

Getting Back on Track

A Route Map for Community Groups to assist them to acquire
Railway Assets



Funded by



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Such is the architectural heritage of Scotland's railway that a significant number of the buildings are listed. According to Historic Scotland's published 2009 register, there are 86 railway buildings registered as listed in Scotland with 14 being A listed, 57 B listed and 15 with a C (s) or the non-statutory C listing.

Listed building status and what it means

A - Buildings of national or international importance, either architectural or historic, or fine little-altered examples of some particular period, style or building type

B - Buildings of regional or more than local importance, or major examples of some particular period, style or building type which may have been altered

C (S) Buildings of local importance, lesser examples of any period, style, or building type, as originally constructed or moderately altered; and simple traditional buildings which group well with others in categories A and B.

Two additional categories existed until recently, Category C (non – statutory) and B for Group (statutory). These have now been phased out entirely.

What is a Railway Asset?

A railway asset can be any part of the railway network or infrastructure; however for the purposes of this report, we would consider railway assets to include:- platform waiting rooms, signal boxes and similar buildings which could potentially be used for other non railway related activities. We also recognise that there is a significant amount of railway land and outdoor space that could potentially be used by the community and while our route map does not expressly make reference to this, we acknowledge these spaces as assets and understand that there are funding supports such as the landfill tax credit scheme that could be utilised to create outdoor facilities on these spaces.

Many railway buildings are no longer used for the purpose for which they were built, although that does not mean that they aren't used at all; sometimes they are used by railway station staff and track maintenance teams to store equipment.

First Scotrail currently holds the franchise for the railway network in Scotland and as such has responsibility for the management and maintenance of the majority of railway assets in Scotland.

There are clear advantages for the railway operator in allowing community groups to take over railway assets:-

- Empty rooms are brought back into use
- Station buildings are often upgraded as a result
- Stations become more vibrant places from the activities that take place there
- The experience of the travelling public is enhanced

With these issues in mind, the “adopt a station” scheme, was introduced to encourage small businesses, charities and community groups to use vacant station buildings for activities that benefit passengers or the community.

In addition, a “one off” fund of £1m was initiated by Transport Scotland in 2009. SCRF (stations community regeneration fund) was put in place to help those groups adopting railway assets pay for structural works as well as revenue costs of project activities taking place. This final closing date for applications to this fund was 1st February 2010.

About the Route Map

Forward Scotland has produced a route map of the process involved in adopting a railway station asset to try to help community groups and other organisations who might be considering that kind of activity. While it has been produced primarily with railway assets in mind, it can, for the most part, be applied to almost any process of asset adoption or acquisition. By using the route map, we hope to help groups avoid some of the pitfalls that can delay or even prevent asset adoption and which can cost groups valuable time and, in some cases, money.

In designing the route map, we have taken care to highlight as many processes and scenarios as we can. We aren't suggesting that all groups will go through the same processes or that they will have to complete all the tasks highlighted. Groups with simple or small scale plans will move through the process much quicker than those with large scale developments in mind and users of the route map should make up their own minds about which processes apply to them. On a similar note, we recognise that there are some processes that aren't included in the map. We fully intend to keep the route map as up-to-date as possible and would welcome any feedback on things that are missing or in areas where we could generally improve.

Using the map

The route map has been set out using a standard set of process flow symbols, although we have in some cases modified the way they are used in order to represent the route map in a way that is as simple to follow as possible. Users should note what the symbols refer to before reading the map

Green Boxes - These represent milestones and, with a few exceptions, will appear at the top of the map

Yellow Curved boxes – These represent actions that might have to be taken at a particular stage in the process

Orange Curved boxes – These contain suggestions and tips as well as things that might need to be considered within each stage of a process

Triangles – These represent times when a decision needs to be taken on whether to carry on or abandon the proposals. These only appear in the first half of the route map, which is concerned with the early stages, when a group's main focus is on determining whether the proposal is right for them.

Red symbols – These are exit points in the process. Users of the route map will notice that most of these appear again within the first half of the route map, during the initial and formal scoping stages.

Blue symbols – these represent documents, contracts and reports that may need to be issued or produced.

