

An introduction to developing your assets as a route to sustainability

Introduction

One of the roles of the High Peak CVS Sustain Project is to support local groups and organisations to become less reliant on grant funding, and to develop alternative means of generating income to sustain their activities. That is not to say to abandon grants altogether – there will always be a need and a place for grants – just to look at ways of gaining independence and sustainability through earning a proportion of your income in a world where grant availability is ever decreasing.

One way of doing this is to take a look at the assets your group has, and see if you are making the most of them or whether they could earn you some income. Could you, for example, use your assets to help you trade goods or services?

So what assets might you have?

The assets of a community group or organisation can be divided into four groups:

- **Capital assets** - such as buildings, land, equipment
- **Financial assets** - in other words, your cash reserves
- **The people** – staff and volunteers – that run your organisation, with their skills, qualifications and experiences which they contribute to your group's

activity, together with the reputation, links and relationships they build for your organisation. Your membership or users are also an important part of your 'people assets'

- **Intellectual property** – the particular knowledge, information, skills and expertise developed by your group or organisation through its activity.

Some examples to get you thinking

OK", you say, "I understand what you're getting at with these different sorts of assets, but I can't see how we could exploit ours". Well, this is where you need to let your imagination go a bit, and perhaps think a little laterally too – take a sideways step, if you like! Don't be afraid to 'ask for the sky' and consider activities that require some additional input before you can start trading. For example, it may be that you will need additional training or equipment, or if your asset is a building, it may need some modernisation or adaptation made to it, in order to start earning an income. Grants can be available for this sort of thing.

Let's look at some examples from around the country:



- A building can be a prized community asset and the key to many exciting projects. A West Yorkshire group set out with a near derelict building and the determination to develop an accessible arts and community centre. With grant funding, the building has been renovated, and now provides meeting, performance and workshop spaces, a café used by specific groups and the community at large, a multimedia suite, a recording studio and studio space for individual artists. In the near future the project will be completely self-sustaining, covering not only the building's running, maintenance and administration costs but also the staff costs of a community development worker.

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- On a much smaller scale, a community group began by hiring out its bouncy castle. They extended this service to offer a complete package for corporate family days consisting of hire of the bouncy castle and other toys accompanied by a couple of young people who have completed a short course as children's entertainers.
- The charity shops found on every High Street are an obvious way of raising funds. This sort of activity can be scaled down: a gardening project's volunteers and trainees sell their produce at their monthly local farmers market. Another group raises funds by selling donated goods at local car boot sales.
- A Cambridgeshire self-advocacy project encourages people with learning difficulties to 'take control of their lives, realise their talents, live their dreams and fulfil their potential'. It earns a sizable proportion of its income by training other organisations how to involve service users in service delivery – with its own members fronting the training!
- A London charity which teaches cookery and healthy eating to youngsters aged 3 upwards and their families made good use of its non-financial assets and resources. The staff team, who have a raft of relevant experience and skills, developed their network of contacts, building strong relationships with their local community, negotiating some free office space and attracting celebrity chefs to become involved in the project. Corporate companies provided kitchen equipment and furniture. They also exploited the fact that food and cookery are trendy subjects at the moment, and that they are filling a gap in the market.

So there are all sorts of possibilities. Notice that some of these activities simply make money to finance activities which are difficult to fund otherwise, whilst others make money at the same time as helping to fulfil the organisation's aims. If you choose to just make money, be careful that your earning activity does not detract from the main aims and mission of your organisation. There may also be some tax and charity law issues to consider. Seek advice from High Peak CVS if you are unsure.

For many groups the idea of earning an income is quite alien. "We're here to fulfil our mission, not make a profit", you say. But 'profit' is not a dirty word – it's what you do with it that counts!



Through the SUSTAIN project, High Peak CVS aims to help voluntary and community groups diversify their funding and develop social enterprise approaches to income generation.

We offer information, advice and training to assist with the sustainable development of your group. This may range from brief help on a specific matter, to in-depth protracted development work.

Information

We can direct you to sources of information about all aspects of organisational planning, grant funding and earning income to achieve sustainability.

Advice

High Peak CVS development workers can help with detailed one-to-one support toward your sustainability or give simple advice over the phone or by email.

An example would be using your building as an income generating asset, where we could advise on purchase and development funding, business plans, managing, professional help, environmental and access issues, etc.

Training

Several courses are run under the SUSTAIN project. If you have specific training needs please contact us.

This fact sheet is one of a series of fact sheets produced by High Peak CVS. **They can all be downloaded from our website www.highpeakcvs.org.uk/how**

To find out how we can help your group, please contact us on 01663 735 350

