

# Information, Advice & Support



**For Community Co-operatives**

**March 2016**

# Information, Advice & Support available from Plunkett Foundation

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**We help communities to take control of their challenges and overcome them together.**

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Plunkett Foundation supports people, predominantly in rural areas, to set up and run life-changing **community co-operatives**; enterprises that are owned and run democratically by large numbers of people in their community. They help people to tackle a range of issues, from **isolation** and **loneliness** to **poverty**, and come in many forms including shops, cafes, pubs and land-based initiatives, and everything in between.

Our core values are the values of the great Irish co-operative pioneer, **Sir Horace Plunkett**, who founded Plunkett Foundation in 1919. He believed that rural communities didn't have to wait for someone else to make life better for them; they had the potential to do it themselves – with a little help. His values are embedded in the heart of what we do:

- We seek economic solutions to create social change
- We seek solutions that enrich rural community life
- We see self-help as the most effective way to tackle rural needs

Essentially, we aim to support communities that are seeking to address local problems through trading activity that is needed, that will be economically viable and sustainable, and help alleviate poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. This could include supporting the whole community or individuals that are financially disadvantaged, through to addressing wider social issues such as loneliness and isolation. This may be achieved by safeguarding vital services, creating jobs and training and providing opportunities for social interaction and involvement.

We also look to ensure the activity doesn't displace any other trading activity which is serving the community. The enterprise needs to be generating benefits for the wider community, not just for those that are members of the co-operative, or those identified as being in poverty. This might be the creation of a 'community hub' that allows all members of the community to take part in some way and feel the benefit of being part of the community.

On the whole, we allow communities to 'self define' themselves as rural owing to 'rural' looking very differently in different parts of the UK.

We support communities that want to create a community co-operative that will adopt a legal structure that enables genuine and democratic community ownership. There are many legal structures that will enable this, but they should feature:

- Open and voluntary membership.
- One member one vote.
- The interests of the co-operative are linked into long term community control.
- The distribution of profit does not enable some members' greater control than others.

There will also be various ways in which the enterprise is managed but to meet with the above criteria, our expectation is that a community co-operative may look like any one of the following:

- Community owned premises, enterprise managed by community.
- Community owned premises, enterprise managed by commercial operator.
- Privately owned premises, leased by community co-operative, and managed by community.
- Other community premises (such as a church, pub, or village hall), enterprise managed by the community.

## How we help

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**Plunkett Foundation offers a wide range of support to communities setting up and running community co-operatives.**

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- In the initial stages, all communities can expect to receive at least 30 minutes of free support by phone or email to discuss their idea.
- If meeting our core criteria for a community co-operative, communities can expect to receive on-going nurturing support from our Frontline co-ordinators free of charge. This support is not time-bound, but communities should not be expecting in-depth or specialist support at this stage.
- Communities wishing to access more specialist or in-depth support may apply for 'funded' support which Plunkett can offer free of charge to the community. Funded support is made possible through specific funding streams and income generated from our membership and donations. As a result, this support is time-bound and will require communities to provide feedback on the level and quality of service.

- Funded support is offered to communities based on our assessment to a number of questions the panel will answer when considering your application.
- Communities should not expect to receive more than two allocations of funded support in any 12-month period, but exceptions may be made depending on the availability of funded support packages.
- In cases where funded support is no longer available, or a community is ineligible for free support, communities will have the opportunity to pay for support at subsidised rates (members) or non-subsidised rates (non-members).

## Applying for funded support

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Funded support is available by completing our Request for Support Form. This form is available to communities when we feel you're ready to let us help you progress your ideas. Prior to us sending you the Request for Support Form your community group will need to demonstrate that you:

- Comprise at least three individuals
- Are planning to establish, or have already established, a community co-operative
- Have consulted with your local community
- Have identified a level of need for the project.

If you think your project is eligible, please contact our Frontline Co-ordinators to request an application form by emailing [info@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:info@plunkett.co.uk) or calling 01993 810730.

## Our core eligibility criteria

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We can only provide funded support to communities that meet (or are working towards) all of the following core criteria for a community co-operative:

1. The venture is using enterprise as a means to alleviate rural poverty (or disadvantage) and social exclusion
2. It exists to provide community benefits that are identified as needed and supported by its immediate population.
3. The enterprise is based in or is serving a rural community.
4. The enterprise is owned and run democratically by the local community.

Plunkett doesn't have a strict definition of what a rural community is. Instead, we are interested to know more about the area you live in and the issues your idea will address.

Please note we are occasionally able to offer support to communities that do not meet this criteria, e.g. urban communities. Please contact us for an initial conversation about this.

## Our assessment process

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Applications are considered by an assessment panel on a weekly basis. We aim to assess and respond to all applications within 14 working days, but usually we can assess and respond to your request for support sooner than this. As part of the assessment process, it may be necessary to request further information from the applicant or to have a discussion over the telephone to assess their eligibility and support needs in more detail. The assessment team will need to make three key decisions:

- Does the applicant group and their proposal meet Plunkett's core eligibility criteria?
- What is the best way to provide the support?
- How can the support be resourced?
- How would our support make a substantial difference to the viability or sustainability of the enterprise?
- If already an established community co-operative, are they members of Plunkett Foundation?

# How we provide support

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No matter what the outcome of the assessment of your request for support, we will let you know and provide feedback where possible. If successful, we will then send you everything you'll need to know about the support being provided to you. It will normally be a requirement to use the support within a three month period and to complete our online feedback survey when you've received the support in full.