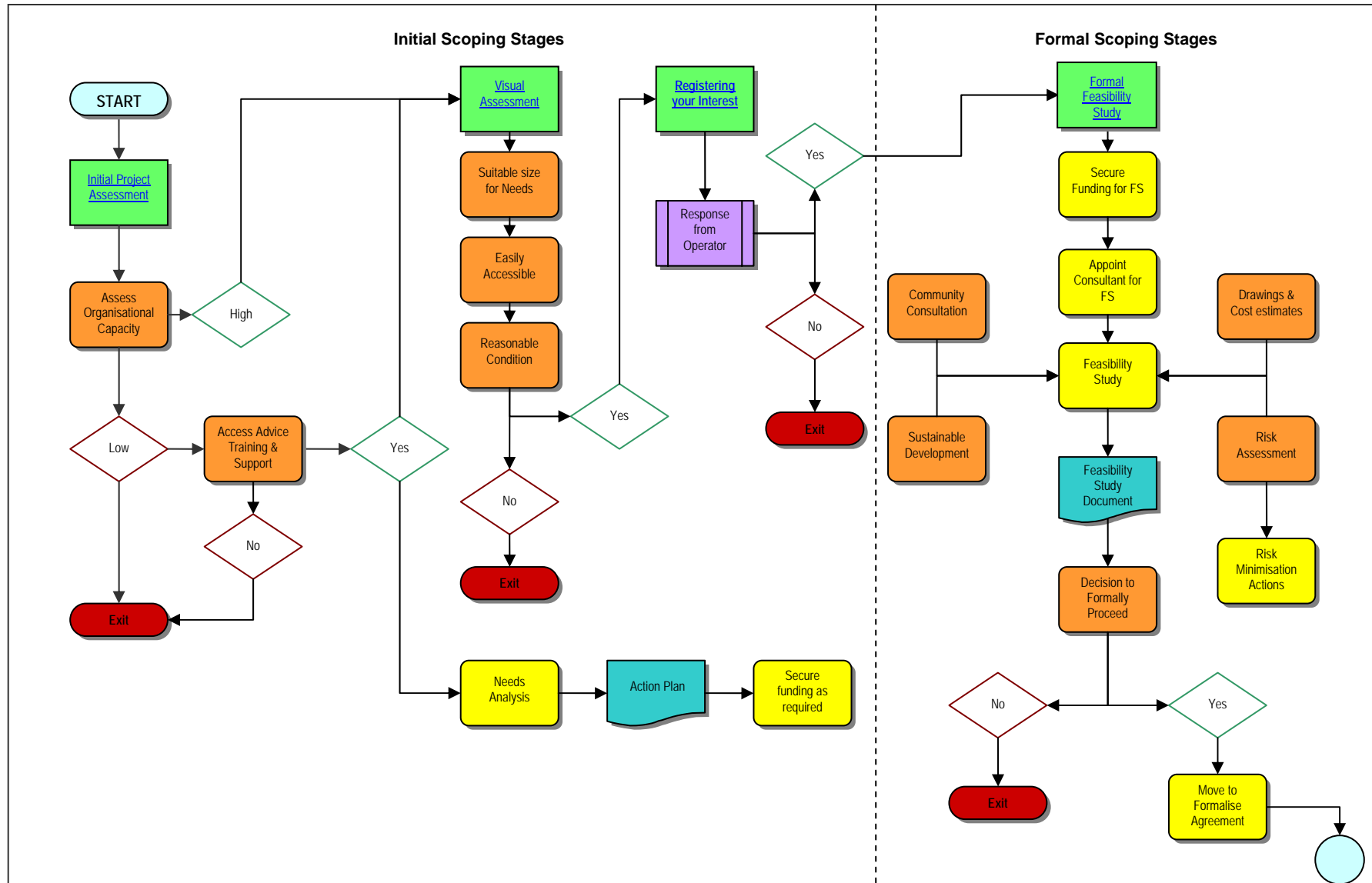
Purple symbols – represent a part of the process where the railway operator initiates their own internal procedures towards tri-partite agreement.

