

Venture FX Projects criteria

The aim of the Venture FX scheme is to make more disciples of Jesus by creating 20 new Christian communities, or fresh expressions of church, among non-churched young adults, over a 10-year period. It is important that the locations for these projects are carefully chosen so that they can have good prospects of succeeding. It is also vital that they are situations where it is likely that Pioneer Mission Leaders will be both released to do their work but also appropriately supported in doing it. To help us make assessments of where the projects would best be located we have drawn up a list of selection criteria.

Engaging in culturally relevant mission

- 1. Projects should demonstrate a clear strategy for engaging with non-churched young adults so that they may become disciples of Jesus Christ and be equipped to live a Christian life.**

A potential project should be able to demonstrate that it has thought through the particular needs of those it seeks to reach and has begun to plan strategically to engage with them. There should have been some initial reflection on the nature of the community and the culture of the young adults whom it is hoped to reach. The project needs to be more than a general aspiration, although clearly the detail may not begin to emerge until the project has begun. We will be looking for a clear intention to make Christian disciples and to create an environment in which they can be nurtured and equipped to live a full Christian life.

- 2. Projects should represent an holistic approach to mission, evangelistic in intention but engaging with issues of justice and social action as appropriate.**

The intention is to offer an invitation for people to become disciples of Christ, and potential projects should recognise the need for the good news to impact every area of life and the call to be 'world-changing disciples.' In each situation there may be issues of justice and social engagement or opportunities for showing care and concern to those in need which should form part of the vision.

- 3. Projects should take seriously the cultural context in which they are set and should seek to be inclusive and open.**

What has worked well in one place may not be suitable or effective in another, and situations vary significantly even when there appear to be similarities. It may be tempting to imagine that a model used elsewhere can simply be transferred. Whilst it is valuable to learn from the experience of others, it is important to discern what is an appropriate model for the particular context where the project is set. Careful listening to God and to the community is essentially to enable this discernment to take place.

Fresh expressions of church are frequently attractive to people who feel rejected, hurt, marginalised, discriminated against or who have had a painful experience of church, and a non-judgemental atmosphere of welcome and acceptance is essential.

Forming Christian Community

- 4. Projects should have the intention of establishing a fresh expression of church for non-churched young adults (i.e. those aged between 18-35 years old).**

A project will seek to engage primarily with those in the target age-group who are not currently part of the life of the church. There are bound to be some blurred edges, and it is impossible and inappropriate to be too prescriptive about who can belong to the developing fresh expression of church. However it is important that the main focus and the strategy underpinning the project is focused primarily and very clearly on non-churched young adults.

- 5. The aim of the project will be to work towards a Christian community which will become a church in its own right, recognising that a culturally appropriate church for young adults may look very different from 'traditional' models of church, and will vary according to context.**

A Venture FX project will be more than an evangelistic activity or a common-interest group. It will from the outset intend to create a Christian community which has the potential to be recognisable in due time as a church. Whilst it is likely that it will, and should, be shaped differently from a more traditional model of church, its aim will be to function as a culturally relevant ecclesial community.

- 6. Projects will reflect the description and values of a fresh expression of church adopted by the Fresh Expression Initiative:**

A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.

- It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.*
- It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.*

Planning strategically

- 7. Projects should be located in environments where the ministry of a pioneer mission leader will be released and supported, ideally where there is a good possibility of local young adult volunteers engaging with the project.**

We will be looking for situations where a pioneer mission leader can be released to pioneer new work without being burdened by other worthy but distracting activities in the life of the District, Circuit or local churches. Their

gifts will be recognised as God-given, to be valued and used to their full potential in the mission of God through this developing fresh expression of church. But pioneers will also need to feel supported and encouraged in their work. Potential projects will need to demonstrate an understanding of the need for this balance and a means by which it may be achieved. The pioneer is likely to gather a team of young adults to share in the work and the potential for this needs to be carefully considered.

8. Projects should demonstrate careful thought about how they may develop and be sustained over a ten year period and beyond.

Fresh expressions of church often begin, and sometimes remain, very small in size. They can take a long time to develop into a vibrant and sustainable Christian community. They are not a recipe for quick results and usually involve much patience, faithfulness and prayer. The less like a traditional model of church it is, the longer it may take to come into being. Projects will have given some thought to how the long term nature of the work may be provided for and sustained.

Relating to the wider church

9. Projects, whilst enjoying the freedom to reflect the context and culture in which they are set, should nevertheless remain obviously in connection with the wider church or churches of which they are a part.

A fresh expression of church may be expected to develop its own style and way of being church which reflects the culture of the people for whom it is formed. It is important to free it from any expectations that it should conform to a particular model or clone of other churches but to allow it to respond to its cultural context. Nevertheless an emerging Christian community should be recognisable as part of the wider Church and should represent orthodox Christian beliefs and practices. Even where a project is fully ecumenical the ethos and values of the Methodist Church should be maintained.

10. Projects should be supported and monitored using a light touch approach but providing clear processes of accountability and supervision.

A fresh expression of church developed as part of the Venture FX scheme will relate to a District or Circuit, and proper channels of communication, supervision and management will be needed which are not overbearing and restricting but which are supportive and which will lead to proper and appropriate accountability. This will vary from place to place and will need to be established in consultation with the coordinator of Venture FX.

11. Projects should involve ecumenical cooperation wherever possible.

The ecumenical dimension to the development of a fresh expression of church will vary from one location to another, but it should always be the intention that cooperation with other Christians will take place whenever it can. Sometimes this may be a formal agreement to work together, perhaps using existing structures or relationships. At other times it may be a more informal arrangement. At the very least there should be consultation and liaison with other local churches. It is vital that we respect what others are

doing as well as desiring to see how best the project might complement their work. Where we are met with unresponsiveness or when there are conflicting expectations it may be necessary to press on for the sake of God's mission, hopefully with the blessing of others even if it is not possible to secure their active cooperation.

Working with the connexion

- 12. Projects should enable the pioneer mission leader to be supported through suitable coaching or mentoring, peer-networks, or mission accompaniment as determined by Venture FX.**

A key part of the vision of the Venture FX scheme is not only the establishing of fresh expressions of church, but the formation of effective pioneers. We aim to encourage people to develop the gifts they have and to grow in effectiveness in their calling to pioneer work. We hope that they will feel part of and supported by the network of pioneers throughout the scheme and that in time this will develop into a strong and nourishing network. Coaching and mentoring and belonging to a peer-network will be the culture in which pioneers will develop, alongside 'on the job' training. Potential projects will be able to acknowledge and respect the importance of this dimension of the scheme.

- 13. Projects should be willing to engage in full partnership with Venture FX, embracing its ethos and following its guidelines for the deployment, support and training of a pioneer mission leader.**

Potential projects will value the concept of a creative partnership with the connexional scheme. They will rightly seek to pursue the mission of God in their local context in an appropriate way, but will recognise that the vision of Venture FX is not only to establish fresh expressions of church but also to create a supportive framework for the formation of effective pioneers and to contribute to the Methodist Church's ongoing exploration of how pioneer ministry can best become integrated into its life.

Districts and Circuits will need to examine carefully the way in which a Venture FX project relates to their current mission policy and strategy, and will also need to consider the local costs which are likely to be incurred in addition to sharing the cost of a pioneer .