

Managing a new Development Project - Employing a Local Development Officer



0845 300 1818

Item Code FS185085 June/05 Edition no 1

Introduction

In addition to the professional staff based at Gilwell Park, the Field Development Officers and country staff involved with development, there has been a history of some local Areas/Counties and Districts employing Local Development Officers. On average, about 20 LDO's are employed at any one time across the UK.

This factsheet raises a number of issues that should be considered when planning a major development project and particularly one that involves the employment of a Local Development Officer (LDO).

Development

From the outset, it is very important that a development project has a clear and focussed purpose and that this is clear to all those involved. It is particularly important that the purpose of the project is made clear on any funding application. It should also be noted that for the Association the term "development" focuses upon the "recruitment and retention of members" delivered in a sustainable fashion.

It is also important to realise the in most cases development requires change if it is to be successful. The development project may challenge what individuals do, challenge long held beliefs about what is the "right" way of delivering and supporting Scouting as well as challenging the local culture.

Keys to success before starting

The ownership of the project by the key volunteers and others affected is critical. A project that does not have local support will never be successful.

The project must be integrated into the work of the District, Area or County and cannot afford to be seen as an isolated piece of work..

Projects must have a committed Project Management Team, made up of people who have the necessary skills and competencies. The team should ensure that local Scouting supports the project, ensure that the project remains focussed upon its objectives and provides support for any LDO. The continuity of the Project Management committee members also contributes significantly to the success of a project

If the project does employ an LDO, one member of the Management Team must be designated formally as their line manager. This person should be committed and clear about the aims of the project and must have the skills and experience necessary to manage a member of staff. The quality and experience of the line manager is critical.

Employing a Local Development Officer

Employing paid staff is a significant responsibility, and one not to be taken lightly. Staff need to be properly paid and managed, they need to have an appropriate place to work and all the appropriate systems need to be in place – it is not a easy option, nor is it a panacea that will cure all ills!.

Before starting, obtain a copy of the factsheet, Guidelines for Employing staff on a Development Project, FSxxxxx <http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/> Advice can also be sought from the Human Resources Department at Gilwell Park.

In most cases funding and therefore the LDO contract is time limited, often to no more than three years. Plans for the longer term need to be

considered, so that at the latest by the end of the first year, a long-term sustainability plan is available. It should not be the role of the LDO to identify funding for the continuation of the project, as this will detract them from the core work of developing Scouting.

It should be recognised that as with all short-term contracts, the LDO will not wish to find themselves without a job and so may leave half way through the final year of the project. This possibility should be considered by the Project Management team early on, with options identified to complete the work.

Issues during a development project

During the early days of a project the LDO will require a comprehensive induction as well as time to develop short-term objectives and work plans. Opportunities need to be built in for a new LDO to learn about Scouting and to build relationships with volunteers and others.

Easy, early wins are also an important element of induction. These wins (e.g. opening a new Section at an existing Group) will raise morale and show local Scouting that the project can make a difference.

This induction period can take up to 3 months of the first year. At the end of the induction period the line manager should undertake a formal review with the LDO identifying their success to date and any further training or development needs.

The Field Development Service can help to prepare an induction programme for new LDO's, including the opportunity for some practical experience perhaps on adult recruitment or development planning.

It is important that training and development opportunities for an LDO are planned and budgeted. Gilwell runs LDO meetings, usually three times a year. These meetings are an opportunity to share good practice and network with others undertaking a similar role as well as offering a training opportunity. Project Managers are invited to attend one of these meetings each

year, so that they too can share information and experiences.

Supervision and Management

New LDO's need frequent and regular meetings with their Project Manager – perhaps weekly, in order to stay on track and receive crucial support during the induction period. These supervision sessions can become less often, perhaps fortnightly or monthly once the project has become established. As with any adult in Scouting, providing good support makes an individual feel valued and they are more likely to stay and perform well.

Each project must have a clear work plan with regular project meetings reviewing progress against the plan and ensuring that the project stays on track. Reviewing the plan, recording outcomes and learning from successes and failures will assist in developing new methods of working and help plan for the future.

Formal reviews are also important, particularly where funders require reports on progress, however the notes of project meetings can feed into these more formal reports if a regular review of the work plan has been undertaken.

If things are not going well in the project it is important to let the funders know at an early stage. Funders will not want the project to fail and they are a useful source of advice and support. It is better to tell the funders quickly rather than disclose the difficulties in a formal report.

The Partnership

An important element of a development project, particularly where there is a paid employee, is that the work is carried out in partnership between the volunteers and the LDO. The long-term success of a project depends on volunteers sustaining the work after the LDO has moved on. Experience has shown that where the LDO works in isolation, the work often dies when they leave. This is a crucial element to the long-term sustainability of development work.

The Local Development Officer's Role

Each LDO tends to have a unique role, tailored to the needs and focus of the locality. There are however, some common attributes and easy wins, they all share.

- Adult recruitment is the most common role of the LDO, but it is not something that can be sustained by the LDO alone. Critically new volunteers need welcoming, support, induction and training provided by existing volunteers.
- It is often easier for a LDO to start new Scout Groups rather than prop-up struggling Scout Groups. New Groups are more measurable, clearer to make progress with and sustainable. Opening new Sections in existing Scout Groups is another successful technique.
- LDO's should and should be able to train local volunteers in the techniques of recruitment to ensure that growth is sustainable. Training in development techniques can provide sustainability for the future as volunteers carry on the work when the project ends.
- LDO's cannot and should not work on their own. They need networking to the wider community, working in partnership with other organisations and volunteers.
- Project Managers need to allow time for their LDO to network with other LDO's, FDO's and HQ teams. The benefit is that learning and good practice can be shared.

Measuring results and outcomes

Before the project starts a baseline measurement should be taken showing the state of the Groups, Districts and Area/County. During the project regular monitoring must take place, perhaps by using interim Census figures collected quarterly. This measurement can then be used to identify the overall position and to monitor the difference the project is making. This can help the project to prioritise the resources available and to identify

the successes. Measuring results is easier if the project is focussed and planned well from the beginning.

End of Project and Exit Strategy

Most projects run for 3 or 4 years, but some continue longer, adapting to meet changing needs. It is important that the LDO's job does not become one of fundraising and that development remains the focus. If additional funds are required, someone else should undertake this task.

It should be remembered that substantial funding can sometimes be identified by approaching a number of funders for small sums. Fundraising however is an ongoing issue and cannot be left to the final year of the project. In practical terms, it can take 9-12 months to raise the money necessary and the project management team should review the sustainability half way through the project. If it is identified that the project will not continue it may be necessary for the project to change focus in the final year by, for example, passing skills/roles onto volunteers.

For further information and advice about managing a development project, please contact:

The Development Team
The Scout Association
Programme & Development Department
Gilwell Park
Bury Road
Chingford
London
E4 7QW
Tel: 020 8433 7100
Email: development@scout.org.uk