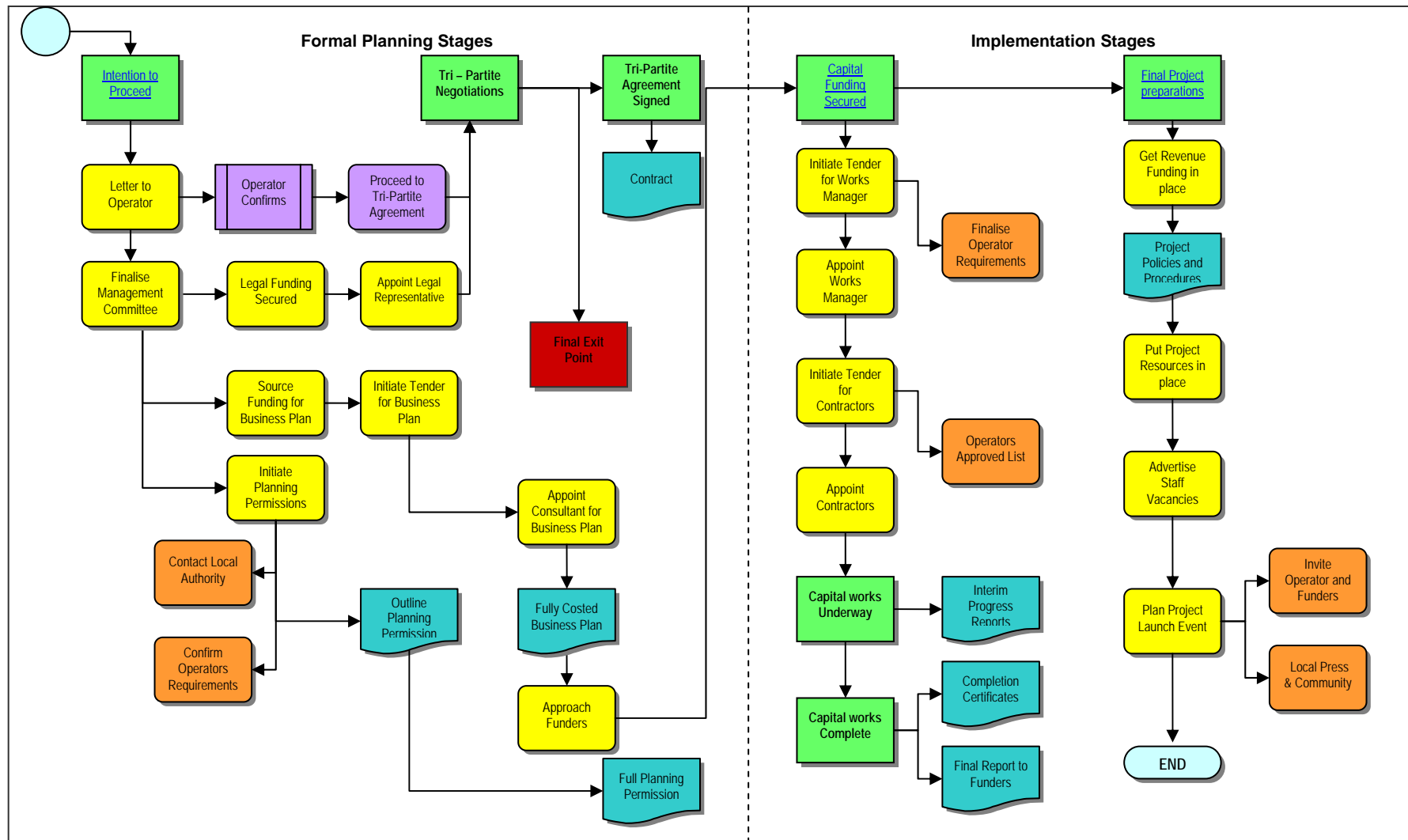
Arrows – indicate the direction in which a process will move.

We have designed the report so that by clicking on the green boxes at the top of the route map, users can be directed to more detailed information that is relevant to that part of the process. This will also, where applicable contain links to websites, case studies etc.

We hope you find the route map useful and we welcome any comments or information that you would like to see added.

Forward Scotland, February 2010





Initial Project Assessment

There are many reasons why groups become interested in taking on railway station buildings: -

- The group has activities linked or related to the railways, transport or heritage, for example railway enthusiasts or local history groups. Having premises within a railway station may seem like good synergy.
- The group has goods or services to promote or sell. The appeal there is that passenger footfall within the station will increase their customer or client base.
- The group has no premises of their own. In this case, the appeal might simply be that the buildings are vacant, suitable for their needs and/or centrally placed within the town.

Whatever the reasons behind a group wanting to adopt railway assets, it is vital that the group understands the process involved and can judge whether they will need training and/or support to carry their plans out.

If you are one of those groups interested in taking on railway assets, begin the process by asking yourself some initial questions:-

What level of experience do you have for this kind of activity?

Few groups entering into the process of acquiring community assets will have done it before, but they may have experience in similar types of activities such as carrying out refurbishments, being involved in capital works projects, putting together large funding applications etc and therefore are likely to be in reasonably familiar territory.

Is your committee strong enough to be able to take on the level of commitment required?

Often committees are made up of a core group who have been involved in their group for years and others who come and go depending on changes in their own circumstances and commitments. Acquiring community assets is a process that rarely happens quickly and never without a considerable level of commitment and activity. In addition, the activity will put your group under pressure at some point so it's worth initially weighing up the benefits against the hassle and its effect on your group. The common attributes of community groups who have successfully been involved include – tenacity, dogged determination, drive, enthusiasm, patience, spite, humour, energy. There is always a certain amount of ignorance and naivety as well which appears to be rectified quite early on.

Does your group have the necessary skills to carry this activity forward?

Skills that are commonly used in this type of activity are:-

- Administration, Finance and computing
- Negotiation and Diplomacy
- Visioning, creativity and planning
- Legal skills

- Networking skills
- Project management
- Form Filling
- Report Writing

Its worth doing a short audit of the skills within your committee members, workers and volunteers to assess what skills gaps you have at the outset.

Remember that even if you have a low capacity, it's still possible to go ahead, if you can access support for suitable agencies to help you move through the process.

