

Community Action 101

How to find a need that is real, work with an organisation already doing the work, and finish the thing you started. For young founders and volunteers.

1 THE PROBLEM

Youth-led projects tend to fail in the same way. Someone has an idea first and then goes looking for a need to fit it. They promise more than they can do. Then exams arrive, or people leave for university, and it stops.

The first instinct is usually to start a new organisation. But someone is often working on that need already and is just short of hands, or of one free afternoon a month. NCVO's guidance opens with the same question. Do you need to set up a new organisation at all?

You have probably watched it happen. A launch event, a logo, a few sessions, then nothing. Nobody writes down what happened, so the next group has to work it all out again.

ASK FIRST

1. Who has told us this is a problem, in their own words?
2. Who is already doing something about it, and what do they lack?
3. What happens to the people we serve when we stop?

If you cannot answer the third one, do not announce the project yet.

2 WHY IT MATTERS

For the people served

A cancelled visit, or a class that stops halfway through, uses up someone else's time. People move things around to fit a service in. If it then disappears, they are worse off than if you had never offered it.

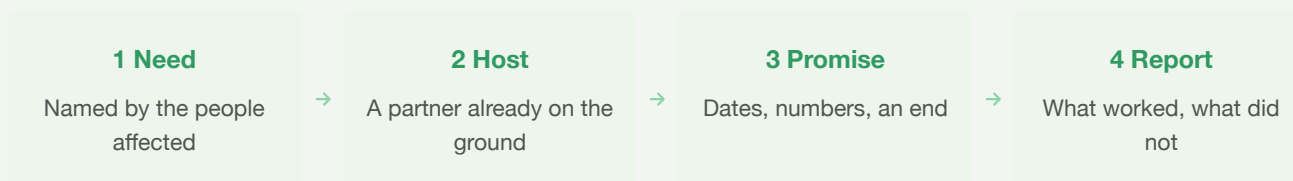
For the host organisation

Staff spend hours briefing you, running safeguarding checks and sorting out access. If you turn up once and never come back, they have less time than they had before you arrived.

For you

A small thing you actually finished says more about you than a big plan on a slide. It also gives the next person something to build on.

3 WHAT CAN BE DONE



This order survives a handover. Most people skip step 2.

1 Find the need with the people who have it

Ask a frontline organisation what work they cannot find people for this term. Surveying your friends about what they think the problem is will not tell you.

2 Work through a host

An existing NGO already has the safeguarding policies, the insurance, the consent forms and the keys to the building. In Hong Kong, the Agency for Volunteer Service and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service put volunteers in touch with their member agencies.

3 Write down how it is meant to work

NPC's *Theory of Change in Ten Steps* takes you from the situation, to the people you serve, to what you will do and what you hope changes. The last step is the one people skip: writing down what you are quietly assuming.

4 Promise small, in writing

Put the dates, the numbers and the finish date in writing. Run it, count what actually happened, write down the parts that did not work, and give your notes to whoever comes next.

Link it to something bigger. UN member states agreed **17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets in 2015**, to be met by 2030 (United Nations). Pick one of the targets rather than a whole goal, and be clear about which part of it your project actually touches.

4 LEARN MORE AND TAKE PART

- United Nations — The 17 Sustainable Development Goals
sdgs.un.org/goals
- United Nations — Volunteerism for Development
un.org/en/global-issues/volunteerism
- Agency for Volunteer Service, Hong Kong
avs.org.hk/eng
- The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
hkcss.org.hk/?lang=en
- NPC — Theory of Change in Ten Steps
thinknpc.org/resource-hub/ten-steps
- NCVO — Setting up a new organisation
ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/setting-up

4 TAKE PART WITH SUSTAINIFY

Sustainify is a youth-led organisation in Hong Kong. Bring an idea on your own or with a few friends. You do not need a registered organisation or a finished prototype. What we offer is mentorship, networks and educational materials. We can only offer as much as we have people for, so working with us does not come with funding or a guaranteed placement.

MENTORSHIP

We help you check the need is real, and work out a first activity you can actually do.

NETWORKS

Introductions to organisations that can tell you what they are short of, or take you on.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Guides and worksheets to work through, so you turn up with real questions.

FROM ENQUIRY TO A FIRST ACTIVITY

1. **Bring the idea.** The need you have seen, who would benefit, and what help you want.
2. **Talk it over.** What it would change, why you want to do it, and whether we can actually help.
3. **Agree one small first activity.** A conversation, a volunteer shift, an introduction, or a small trial run.
4. **Prepare and deliver.** Plan it with the people involved, then confirm the arrangements with the host.
5. **Learn and decide what comes next.** Ask people how it went, write down what happened, then run it again, change it, or stop.

WHAT TO TELL US WHEN YOU WRITE

- What idea would you like to explore?
- What have you tried so far, if anything?
- How much time can you contribute?
- Who could benefit, and what need have you noticed?
- What help would make the biggest difference?
- How would you like us to get in touch?

Write to us in plain language. If you are neurodivergent that is no disadvantage here; just tell us how you prefer to communicate. **Community project development is one of our three workshop themes**, and this explainer is the material behind it. Write to info@sustainifysdg.com