Chapter 18 Financial Sustainability

The first month of an NPNP might include a variety of important activities: hosting a meal for early stakeholders and supporters to talk about the new community, printing a survey to give out as you knock on doors to meet your neighbours, designing art engagement for the school assembly, hiring a hall and organising food and music for your first community party, and of course, buying cups of coffee for as many new people as possible – to listen to their stories and share yours.

All of these relational commitments are absolutely crucial and also extremely fun! And though they are quite diverse, they all have at least one thing in common: they all cost money.

If you sit down with 20 people a month for coffee and conversation, the annual coffee bill could be significant – and you're only getting started! We recognise that each context will be different, but all will need to be attentive to financial resourcing.

There is a temptation in pioneering and church planting to let money be the last thing you worry about, the last action item in the pioneering team to-do list. We rationalise and convince ourselves: 'If we get the vision right, if we just focus on meeting people, if we have the most beautiful website or most profound statement of welcome, we won't need to worry about money. It'll all work itself out.'

Of course, this is not true. One of the most common mistakes made in pioneering (and existing churches, too) is not talking honestly, candidly, and positively about money from the beginning. Sadly, creative pioneering initiatives come to an end all the time – not because they weren't making a difference in people's lives, nor because they weren't clear about their reason for existence, but because they ran out of money. Good financial practice is linked to our understanding of who God is, who we are in relation to God, and what the ultimate promise and purpose of life are.

Small conversations early on

Discussing finance from the beginning of the NPNP is important as a regular aspect of the community's development and growth. Talking to individuals and the whole community regularly and in small ways avoids a conversation about it in a crisis situation. Having a clear understanding and set of related actions for how your NPNP will steward finances is not only good business practice, it is foundationally linked to your mission, your discipleship and your theology.

Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). This is not an obscure verse; in fact, how we steward money – including our possessions, economic practice, material and financial generosity – is a major theme in Scripture, right up there with love. We believe the two are connected.

So, from the very beginning of your NPNP, discuss prayerfully and confidently how financial generosity will be integrated publicly and clearly into your discipleship pathways and measures of fruitfulness. Instead of speaking of giving in general terms ("we will all give in different ways, and that's fine"), be explicit that financial generosity is part of discipleship – we offer our prayers, our presence, our financial gifts, our service and our witness. For increasingly committed disciples, it's not pick-and-choose.

Church at the Margins

NPNPs in economically marginalised communities will need to be sensitive to the potential limitations of financial resources in their communities. It will be important to encourage financial giving appropriate to the resources available. Considering the costs of activities will be an important aspect of community life to ensure they are accessible to everyone.

An attitude of gratitude

A helpful way to begin the discussion about money is to reflect on the seed missional funding the new NPNP has received from the district or circuit. This money is an investment to help you get started, but it's not a transaction. It's a gift, a sign of the abundance of God who is the source of everything good, and also a sharing in the faithfulness of those who have come before us – forebears whose financial sacrifices over the centuries mean that there is something now to provide for new things, new missional experiments.

At the beginning, praise God for this generosity, help the pioneering team to practise gratitude and reflect on what honouring and stewarding this gift might mean for your new community as you begin to establish discipleship rhythms. How might this generosity beget more generosity? How is financial generosity part of your mission and ministry? How is it connected to helping the kingdom of God come about? What is your understanding of fundraising and stewardship, and how will you practise that? How can you begin to take responsibility for your financial life in ways that expect sustainability but more than that, in ways that expect you to fund new things in the future?

Who can help?

Your pioneering team will need to learn to think and communicate clearly about finances in a way that people respond to. It is important to have as part of your team someone who can hold the day-to-day finances in perspective and help forecast the finance required for the future as the NPNP grows in reach and ministry.

Practising giving and stewardship

Consider the following in creating a culture of giving and responsible stewardship:

- How are you, as a leader in this community, modelling the spiritual discipline of giving? Could you practise tithing or move towards it?
- What does increasing faithfulness in financial generosity look like? Share testimony about the practise of giving and how your own commitment has been both a challenge and a gift. Never ask people to make a commitment that you're not willing to make yourself.
- How will you discuss finances in pioneering team meetings (and meetings with your line manager, coach, management/steering group)? How will financial matters be incorporated into your mission plan/strategy?
- How will you build a budget for your NPNP? How will your share it with others, so they can understand the finances? Your circuit treasurer will be able to offer support in this.
- How will you manage the day-to-day finances of the NPNP? You may need to open a current account. Your circuit or district treasurer will be able to offer support in this.
- How will finances be part of discipleship pathways? How can people learn about, practise, and share the joys and challenges of giving? Consider using a resource such as Holy Habits (holyhabits.org.uk), which includes a chapter on 'Sharing Resources'.
- How are you helping the NPNP understand its ongoing financial development in relation to the initial connexional funding? How are you stewarding the community's finances in a way that will make it possible for you to fund other NPNPs in the future?

