

New Places for New People

Starting new Christian
communities:
A practical guide

Chapter 5

How to Discern
Where to Locate
a Project

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Discerning where to locate a project is a key responsibility of the District New Places for New People (NPNP) Team (see page 11 for more). This chapter will guide you through that discernment. This process can also be adapted for and used by circuits and local churches discerning where to locate a project in their neighbourhood.

In order to discern where to locate your district-led NPNP project, you'll need to:

1. Consider your district context.
2. Listen to the community in the prospective location(s), to God and to each other.
3. Learn about and meet local people.

Throughout all this, you'll need to keep returning to these important questions:

- Why do you feel God leading you to choose this project over others? Who are you orienting toward? What is God saying to you through the established and evidenced need?
- In one sentence, can you describe your vision for what you are doing? What will it look like in a few years' time? What are the core values of your project?
- How do you see it changing missional culture in every circuit across the district?

1. Consider your district context

The district-led NPNP projects are all about encouraging a change in missional culture so that every circuit makes beginning an NPNP a core priority in their mission plan. It is important to consider the project's wider influence and the potential shared learning for other circuits, ie, are there similar contexts elsewhere in the district which can model their project on this one?

2. Listen to the community, to God, and to each other

All NPNP projects begin with listening. The purpose of listening to the community, to God, and to each other is to discern the voice of God as you look for the signs of where to locate the NPNP project.

Listening to the community

Listening to a community is hard and challenging, but also an opportunity to get to know people and form new and creative relationships. It is from this initial deep listening that a clear vision for a new Christian community relevant to your unique context will emerge.



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It is important to be methodical about listening, as this avoids overlooking key community areas and provides a structure for team members. Using the following method, or a similar one, will help to map your community and will be an early important team-building exercise:

- Give each person a sheet of flipchart paper or some sticky notes to write down as many people, groups, and places they can think of in the location you are considering. Take 15-20 minutes for this exercise.
- Give each person five minutes to share their list and observations.
- Take a large map of the area you are focusing on. Together, study and reflect on how your lists correspond with the geography, centres for community gathering, and other significant features and people. Discuss what important questions you need to ask of the whole area and the specific contexts you have listed.
- Divide up the lists and take responsibility to listen to them, prioritising the places the team has little collective knowledge of.

Find out more about good listening practices on page 56.

Listening to God

In the busyness and enthusiasm of starting something, it is easy to forget to pause and listen to where God might be leading. At every stage of the discerning process, it is important to set aside time for prayer (see page 40 for more).

- Open every meeting in prayer, whether it is in a coffee shop, church, or living room.
- Make time for quiet reflection and silence – perhaps allow space for this on your meeting agenda.
- Give opportunities for people to share a testimony of when God has spoken to them during their times of listening to the community.
- Regularly ask what others think God might be saying.
- Whenever people share what they sense God is saying or doing, recognise that, affirm their perception, and give thanks for it before debating whether the idea is good or moving on to other business. This will nurture an environment in which team members feel able to share when they sense God is revealing something.
- Develop a rhythm of prayer outside of meetings. It does not need to be long. Choose a regular day or time when the team commit to five minutes of stillness to listen for what God is saying. You could each open that time using Samuel's words, 'Speak Lord, your servant is listening' (1 Samuel 3:10).
- Make sure the team is supported in prayer by others. Could you ask ten faithful people to pray for your project, or organise a weekly prayer meeting just to support this project?

Listening to each other

Listening together as a team will bring different perspectives and understandings of the community. Placing collaboration at the heart of your project will build relationships within the team and enable each person to feel valued. Here are some helpful ideas:

- **Communicate between meetings.** There will be plenty of information to gather, so sharing the listening you have done in between meetings will mean the time shared together can be focused on discerning what God is saying. You could do this by email or group chats, a closed Facebook group, or shared drive.
- **Let everyone speak.** Be disciplined, give each person uninterrupted time in the meeting to share. Remember some people may need encouragement to share their insights.
- **Celebrate different ways of thinking.** Be open to sharing information in different ways: encourage the use of pictures and metaphors, music and objects.
- **Encourage questioning.** Ask open and searching questions eg Where are we seeing signs of God at work? Why should the project be here? Why not? What would we contribute? What more do we need to know, or do, to help our discernment?

3. Learn about and meet local people

Consider the factors which have shaped community identity in this context: the impact of its history, geography, cultural, and religious influences. What kinds of healthcare and education are available? How healthy is the local economy? Review neighbourhood statistics and data about the area and local population from the Office for National Statistics or the local council. This can help you identify groups of people who may need an NPNP and who may not be visible in the places you usually frequent.

As you're doing this research, go out and meet the community. It is essential to move beyond facts and figures to conversations and relationships with real people to hear what they care about. You could invite a key community leader for lunch, sit in the local park and see who you encounter, walk 'off the beaten track' to explore the neighbourhood, or attend a community event. If you are not from the local area, then do this in company with someone from one of the local churches, so that local relationships are being built.

You will also need to meet the local churches, ministers, leaders, and congregations to assess their level of support for this work. Involve them in conversations and discernment as much as possible, whilst ensuring that their expectations are managed (if you are considering a few different places, ensure everyone is aware of that, so that the locations not selected are not disappointed).

Consider who, of those you have met during this discernment process, could lead a potential project and what key relationships they have in the local community (see below).



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Potential leaders that already have some or all of the following people in their networks will enable a strong start to any New Place for New People.		
Local business leaders	Housing Associations	Parents of children associated with the sending church
Police	Conservation groups	
GP surgeries	Landlords	
Those working in health and social care	Sports clubs	Local politicians
	Citizens Advice	Farmers and farm workers
Market stall holders	Voluntary organisation leaders	People working with the recovery community
The town clerk		
Café and restaurant owners	Artists	Librarians
	Care home managers	Local charities
Foodbank volunteers	Debt Counselling services	Teachers and headteachers

Experiment, test, and learn

It is better to test ideas at an early stage, in several places, to see if your listening, hunches, and discernment resonate with a real community rather than just in theory. And remember, it is okay to make mistakes, change ideas, or explore elsewhere. No project is complete or perfect.

Take your time

It is easy to feel the pressure to decide quickly in the midst of funding timelines and talk of strategy. Taking time to reflect is not an excuse to leave everything to the last minute, but a willingness to allow curiosity to develop, the important voices to be heard, and subtle dynamics of a context to be discovered.

Further resources

A good resource to locate yourself in the thinking and practice of starting a new place is, *How to Pioneer (even if you haven't a clue)* by David Male. It is not a weighty theological tome, rather a helpful introduction for those at the start of a pioneer journey or wanting to better support a project.