

Big Local Connects session: How can hubs be financially viable?

Introduction

The findings from the hubs research ([Community hubs: Understanding survival and success](#)) were used as context for short group discussions about issues raised in the research and how they could apply to participants' experiences and their Big Local area. Below is a note of the points raised by the 3 groups during discussion.

For further background and details, please see the presentation slides for the session and the [hubs research report](#) available on the Local Trust website.

Notes

Who could be your hub partners and allies? How would you find them? (*Partnerships and your hub*)

How could you engage and involve the community in your hub? How do you know your hub is providing something the community will value or will pay for? (*Engaging communities in your hub*)

- Reliable volunteers – some volunteers will be keen to do specific things in your hub and supporting them to do so will help ensure that they are reliable and committed – a key thing when a building needs to open and operate well and provide services that are as you advertise them.
- Paid coordinator – potentially shared with another organisation but who can provide some continuity for users and volunteers
- Building management – involving volunteers and partners in managing your buildings – collaborating on a programme of activities and enabling them to commit to the things they feel confident to do
- Right location – making sure that the hub is well located in terms of feeling safe and in terms of visibility to the wider community will help ensure that you can engage community members in a range of ways

What are the challenges and opportunities in owning a hub? How do you know if owning a hub is right for you? (*Owning a hub*)

Pros/ opportunities	Cons/challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saves on rent • If shared- limits • Shares responsibility • Saving a community facility • Creating a community space • Being visible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared availability • Long term commitment • Taking on a problem • Sustainability of finance and/or income • Finding the right legal structure for ownership

What sources of income are/might be available to you? What would you do if a source of income changes unexpectedly? (*Generating income from your hub*)

How could you attract and keep your volunteers? How do you find the people in your community with the skills that you need? (*Skills and resources to run your hub*)

- Renting out spaces- offices
- Community café
- Contracts for renting space
- Polling station- council will pay to use
- Hold summer schools for potential volunteers to attract the skills you need
- Free access to new groups to start (trial)
- Computer room- printing charges, job search
- Approaching/ going to people you know- groups, neighbourhood other hubs etc.,

Overall feedback

Those present felt it was important when thinking about a hub or running one take the following into consideration:

- You can share space or take over other hubs that exist
- In relation to finance/rents/hires: it's not what you know, but *who* you know.
- Consider introducing sliding charges-these can help people to start up/build up
- Your legal structure- it can take a long time to decide on the best option for your hub. Choose one that can be agreed in a timely way e.g. getting structures agreed with the Charity commission.
- Engagement ideas:
 - Introduce initial tasters; these are free initially but then introduce a payment later (can be a good incentive)
 - Open days to get people through the door
- Link into other services around you; you don't have to do or deliver things yourself

Participants were also asked to note any specific hub-related questions that they had but were not answered within the session. These responses would be shared after the event.

Participant questions and responses	
Can charities rent out rooms to commercial organisations?	This will depend on the terms of your lease or license to occupy the property, your charitable objectives and governing document.
What sort of outside contracts/services were being agreed?	Contracts and services may be either to deliver them to the community via the hub or contracts and services that may be provided to a hub organisation to run aspects of the building e.g. cleaning property checking (boilers etc.)

Participant questions and responses	
VAT and charity community hub?	This depends on the VAT status of the organisation running the hub, the type of lease or license it has to occupy it and whether the building has been opted for VAT and HMRC have been told about it see HMRC information here
Volunteers- how to get people in. It's hard!	They key is to break down tasks and make them varied and interesting with opportunities to develop relationships with building users and have input into the way the building is run.
Responding to an established need we are looking for an online booking system for all communities' halls/centres. Do you know of such a system?	<p>There are lots out there, but here are a few. Some include generating invoices automatically too.</p> <p>https://mid.as/village-hall-booking-system https://www.hallmaster.co.uk/ http://www.hallbookingsystem.co.uk/ https://www.skedda.com/ https://www.habu.co/</p> <p>If you don't find what you're after, you can also put a call out to other Big Local areas on Workplace or Facebook to see what they're using or have come across.</p>