Possible revenue streams

Funding can come from many places; consider the following:

- Ask community members to make prayerful, reflective, regular financial contributions to the NPNP as part of their discipleship.
- Make it easy to give. Carrying cash is becoming less and less common, so innovative ways such as contactless payments, text codes and online giving are popular ways to encourage one-off payments.
- Grow a supporter network. Explore creative conversations with people who are interested but not a part of the community. Perhaps local Christians or other churches who want to support your vision.
- 'Tent-making ministry' is slowly emerging as a way for NPNP leaders to fund their role. Leaders have paid employment of some other kind outside of the Church. They are not paid to lead the NPNP but instead volunteer their time for this. Are there skills and business opportunities that key leaders could develop?
- Becoming entrepreneurial is a way of developing an income stream for the NPNP. Could it be a product or service you sell? A shop or café? Is there a space in premises you own that could be rented?
- Applying for grants is a potential, if at times complicated, funding stream. There are Christian grant-giving organisations and other community-based funders who may support elements of your community's life. However, it is better to develop a culture of giving rather than depend on a culture of grant applications.

Further resources

Methodist Insurance guidance on fundraising: methodistinsurance.co.uk/church-fundraising

Helping church plants explore how to become financially sustainable: stewardship.org.uk/church-planting-pathway

Chapter 19 Circuit Funding Processes

When the District NPNP has been approved, and launched, the District initiates a process to discern where circuit NPNP communities are emerging.

Step One Discovering the vision, focus and context for new circuit NPNP communities is a partnership of prayerful discernment between the District and circuits. Ideally, this would include the District NPNP Team, mission enabler, or learning network staff and could occur in:

- District leadership team meetings
- District Superintendent gatherings
- Circuit leadership teams
- Gathering of all the circuit leadership teams for prayer and discernment
- District Representative Synod

Step Two Accompanying the development of a local vision is the core priority. This journey of support, prayer and discernment to design and prepare for a circuit-led NPNP community will take time (at least 6-12 months) and may include the testing of ideas and experimentation. We recommend the District NPNP Team (or its representative) meet the circuit NPNP team at least three times to design and prepare for their circuit-led NPNP.

Step Three The role of the District NPNP Team is to clarify which circuits have an emerging vision and meet the NPNP criteria of a new Christian community in a new place and would benefit from circuit NPNP funding. The NPNP eligibility criteria can be viewed at the end of this chapter or in the District NPNP Guide, p. 7.

Step Four The District NPNP Team identify how many circuit NPNPs are emerging and would benefit from the funding.

Step Five Determine which of the two funding models below, Model A or Model B, is appropriate for their context.

Funding Models

The Connexional Mission Committee has approved two funding models which have been developed by the Connexional NPNP team with input from District NPNP colleagues.

Model A: 1-3 (usually) circuit NPNP communities within the District

The Mission Committee receives and approves each circuit NPNP submission *agreed by the District process* prior to the releasing of funds. It is ideal for districts who have identified between one and three larger circuit NPNP communities which will draw upon the whole circuit funding allocation and whose submissions are ready to be received within the existing cycle (three meetings per connexional year) of the Mission Committee.

What is required:

- A District NPNP Team to support the initial process and offer on-going support, including a District appointed named NPNP lead (eg Mission Enabler or someone with equivalent skills).
- A District NPNP panel to scrutinise the circuit NPNP submission (at least three people who have expertise in pioneering and mission and have not been involved in the support process).

Location:

In single circuits or a combination of circuits.

Timescale:

NPNPs are either ready to begin immediately, or within the next 6-12 months.

Funding:

To be released on an annual basis as per the NPNP budgets.

Evaluation:

The ongoing releasing of funds is dependent on receiving an evaluation (after the first 6 months and then first 12 months onwards) of the circuit NPNP work.

Action

Each circuit NPNP completes their funding submission form and makes a presentation to a District NPNP panel to hear the project vision, ask questions, and offer feedback. The purpose of this is two-fold: to tell the story of the NPNP and to evidence how the eligibility criteria have been met.

