

New Places for New People

Starting new Christian
communities:
A practical guide

Chapter 20

Financial
Sustainability

Financial Sustainability

The first month of a pioneering project might include a variety of important activities: hosting a meal for early stakeholders and supporters to talk about the new project, printing a survey to give out as you knock on doors to meet your neighbours, designing an art engagement project for the school assembly, hiring a hall and organising food and music for your first community party, and of course, buying cups of coffee for as many new people as possible – to listen to their stories and share yours.

All of these relational commitments are absolutely crucial and also extremely fun! And though they are quite diverse, they all have at least one thing in common: **they all cost money.**

If you sit down with twenty people a month for coffee and conversation, the annual coffee bill could be significant – and you're only getting started! We recognise that each context will be different, but all will need to be attentive to financial resourcing.

There is a temptation in pioneering and planting projects to let money be the last thing you worry about, the last action item in the pioneering team to-do list. We rationalise and convince ourselves: 'If we get the vision right, if we just focus on meeting people, if we have the most beautiful website or most profound statement of welcome, we won't need to worry about money. It'll all work itself out.'

Of course, this is not true. One of the most common mistakes made by pioneering projects (and existing churches, too) is not talking honestly, candidly, and positively about money from the beginning. Unbelievably creative pioneering community projects close all the time – not because they weren't making a difference in people's lives, nor because they weren't clear about their reason for existence, but because they ran out of money.

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Small conversations early on

Discussing finance from the beginning of the NPNP is important as a regular aspect of the community's development and growth. Talking to individuals and the whole community regularly and in small ways avoids a conversation about it in a crisis situation.

Having a clear understanding and set of related actions for how your project will steward finances is not only good business practice, it is foundationally linked to your mission, your discipleship, and your theology. Good financial practice is linked to our understanding of who God is, who we are in relation to God, and what the ultimate promise and purpose of life are.

Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). This is not an obscure verse; in fact, how we steward money – including our possessions, economic practice, material and financial generosity – is a major theme in Scripture, right up there with love. We believe the two are connected.

So, from the very beginning of your project, discuss prayerfully and confidently how financial generosity will be integrated publicly and clearly into your discipleship pathways and measures of fruitfulness. Instead of speaking of giving in general terms ("we will all give in different ways, and that's fine"), be explicit that financial generosity is part of discipleship – we offer our prayers, our presence, our financial gifts, our service, and our witness. For increasingly committed disciples, it's not pick-and-choose.

Church at the Margins

NPNPs in economically marginalised communities will need to be sensitive to the potential limitations of financial resources in their communities. It will be important to encourage financial giving appropriate to the resources available. Considering the costs of activities will be an important aspect of community life to ensure they are accessible to everyone, and no one is excluded due to the cost of an event or activity.

An attitude of gratitude

As your pioneering team begins to take shape, a helpful way to begin the discussion about money is to reflect on the seed missional funding the new project has received from the district or circuit. This money is an investment to help you get started, but it's not a transaction. It's a gift, a sign of the abundance of God who is the source of everything good, and also a sharing in the faithfulness of those who have come before us – forebears whose financial sacrifices over the centuries mean that there is something now to provide for new things, new missional experiments. At the beginning, praise God for this generosity, help the pioneering team to practise gratitude, and reflect on what honouring and stewarding this gift might mean for your new community as you begin to establish discipleship rhythms. How might this generosity beget more generosity? How is financial generosity part of your mission and ministry? How is it connected to helping the kingdom of God come about? What is your understanding of fundraising and stewardship, and how will you practise that? How can you begin to take responsibility for your financial life in ways that expect sustainability but more than that, in ways that expect you to fund new things in the future?



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Who can help?

Your pioneering team will need to learn to think and communicate clearly about finances in a way that people respond to. It is important to have, as part of your team, someone who can hold the day-to-day finances in perspective and help forecast the finance required for the future as the NPNP grows in reach and ministry.

Practising giving and stewardship

Consider the following in creating a culture of giving and responsible stewardship:

How are you, as a leader in this community, modelling the spiritual discipline of giving? Could you practise tithing or move towards it? What does increasing faithfulness in financial generosity look like? Share testimony about the practise of giving and how your own commitment has been both a challenge and a gift. Never ask people to make a commitment that you're not willing to make yourself.

How will you discuss finances in pioneering team meetings (and meetings with your line manager, coach, management/steering group)? How will financial matters be incorporated into your mission plan/strategy?

How will you build a budget for your NPNP? How will you share it with others, so they can understand the finances? Your District Treasurer will be able to offer support in this.

How will you manage the day-to-day finances of the project? You may need to open a current account. Your District Treasurer will be able to offer support in this.

How will finances be part of discipleship pathways? How can people learn about, practise, and share the joys and challenges of giving? Consider using a resource such as *Holy Habits* (www.holyhabits.org.uk), which includes a chapter on 'Sharing Resources'.

How are you helping the project understand its ongoing financial development in relation to the initial Connexional funding? How are you stewarding the community's finances in a way that will make it possible for you to fund other projects in the future?

Possible revenue streams

Funding can come from many places; consider the following:

- Ask community members to make prayerful, reflective, regular financial contributions to the project as part of their discipleship.
- Make it easy to give. Carrying cash is becoming less and less common, so innovative ways such as contactless payments, text codes and online giving are popular ways to encourage one-off payments.
- Grow a supporter network. Explore creative conversations with people who are interested but not a part of the community. Perhaps local Christians or other churches who want to support your vision.
- 'Tent-making ministry' is slowly emerging as a way for NPNP leaders to fund their role. Leaders have paid employment of some other kind outside of the Church. They are not paid to lead the NPNP but instead volunteer their time for this. Are there skills and business opportunities that key leaders could develop?

- Becoming entrepreneurial is a way of developing an income stream for the NPNP. Could it be a product or service you sell? A shop or café? Is there a space in premises you own that could be rented?
- Applying for grants is a potential, if at times complicated, funding stream. There are Christian grant-giving organisations and other community-based funders who may support elements of your community's life. However, it is better to develop a culture of giving rather than depend on a culture of grant applications.

Further resources

Methodist Insurance guidance on fundraising:

www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/church-fundraising

Helping church plants explore how to become financially sustainable:

www.stewardship.org.uk/church-planting-pathway