and newspapers. Crafts are also exhibited and are for sale. The village now once again has a post box and can offer a PostPoint service (www.postpoint.ie). Everything that is used and sold is sourced locally. Events are held (for instance, a market, a Downton Abbey day, a vintage Volkswagen show) and local groups use The Cottage as a meeting place. The local youth club helps to grow herbs and flowers for use in the tearooms and children from the local national school grow vegetables, which they trade with The Cottage in return for cookery lessons.

Volunteers were, and continue to be, hugely important to the set-up and subsequent operation of the cooperative. The group was not in a position to pay any salaries for the first six months. There are now three part-time paid managers, but wages remain low. There are two JobBridge interns. Around 12 volunteers come in for short stretches of time and work experience opportunities are offered for young people both with and without special needs. The Cottage has also availed of in-kind support; for example, the accountant waived his fees for the first year of operation.

Annual turnover is now in the region of €150,000; these are much-needed monies which are circulating in the local economy. The Cottage has received a number of awards, yet is not resting on its laurels. It wants to keep improving its offerings; for example, it is planning to develop a sensory garden in 2016. Most exciting of all, it wishes to spread the Plunkett Foundation model throughout Ireland and welcomes anyone who wishes to get involved to get in touch.

“There are no words that can express the joys and happiness The Cottage has brought back to our entire community. It has actually given it back its heartbeat. There is now life in what was a dead village. People are enjoying the lovely warm atmosphere of the tearooms and appreciate having a place to buy their newspapers and groceries without having to travel further afield.”

ruralcommunityretail.com/conference/mary-fogarty-and-maeve-ohair-loughmore-co-operative-shop-and-tea-rooms/

CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE SUNNY SOUTH EAST: ROSSLARE TIDYTOWNS

“It is better to raise funds that are earmarked for specific projects than it is to try and fundraise without yet knowing what you are going to spend the money on.”

Jim Fortune, Former Committee Member, Rosslare TidyTowns

The village and seaside resort of Rosslare Strand in Co. Wexford (www.rosslareholidayresort.ie) has a permanent population in the region of 1,500. However, this swells in the summer months and at weekends, when there is an influx of holiday-makers. Despite its relatively small size, community life is vibrant. Amenities include two community centres, soccer pitches, tennis courts, an athletics track, an outdoor bowling green, a crazy golf course, a children’s playground and a community garden. Community-led organisations include sports clubs, the Rosslare Community Development Association, an active retirement association, a historical society, a Men’s Shed and a TidyTowns group. Most are affiliated to the Rosslare Development Association.

Originally a Bord Fáilte initiative, the TidyTowns movement (www.tidytowns.ie) has been in existence since the 1950s. The Rosslare TidyTowns committee (www.facebook.com/rosslaretidytownsvolunteers/), an unincorporated association, was established many years ago and is an integral part of the local community.



Rosslare TidyTowns is run entirely by volunteers, who come from all walks of life. These volunteers meet regularly to discuss progress on their three-year action plan for improving the natural and built environment of the village and its surrounds. The group also engages with Wexford County Council with regard to roads, footpaths, derelict buildings and the like, and with Iarnród Éireann in relation to the train station and bridges. Practically, its volunteers engage in a range of activities, from planting and weeding, to painting and litter picking, and much in between. They also get involved in other community events, such as tea parties and carol singing. Raising awareness, having fun and building community spirit are all emphasised.



The costs associated with running this all-volunteer group are relatively modest (in the region of €5,000 per year, though this figure is growing). Funds are usually raised from the general public, primarily using events, such as church gate collections, raffles, plant sales, etc. Especially successful was its inaugural fun dog show in 2015, which

generated funds through sponsorship, admission and competition entry fees, and which will now become an annual event. Furthermore, individuals and organisations make occasional donations, either in-kind (for instance, of materials) or monetary (an anonymous donor recently gave the group €1,000). They also provide prizes for raffles. The group is constantly seeking new ways to raise funds.

The group engages with other bodies in the community as appropriate. For example, it is in close contact with the local national school, which is highly committed to being a Green-School (www.greenschoolsireland.org). It has partnered with the Men's Shed to produce planters, seating and picnic tables (including wheelchair accessible picnic tables). It is working with the local historical society to co-develop an eco-heritage trail. It was also heavily involved in the application to Wexford County Council's 2015 Access For All Gardens, Parks and Community Spaces scheme (www.wexford.ie/wex/Departments/AccessForAll/AccessforAllGardensParksandCommunitySpaces). The application won first prize (€7,000) to redesign the community garden to provide access for all.



As in any community, challenges arise from time to time. For instance, the garden redesign plans were interrupted by the discovery of a rare species of plant. There are sometimes grey areas in terms of responsibilities of one community group in relation to another, and there can be conflicts of loyalty for people who are involved with more than one group. Finally, there can also be tensions associated with a multitude of groups trying to raise funds from the same individuals and businesses in the locality.