Funding Submission Form

After the District group has agreed the circuit NPNP meets the criteria, the Funding Submission Form is signed by the Superintendent/District Chair and then submitted to the Connexional Funding Officer.

Connexional Funding Officer

The Funding Officer scrutinises and signs off each circuit NPNP submission before sending the documentation to the Mission Committee for approval.

Mission Committee

The Mission Committee receives and signs off each individual circuit NPNP community submission prior to the releasing of funds.

Model B: Multiple (usually more than 3) circuit NPNP communities; this could include extending/replicating the district NPNP.

The Mission Committee receives and approves the District's circuit NPNP oversight process, it does not approve the individual circuit NPNP submissions.

The role of the Mission Committee is to approve the District's circuit NPNP oversight process. This model offers greater flexibility as circuit submissions can be approved locally and (subject to final approval by the Funding Officer) offer a timely response. The model is ideal when multiple circuit NPNPs are anticipated, and likely to emerge during the next 12-18 months.

What is required:

- A District NPNP team to support the initial process and offer on-going support, including a District appointed named NPNP lead (eg Mission Enabler or someone with equivalent skills).
- A District resourced oversight process to assess each circuit NPNP community submission which is outlined (proforma to be made available) for approval to the Mission Committee.

Timescale:

Some projects are ready, and more time (12-18 months) is needed for others. As soon as the process has been approved by the Mission Committee the district can begin to approve its own circuit-based NPNP submissions.

Funding:

To be released on an annual basis as per NPNP budgets.

Evaluation:

The ongoing releasing of funds is dependent on receiving an evaluation (after the first 6 months and then first 12 months onwards) of the circuit NPNP work.

Following approval of the district oversight process

Action

Each circuit NPNP completes their circuit funding submission form and makes a presentation to the District oversight group (DPC, or its equivalent) to hear the NPNP vision, ask questions, and offer feedback. The purpose of this is three-fold: to tell the story of the NPNP, to evidence how the eligibility criteria have been met, and approve the submission.

Funding Officer

The Funding Officer scrutinises and signs off each circuit NPNP submission and then informs the Mission Committee that this has been done. In the event of the Funding Officer disagreeing with the decision of the District, the circuit NPNP submission will be sent to the Mission Committee for review (otherwise, the documentation is not shared with the Mission Committee).

Mission Committee

The Mission Committee receives and approves the District's circuit NPNP oversight process, rather than each circuit NPNP submission.

Here is an example of a circuit submission form: your District may have developed their own version of this form so please do check **methodist.org.uk/CircuitNPNPFunding**

Eligibility Criteria for Circuit NPNPs

Funds will be awarded to circuits that meet the following criteria.

An NPNP focused on one of these areas of opportunity:

- new towns or new housing developments
- student/young adult/university
- families with children
- replanting in an existing place or second site of a growing church
- Church at the Margins
- or another context where an NPNP vision has arisen.

The NPNP will be:

- a new community, not a relaunch of an established church or existing community.
- focused on intentional evangelism and discipleship, leading to significant numbers of new people exploring faith and becoming disciples.

The circuit will have:

- a good manager/overseer/coaching culture agreement and support from Circuit Leadership Team and Superintendent
- carried out substantial contextual and prayerful discernment about community needs and local church/circuit resources surrounding the NPNP
- a clear foundational gospel vision, including evidence of listening to God and prayer
- an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy; equality and inclusion of all people must be demonstrated as a core value of your NPNP. More information is available here methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/resources

- followed safeguarding best practice, as defined by the Conference. Conversation with the District/Safeguarding Officer required to advise on safeguarding risk assessment/policy and sign off.
- DPC/District Chair ownership, accountability, and endorsement
- clear and robust leadership appropriate to the context. clearly outlined roles and responsibilities of different parties; this will include:
  - a named line manager/management committee for the pioneer
  - a steering group for the NPNP.
- continuity plans in place where needed, to ensure the stability of an NPNP (eg planning for a change in the local superintendent, or for working with existing congregations)
- clear and realistic outcomes (fruit) that emphasise missional culture change. The plan must evidence a clear link between planned activities and outcomes.
- a six-monthly review process to enable the NPNP to remain agile and responsive
- for CAM communities – people with 'lived experience' from the community must have been involved in the design and development of the NPNP and its aims.