

From idea to plan

An introductory discussion guide

Start with a conversation

You do not need project experience to use this guide. Read it on your own or discuss it with a group. There are no forms, scores or right answers to calculate.

What is a project?

A project is a piece of work with a purpose, a beginning and an end. It might be a community event, a small garden or a series of learning sessions. A good idea becomes a plan when you can explain what you want to achieve and what it will take.

One idea we will follow

Imagine a community group saying: "We want to help people use their phones." That is a useful starting point, but it leaves questions. Who needs help? With what? Who can provide it? How long will it take?

Two things to explore

SMART helps you describe a clear goal. Resources are the people, time, money, skills, equipment and space needed to make it happen. A clear goal still needs a workable plan.

Talk it through

What idea would you like to explore? Who might benefit? What makes you think they need it? Ask the people involved before settling on a solution.

Make the goal SMART

Five questions that turn an intention into a clearer goal

S - Specific

What exactly do you want to do, and for whom? Instead of "help people with technology", try "help local adults who want to practise basic smartphone tasks".

M - Measurable

How will you know whether it helped? Look for a useful result, not just attendance. For example, participants could practise sending a photo and recognising warning signs in a suspicious message.

A - Achievable

Can you do it with the people, time and support available? Start small if needed. Two sessions may be more realistic than a year-round service.

R - Relevant

Does the goal address something people actually want or need? Ask potential participants which tasks matter to them. Your preferred activity may not be their priority.

T - Time-bound

When will the activity happen, and when will you review it? Choose dates you can meet. A deadline should help the plan, rather than force an unrealistic promise.

Talk it through

Which part of your idea is clear already? Which part needs a conversation or more information? SMART is a way to ask better questions, not a guarantee of success.

What resources will you need?

Look beyond the budget

People and skills

Who will organise the activity, deliver it and help participants? What skills are needed? Ask people whether they are willing and available; do not assume that an offer of interest is a firm commitment.

Time

Include preparation, delivery, travel, communication and tidying up. Who has time for each part? A free activity can still demand more volunteer time than the group can manage.

Money

What will cost money, and who will pay? Consider room hire, printing, materials and travel. Separate funds already available from support you hope to receive. If a cost is unknown, find out before committing.

Space and equipment

Is the room suitable and accessible? Will you need Wi-Fi, devices, tables or materials? Check what can be borrowed and whether it will work when needed.

Permission and practical support

Who needs to agree to the activity? What guidance or arrangements does the venue require? Think about access, participants' needs and how you will handle problems.

Talk it through

What do you already have? What has someone actually agreed to provide? What is still missing? Could a smaller version work with the resources confirmed so far?

A small plan you can discuss

Fictional example: smartphone mornings at a community centre

A clearer goal

Over the next six weeks, run two 90-minute smartphone practice sessions for up to eight local adults. Ask participants what they want to learn. At the second session, invite each person to demonstrate one chosen task and say what support they still need.

What makes it SMART?

It names an activity and audience, gives a timescale and suggests a way to review learning. It is achievable only if suitable helpers, a room and the necessary equipment are available. It is relevant only if potential participants want this support.

Resources to discuss

The group would need an organiser, suitable helpers, a booked accessible room, working Wi-Fi and clear joining information. Participants might bring their own phones. Check any printing, room or travel costs. None of these resources should be treated as confirmed until checked.

If something is missing

If the room is unavailable or there are too few helpers, change the date, reduce the group size or start with one session. Changing a plan after checking the facts is useful progress.

Choose one next step

Talk to potential participants, check a venue, ask a helper or find out a cost. Agree who will take that step and when you will discuss what they learned.

Before you promise

Can you explain the goal simply? Do people want it? Are the essential resources confirmed? If not, keep exploring before announcing dates or spending money. This guide starts the discussion; it does not replace detailed planning.