**Guide to Starting a Social Action Project in your Community**

Churches are uniquely placed to transform their neighbourhoods. While official authorities can sometimes struggle to connect, the Church has proved its success for decades.

First, know your why – are you and your church confident of why social action matters and why it matters to God? It’s important to know the story your initiative falls within – so that worship of God and love of neighbour go hand in hand.

1. **Assess: What are the issues, what is being done to address them and what capabilities do we have to do more?**

Before jumping into trying to fix anything, the first stage is listening – finding out who is affected, in what ways, and what support do they need.

It’s important to avoid mentally separating ‘us’ (as the heroes) from ‘them’ (those who need our help) because that denies the people you want to support the dignity with which God created them. As the phrase from the Disability Rights movement puts it (which has since been adopted in other fields): ‘nothing about us without us is for us’.

It’s also important to avoid assumptions about the lived reality of an issue. By going into the specifics, you can find out what matters most to people and you are more likely to be able to identify a tangible way in which you can make a difference, even when the social problem itself feels overwhelming.

**What are the needs within your community?**

* Spend time with people in the places where they live, work and play to learn about the community’s history, passions, relationships, and culture. Get acquainted with as many individuals as possible – have conversations not just about politics or social issues, but about families, sports, relationships, and your own histories.
* Is there a sense of community solidarity, or are there deep divisions between natives and newcomers, or between people of different races or ethnicity? Are there existing mechanisms in the community that serve to bring people together or keep them apart?
* Does the community have a sense of pride, or a sense of inferiority? Does it feel put upon by outside forces?
* What data can shed light on the socioeconomic condition of the community – covering population size and demographics, employment and education, health, employment, and poverty (see the appendix for a list of data sources for Leicester and Leicestershire)

**Learn what resources and assets are available**

The listening and exploration stage also involves uncovering capabilities and callings – what do people feel inspired to do or give? What is already being done which you can signpost people to?

* What is already being done, by whom and with what results? Are there other charities or statutory services addressing the need you have identified?
* What are the strengths within your community? E.g. community leaders, skills and expertise, volunteer capacity, access to funding, shared spaces and facilities.
* Who can you partner with? E.g. universities, local council, other faith groups, schools, local charities.

1. **Plan**

Once you’ve figured out the change you want to see in the world, the next question is how will you get there, and what you will do differently as a result.

* Take inspiration from other examples – what works, is there an established best practice, or existing initiative we can replicate? (See Appendix B for examples of church-led community action projects)
* Outline objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound
* Develop an action plan for the intervention. Include:
  + Who will be involved in carrying out the intervention? Who else needs to know about it?
  + When the intervention will be implemented or how long it will be maintained?
  + Resources (money and staff) needed/ available? (See Appendix C for places to look for funding)
  + How will you engage the people you want to serve?
  + How will you know it is working – embed evaluation of the process (customer satisfaction, quality of implementation) and attainment of objectives.
  + How will you make it sustainable? E.g. marketing, collaboration with other organisations, grants, fundraising, in-kind support.

**Appendix A: Data Sources**

[Church Urban Fund’s parish profiles](https://cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool) – type in the name of your parish and it will give you information on the demographic composition and different forms of poverty in your area.

[Nomis Web local area report](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea) – type in your postcode and it will give you data at a ward, parish, county, or local authority level, including:

* Demographic data (population size, age structure, ethnicity and nationality)
* Housing data (living arrangements, housing tenure, rooms/ bedrooms, central heating)
* Employment data (economic activity, hours worked, qualifications, industry, occupation)
* Self-reported health and disability

[Leicestershire and Rutland Statistics and Research](https://www.lsr-online.org/geographies.html) – links to health, employment and census data at the Local Authority Level.

You can also search for [reports](https://www.lsr-online.org/reports.html) produced by each of the councils on a range of themes including: health and wellbeing, children and family services, safer communities, adoption and fostering, environment and waste, and transport.

[Local Health Reports](https://www.localhealth.org.uk/) – this database is run by the Department for Health and can be used to find out a wide range of health data for your area. Click on Produce Report and type in the name of your area under Study Area on the left hand side. That will produce a profile for your area, with data on population, ethnicity, deprivation, housing, employment, long-term health conditions, child and maternal health, and behavioural risk factors. Click on Local Health Report Part Two on the left hand bar, and it will bring up data on life expectancy, cancer, and hospitality admissions for harm and injury.