**The following pages provide an outline of the typical support that we are able to offer. As above, we endeavour to provide support free of charge, but in cases where funding is no longer available, or where a community does not meet our criteria, communities may have the opportunity to pay for support at subsidised rates (members) or non-subsidised rates (non-members).**

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## Core support

This support is offered free of charge to communities and consists of:

### **A frontline service**

Our team provides a wide range of advice and support to communities considering setting up, or already running, community owned enterprises. This advice can be provided over the phone or by email. Initially, we can provide 30 minutes of general support for free.

### **A series of tools and resources**

Plunkett hosts a wide range of toolkits, resources and case studies that have been developed for community co-operatives. These range from 'how to set up' community co-operatives, legal structures, business planning, financial management, sourcing local food and marketing your enterprise.

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## Funded support

Plunkett aims to offer the services detailed below to communities free of charge when we can. Our ability to support communities is reliant on income from funders, donors and members and so sometimes not all of our services are available.

### **A national network of Plunkett Advisers**

Our advisers span the whole of the UK. They provide tailored advice and support to communities at all stages of their journey. They can guide communities through their

options, help develop the vision for the project and support the development of an action plan to set the community off in the right direction.

### **Specialist business support**

Our team of specialist advisers also works across the UK. They combine their specialist knowledge in areas like legal structures, community shares, business planning, financial management, managing staff and volunteers with their in depth knowledge and experience of community co-operatives, from shops and pubs to farmers' markets, community cafes and land-based initiatives.

### **Mentoring support and co-operative visits**

We facilitate peer-to-peer support between fledgling and established community co-operatives to ensure that practical knowledge and experiences are shared. We do this by working with individuals who have direct experience of setting up and running community co-operatives to support others through a mentoring approach. We also fund the associated costs of visits to established enterprises and cover the time those supporting enterprises give.

### **Community shares advice**

Community shares are an effective means of raising investment for any new or established community enterprise using a Community Benefit Society legal structure. Plunkett Foundation is one of only four sponsoring bodies to have appropriate Model Rules to undertake a community share issue and can provide guidance and support to communities with the community share issue.

### **Funding**

Our support sometimes includes the provision of funding to help communities create their co-operative. If we can provide funding we will make sure you're aware of what's available.

### **Dedicated local food resources and point of sale materials for community food enterprises**

A practical guide is available to help community food enterprises identify, stock and sell more local food and drink. As well as guidance from experienced personnel, this will include point of sale materials to use in-store. Some community shops have seen local food sales increase by over 30%.

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## **Other ways we can help**

There are also a number of other ways in which we can help communities. The following services aren't funded, so we can only provide them by charging a fee.

### Template legal structure

The majority of community co-operatives register their business as a Community Benefit Society. Plunkett Foundation has Model Rules for this legal structure and can register your business with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This is a truly democratic form of structure which enables each member one vote. Advice can also be given on a range of other legal structures.

### Consultancy

Plunkett has increasingly been commissioned directly by fledgling and established community co-operatives to undertake feasibility studies, business planning, and training when our funded support is not available. We undertake this type of work using our in-house staff and advisers, and draws upon the unique knowledge and data we have gathered from the community co-operative sector.

## Membership of Plunkett Foundation

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**Plunkett Foundation is a membership organisation, and we actively encourage those we work with to become members, and in turn, help us to make a difference to the lives of rural communities.**

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We're proud of the work we do to help communities set up and run life-changing community co-operatives. Becoming a member of Plunkett makes a vital contribution to sustaining our service and, important, offers you the chance to inform the development of our service and shape our views and work. We have two membership packages, so you can choose the one that will suit you best.

### Supporter membership

Supporter membership is for any individual, organisation or community co-operative who shares our values and wants to support us. Becoming a supporter member means you are directly helping us to have an even greater impact in all areas, from the practical help we provide to communities to our work in providing a voice for rural communities amongst policy makers, support organisations and communities themselves.

### Cost

- £50 for individuals per year
- £75 for organisations with a turnover of under £1m

- £150 for organisations with a turnover of £1m or over

## Benefits

Becoming a member means you join a growing number of like-minded people and organisations all working together to help communities set up and run co-operative enterprises as a way of overcoming a range of challenges. In addition members also receive:

- A monthly newsletter tailored specifically for members
- Information on all our publications and events before anyone else
- Bespoke member events and reduced ticket prices for all Plunkett events
- The opportunity to shape our views and work

## The Plunkett Community Co-operative Network

We've developed an exclusive membership package for community co-operatives, whether in the initial stages of setting up or those open and trading. This membership package gives you the opportunity to join together and give support back to others just starting out. It also helps your co-operative to benefit from additional advisory services from us, and to access a range of purchasing benefits.

## Cost

- It costs £240 per year to join the Plunkett Community Co-operative Network (PCCN).

## Benefits

- As well as receiving all the supporter membership benefits, PCCN members also receive:
- Exclusive access to purchasing benefits to help reduce running costs (see more below)
- Discounted services from selected third party suppliers of professional services
- Additional advisory services from us, including annual health checks
- Discounted Model Rules for Community Benefit Societies.

# Contact Us

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**We're always happy to hear from you!**

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**Phone:** +44 (0)1993 810 730

**Email:** [info@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:info@plunkett.co.uk)

**Online:** [www.plunkett.co.uk](http://www.plunkett.co.uk)