



Section one An introduction to Project Management

A number of different activities are called 'projects', from building the Channel Tunnel to creating an IT system, from introducing a quality management system in a local authority to setting up and running an English language course for newly arrived asylum seekers. Typical projects in the Refugee Community Organisation (RCO) sector might include homework clubs for children, holiday play schemes, or a drop in advice service.

Whether it involves producing goods or delivering services, a 'project' tends to have a beginning, middle and end – even if these have been artificially created to make the activities clearer in purpose or more manageable. As such they tend to focus on 'delivering' a specific service or product, or group of related services / products, which result in a defined end point.

It is important for the voluntary sector to understand that funders are often looking for changes to be realised as a result of funding a project, and are often looking for voluntary sector organisations (VCOs), including RCOs, to demonstrate how they will not need funding to provide the same services by the end of the project period.

1.1 Project Management theory

There are a number of different approaches to managing projects. Which approach an organisation chooses mainly depends on their preferred style and how they think they can best manage that particular project (and any expected problems). For example, there are:

- 'gated' processes where a Project Board signs off specific pre-agreed stages of development within the project; and
- 'process projects' where the emphasis is on testing out an approach by means of a pilot project and learning from this experience before starting on a bigger project.

Two well-known project management 'brands', promoted by the [Office of Government Commerce](#) (OGC), are [PRINCE2](#) and [Managing Successful Programmes](#) (MSP).

PRINCE2 stands for 'projects in controlled environments'. It was established to help with complex IT projects in environments where everyone is paid and working towards one clearly defined goal.

'Programmes' are a relatively new buzz-word, and MSP has become a leading approach to managing 'programmes', which the OGC describe as being different from 'projects' as "it is their outcomes rather than their outputs that matter". In other words, programmes are primarily focused on what changes they realise, rather than what is produced.

For further information on PRINCE2 and MSP please see the further resources in Section eight of this toolkit.

For particularly complex projects, the software package [MS Project](#) is often used. MS Project helps the project manager manage the project, the project management team to see if they are on track and if not, to understand where the delays are.

1.2 Voluntary sector projects

The good news is that smaller projects don't need to be developed to the level of complexity described in the above section. But you can use some of the basic principles and approaches developed by project management specialists to keep on track, in control, and to report on your project and the benefits it is bringing, without having to set up lots of systems and procedures. In fact, if you set up a system that is more complex than it needs to be, there is a danger that you might confuse yourself or your stakeholders and lose the purpose of what you are doing.

However, there are issues specific to the voluntary sector that our public and private sector colleagues may not have to worry about to the same degree. Here are some key considerations:

- Projects in the voluntary sector tend to be less 'controllable' as they often involve volunteers – they aren't always able to make the same level of commitment as contracted staff and it might not be easy to replace them if they leave.
- Voluntary sector projects often aim to reach complex social outcomes which depend on external factors that are beyond the immediate control of those in the RCO (such as a change of government leading to radically different policies).
- Both volunteers and paid staff working in the voluntary sector tend to be very passionate about what they are doing, which means they tend to have a lot of ownership of the issues and want to talk through their preferred direction, aims, and ways of doing things. This tends to add to the time needed to achieve something, as well as leading to disputes which in turn take more time to resolve.
- RCOs and VCOs tend to run new services as projects, and the person managing the project may not have much project management experience, or sometimes not even much office experience. Therefore, time for learning needs to be built in.

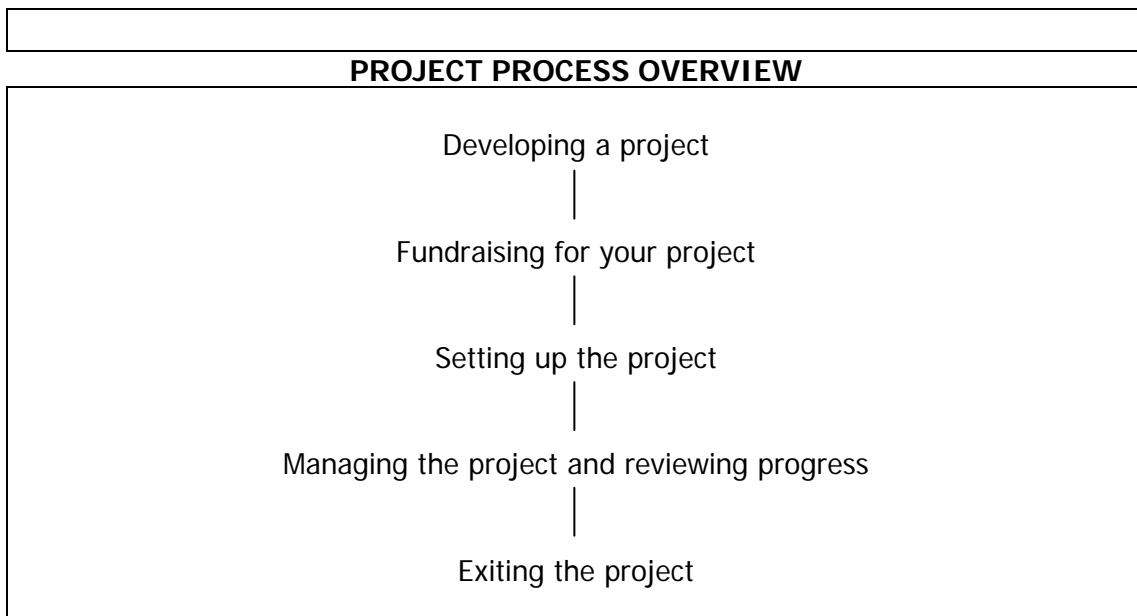
Following private or public sector practice is therefore not always the strongest option. Most voluntary organisations are also very small which means they can operate more informally and respond quickly to new problems and developments around them. This flexibility and dynamism is a very strong advantage. Consider the difference between how you work and how a multi-national organisation works, for example. In a multi-national company, 100,000 people might need to be informed of

a key change in how they work. And doing this can be a big job in itself. A voluntary organisation, however, is more likely to be able to talk to its staff and volunteers about such a change, and answer any questions, over coffee.

1.3 Project Management approach to be used in this Toolkit

No methodology can guarantee a successful project – creating and managing any piece of work requires creativity, determination, perseverance, the ability to think about issues and to see opportunities and problems coming, as well as a strong ability to deal with change. Working together, and looking after each other as a team, is important for both celebrating your successes together and for when you hit difficulties. Focusing on what you are trying to achieve together can provide the glue that keeps you all together in difficult times.

We have tried to keep the toolkit as simple as possible, and present below a model that we think covers the key areas that you will need to work through to develop a comprehensive project plan.



Note about 'chasing funding'

The funder you are approaching for funding your project may tell you what they need to know about the project and in what format. It is good practice to develop your project plan independently before you think specifically about how one funder wants you to present yourself (otherwise there is a danger you will be led too heavily by the funder's interests and not by the people you want to help or by your own approach to doing things – something known as 'chasing funding').

If you are getting stuck or are worried about having to present your application to a different funder in a completely different way, then prepare to answer the questions

on their funding application forms at the same time as going through the planning process for your project.

A key purpose of planning and developing a project is to try and ensure that as few problems as possible arise when you start delivering the project. And planning with your beneficiaries (people who benefit from the service you'll deliver), rather than the funder, in mind should make your project stronger.

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