"In Rosslare there is a real understanding of the natural environment, and of how this environment can react with what has been created by man, when man is in the humour to do so in a positive and resourceful way, so that all the elements benefit."

TidyTowns Competition 2015, Adjudication Report,
www.tidytowns.ie/u_reports/2015/2015%20County%20Wexford%20Rosslare%20258.pdf

ON YOUR BIKE: ROTHAR

“We need to dismantle cultural barriers: selling service or products that are in demand and paying people a fair salary does not make a cause less worthy.”

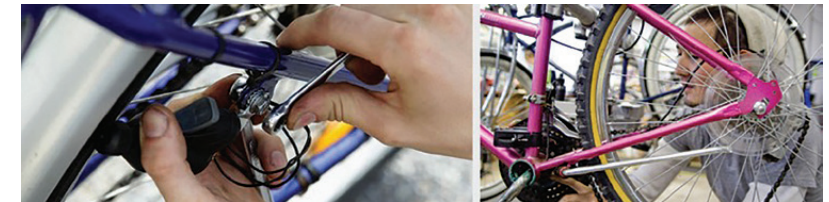
Anne Bedos, Founder and Director, Rothar



The throng of the capital: a place busy with cars, trains, buses, pedestrians ... and a steadily growing number of bicycles, as the environmental and health benefits of cycling are increasingly being recognised.

Rothar, which was established by Anne Bedos in 2008, can be found in two locations in Dublin, one on Phibsborough Road on the Northside and the other in Fade Street on the Southside. It was conceived as an initiative with two interwoven goals: to promote environmental stewardship and to provide development opportunities for disadvantaged young people. It was intended that Rothar would teach these young people how to build their own bikes using parts from old bicycles. Although the mission has remained largely the same over time, the way in which the group is structured and operates has changed to reflect economic realities.

Grants, awards and associated supports and publicity were instrumental in getting the project off the ground and assisting its subsequent growth. Rothar received €100,000 from the Arthur Guinness Fund, €10,000 from the David Manley Awards, €6,000 from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland (www.socialentrepreneurs.ie/winners/anne-bedos), €5,000 from Dublin Bus (www.dublinbus.ie/en/About-Us/Community-Spirit-Initiative/Community-Spirit-Awards) and €4,000 from Dublin City Council (www.dublincity.ie). Rothar also received a non-financial Lord Mayor's Award.



However, it was soon recognised that grants alone did not allow for a viable initiative. A way had to be found to rely less heavily on external funders. A social enterprise model seemed an obvious choice, because Rothar was in a good position to sell products and services. It was decided to adopt a dual legal structure: a company limited by guarantee as the vehicle for Rothar's social mission and a company limited by shares for its trading activities, the profits of which can be reinvested into the other company. Today it runs a self-sustaining business, selling both reconditioned and new bikes and accessories, undertaking repairs, renting out bikes and workshop space, teaching cycle maintenance and offering a café. It also provides specialist services to companies and to families.

Final food for thought: your communications

Funders and donors are unlikely to support groups that they have never heard of. Thinking about your income generation strategy needs to go hand in hand with thinking about your communications strategy.

Word of mouth is an excellent medium, especially in a local community, but on its own it is never enough. You need to inform the media about your presence and your ongoing activities. This includes the print media (national and local newspapers, magazines, newsletters), as well as radio and television (national, local and community). These days, having some sort of social media presence, such as on Facebook or Twitter, is essential too. And there is very little excuse for not having at least a simple website for your group - these can be created and updated very cheaply and easily. Irish Charity Lab is the go-to place for all your digital communications questions (www.irishcharitylab.org). And finally, The Wheel provides a range of training courses on marketing.

Rothar receives unwanted bikes from the general public but also partners with local authorities to receive bikes for recycling. It also works in partnership with Bridge, a project that supports men with a history of imprisonment, to provide a City and Guilds accredited training centre for bicycle mechanics. This initiative was supported with a grant from the St Stephen's Green Trust (www.ssgt.ie). It has collaborated with many other community groups, especially those working with at-risk young people.

It took 18 months of hard, unpaid work before Rothar was in a position to pay any salaries. There are now five paid staff, all of whom previously volunteered with Rothar. Volunteers continue to be an important part of the organisation, with most coming in at least once a week for a four-hour shift.

It has not all been plain sailing. For instance, the environment in which Rothar operates is fiercely competitive and a third premises trial in Dun Laoghaire had to be aborted after three years due to unviable rent increases. Despite such challenges, the future looks bright.



"We believe: ... bicycles are the medium for a sustainable, healthy and active community ... quiet streets and cleaner air is a human right ... reuse of unwanted materials is indispensable to relieve the pressure on our natural resources ... people are entitled to lifelong learning and training, regardless of their background, origin, education and personal history ... in fair pricing, both for our customers and for the organisation to be sustainable."

Rothar, extract from 'Our Values'
www.rothar.ie/who-we-are.html

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www.epa.ie

The Wheel

01 454 8727

www.wheel.ie