

All projects, large or small, have two key stages; the project planning stage and the project implementation. Evaluation is a constant process running throughout the project. The project planning stage is often the most time consuming part, but is ultimately the most important stage. Needs must be assessed evidenced and expectations managed.

Where to start

The project planning stage is also often called a feasibility study, as it deals with the preliminaries of a project; assessing the need for the project, the timescales involved and the likelihood of the project succeeding or not.

Know where you're going, and why

The most important thing to remember is that projects are developed through need, and not by the amount of money available. Avoid the temptation to scale up a project to match the amount of money available. All projects have to evidence why they want funding, and over ambitious projects are unlikely to be successful.

It's also important to know which stage the project is at, and don't try and jump too far ahead in the process. Don't approach funders, or ask anyone for a list of funders, when you're just at the initial of identifying your project.

Evidence of need

The first fundamental stage of a project is to ascertain if it is needed. There can be a big difference between what a community wants out of a project, and what a community needs.

In gathering the evidence of need through consultation (see Consultation Guidance Sheet), ambitious wishes can be replaced with practical requirements e.g. a fully equipped sports complex can be replaced by a flexible, multi use games area capable of supporting different activities. This evidence can be used to either satisfy the community that the course of action is necessary, or with investors in financing the project.

Details of your project

This part of the project starts dealing with the more familiar aspects of project planning:

- What is needed in terms of resources
- Timescales
- How much it will cost

Within this stage, personnel requirements, equipment, overheads and other project costs are identified along with the design drawings, planning permissions and building regulations (if you're dealing with an asset) are covered.

In addition to this, identifying sources of finances is necessary for making the project happen. This often constitutes the lion's share of time allocation, and can be seen as a period of inactivity to the wider community who are waiting to see the build site levelled or the Co-ordinator come into post.

Starting off

- Have you got a viable project?
- Is this a short term or long term project?
- Follow the project planning process

Consultation

- Canvass everyone's opinion or support for the project
- Is there sufficient support from the community?

Details of the project

- What is needed
- How long it will take
- How much it will cost

Writing the Project Plan

- Putting the ideas to paper
- Financial projections formulated
- Monitoring systems established

Writing the Project Plan

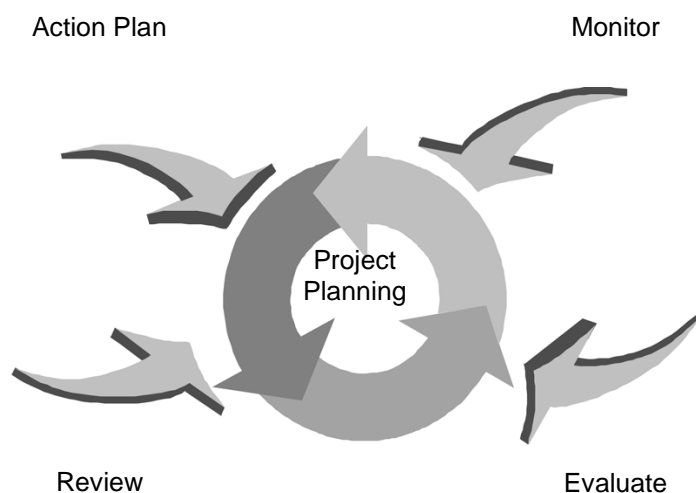
This part gathers together all the previous activities into one document, and includes the background, the aims and objectives and how these will be realised.

It will take into account the resources i.e. financial and material required to do this and the physical systems needed to monitor this. Working out what your group will need to pay for the project and what it will cost to provide services is drawing up a budget. This whole process is underpinned by the planning cycle.

Additional guidance for writing a plan and drawing up a budget is available, see 'more information' for details.

The Planning Cycle

The diagram below sets out the planning cycle.



The planning cycle is a cyclical process, with elements that link together. Each element can be assessed independently and amended accordingly.

- **Monitor** - What is the feedback from the consultation? Is there sufficient support for the project?
- **Evaluate** - Is everything going to plan? What could be done better?
- **Review** - What changes do you need to make?
- **Action Plan** – Update project to reflect any changes

Each element of the planning cycle is covered in the range of Guidance Sheets (see more information section).

For more information please contact us at Action with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01768 840827 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

Supporting communities ... championing rural issues

ACTION with Communities in Cumbria, The Old Stables, Redhills, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0DT
T: 01768 840827 | F: 01768 242134 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk
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Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation

Monitoring, reviewing and evaluation are constant processes running throughout the project, and is covered in greater depth in our Guidance Sheet Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation.

To summarise the process, the following needs to be considered and undertaken:

- Types of information to be collected; qualitative or quantitative?
- Methods of collection; interviews, surveys, workshops, observation?
- Indicators of success; effectiveness, efficiency?
- Reviewing; how will the information be analysed?
- Evaluation: how will the lessons learnt from the review be put into practice and inform how the project should develop?
- Sustainability; can the project generate the finances needed for it to operate itself?
- Replication; can the project be replicated again, either in the same way in a different location, or following the same principles with a different outcome?

By asking these questions at the start, time can be utilised appropriately, saving wasted time and effort and sometimes bringing the completion date forward.

Useful websites

www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

www.thirdsectorcumbria.org.uk

More information

ACT Development Officers can offer further support and advice. A range of additional Guidance Sheets are also available on our website.

Cumbria CVS can help with funding information; for more details visit the Third Sector Cumbria website (see Useful Websites)