[End Child Poverty](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/local-child-poverty-data-2014-15-2019-20/) provides child poverty statistics by constituency and local authority areas.

[Crime data](https://www.ukcrimestats.com/Police_Force/Leicestershire_Police) – To find the crime data specific to your area, scroll down on this page until you reach the table of neighbourhoods (second from the bottom). Click on the name of your area and It will open up a page with figures on different types of crime and antisocial behaviour, by month, over the past year.

[Leicester Open Data](https://data.leicester.gov.uk/pages/home/) brings together over 150 datasets relating to the city covering council activities and facilities (like planning permissions, licensing, social housing and social care) and a range of themes, including air quality, waste, free school meal provision, food and fuel poverty, and children in relative/ absolute poverty.

Leicestershire County Council’s Business Intelligence team have produced [several data dashboards](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/r.i.team.leicestershire.county.council) including:

* [Community insights survey results](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/r.i.team.leicestershire.county.council/viz/LeicestershireInsightSurveyPublic/Introduction) (which can be broken down by district area and shown over time) showing people’s satisfaction with their local area, their volunteering and caring commitments, feelings of safety, concern for the environment, and financial wellbeing.
* [Universal credit claimants](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/r.i.team.leicestershire.county.council/viz/UnemploymentDashboard_16451110624860/UCHeadlinefigures) (which can be broken down by ward and shown over time)
* [Annual survey of hours and earnings](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/r.i.team.leicestershire.county.council/viz/AnnualSurveyofHoursEarningsASHE/HeadlineData) (which can be broken down by district)

**Appendix B: Project Examples**

The Church of England’s [Community Action](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/community-action) resources

[Cinnamon Network’s](https://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/projects/) recommended projects are tried and tested social action projects which can be replicated by other churches.

[NAYBA](https://www.nayba.co/resources)’s recognised projects are best practice approaches that provide local churches with a menu of community projects they can choose from, lead and adapt to their local context.

[HeartEdge](https://www.heartedge.org/) is a network and resource hub to equip churches to develop their congregational lives, cultural offering, commercial opportunities and compassionate service. Under the [Compassion section](https://www.heartedge.org/resources/resource-list) of their website, you’ll find case studies and resources for addressing a range of social issues, and each of the steps involved

[Housing Justice](https://housingjustice.org.uk/what-you-can-do/response-to-local-housing-need#case-studies) has case studies of churches’ practical response to housing issues and homelessness

**Appendix C: Funding**

Depending on the nature of your project, you may be able to fundraise with events, local sponsorship, crowdfunding or church-giving. If it’s a larger project, you will likely need to look at grants and other funding streams. This list is not exhaustive, but should be a helpful place to start:

* [Voluntary Action LeicesterShire](https://valonline.org.uk/funding-and-income/)provides advice, resources and a [searchable database of local and national funding opportunities](https://www.idoxopen4community.co.uk/leicestershire)
* Charity Excellence Framework’s [Free Funding Finder](https://www.charityexcellence.co.uk/Home/FundingFindersResources) is the most extensive free-to-use database directory of grants. The website also has a [list of free goods and services](https://www.charityexcellence.co.uk/Home/FreeGoodsServices) available for charities.
* [Grants Online](https://www.grantsonline.org.uk/search/grants?f=1) has a searchable database for grants
* [Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Community Foundation](https://www.llrcommunityfoundation.org.uk/) manages grants for local projects
* [My Funding Central](https://www.myfundingcentral.co.uk/) is a database of grant funding and social investment sources which is free for organisations with an annual turnover of under £30,000.
* [Leicestershire Community Schemes and Funding](https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-schemes-and-funding) for organisations and projects based on the county
* [MyCommunity](https://mycommunity.org.uk/) has a range of resources from major national charities and organisations, including funding opportunities

You can also sign up for email updates on funding opportunities from the [Leicestershire Funding Toolkit](https://www.idoxopen4community.co.uk/leicestershire).