Support Agencies

In England, there is a support agency for community groups, public sector organisations and private businesses wanting to acquire railway station buildings. The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP) is a not-for-profit association, representing more than 60 groups. As well as providing advice and guidance on how to acquire railway assets, the association also campaigns for improved facilities at stations and better and more integrated railway services. ACORP is a member only association, so any assistance would be made on that basis. In addition, the association works mainly with rail partnerships in England. However, the association publishes a wide range of materials on their website, including case studies and best practice policy documents. The association has also produced a toolkit for anyone with an interest in adopting a station. The toolkit can be downloaded from the [ACORP](#) website.

At present there is no equivalent of ACORP north of the border but there are a large number of organisations in Scotland who can provide assistance with specific issues as they arise.

[Historic Scotland](#) provides information on listed buildings, conservation as well as grant funding.

Local Authorities can provide a wealth of assistance and advice through their various departments including:- planning, conservation, regeneration, community development.

[SCVO](#) and your local CVS can provide training and support for volunteers

A word on Consortia

If appropriate, you might also want to consider forming a consortium as a way of overcoming any shortages in skills and/or experience. A note of caution on this however, is to make sure everyone within the consortium is aware of their roles and responsibilities. Draw up a consortium or partnership agreement at the outset and nominate a lead partner to liaise with the railway operator. You might also want to consider a single bank account for receiving funds and paying bills.

Finally, skills gaps can always be overcome through training. If you have skills gaps, draw up a list of training courses that you might need to take and agree who in your group should take them. Finally, remember that most training courses for community groups can be funded through grants.

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Visual Assessment

Here are some of the things you should be looking out for when viewing railway assets for the first time

Size of the space – is it big enough to accommodate future growth of your project or organisation?

Take a measuring tape and size up the space available. Take notes of any walls that could be taken down, ceilings that could be opened up and any fixed appliances that might be removed.

What features does the space have?

Many railway assets have features of architectural significance and even if the building isn't listed, it can make a difference to funders if there is a willingness to preserve and restore. Record the condition of windows, e.g. glazing level, where they look out to, condition of sashes etc. Also look for features such as unusual cornicing or fire places and note their condition.

What type of platform (if applicable) is the space situated on?

For health and safety reasons, Island platforms aren't particularly suitable as premises for community based activities. Similarly the width of station platforms can vary so it's wise to consider how this might affect your activities.

Does the space have electrics, heat, running water and is it wind and water tight?

These are important considerations when estimating the level of cost to get the space up to useable standards.

Are there any access restrictions at the station e.g. locked gates at certain times and would a disabled person find it easy to get to the space?

In general, if there are access issues that can't be resolved, the space is not suitable.

What level of work is likely to take place to make the space suitable for your needs and how would this affect the station staff?

Most station personnel would be more than happy to accommodate upgrading work taking place, but you need to gauge their expectations early on and remember that the station is their responsibility. Therefore forging good relationships with station staff is vital from the outset.

What are the main railway rules and restrictions in place and how will this affect your group or project?

The rail industry has rules for passengers, staff and other people carrying out work and other activities within their stations. These will be thoroughly explained by railway operator staff.

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Registering your Interest

The [First Scotrail](#) website has a section on its “adopt a station” scheme.

Interested groups are asked to complete a short form which is then submitted for consideration. If you haven't been able to get in to see the space you're interested in adopting beforehand, you may find it difficult to answer some of the questions asked, but the main focus at this stage is simply to let the railway operator know that you are interested in the station space.

The railway operator is likely to come back with a decision within a short space of time.

Unfortunately, there is no published list of vacant railway assets in Scotland and while some stations might appear to have ample empty spaces, this might not necessarily be the case. Often, rooms that were once public now lay closed off to the public, although that doesn't mean they aren't being used. For example, they may be used for storing things such as salt, to keep platforms safe in cold weather, or to store engineering equipment involved in track maintenance.

Remember that even if the operator indicates willingness for you to use the railway space, you have no binding agreement with them until the lease is signed. This is important to note if you carry out any feasibility work prior to the signing of the lease as it is unwise to fund this work with your groups own money.

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Formal Feasibility Study

The purpose of carrying out a feasibility study is to identify how suitable the space is for your needs and to ascertain the level and cost of any work that needs carrying out.

Feasibility studies should also clarify any “listed” status that the building might have and explain what the implication of this are. As well as providing your group with a set of drawings and cost estimates, a feasibility study should examine the level of risk involved in carrying out the work and specify the risk reduction measures that need to be taken.

A feasibility study is not normally something a community group can carry out internally and therefore you will probably have to appoint a specialist to do it for you which of course will incur a cost to your group. Do *not* fund from your groups own funds. Instead apply for a grant. The funders below are a sample of those who provide funding for feasibility studies. Always check your eligibility before applying.

- [Awards for All](#)
- [Scottish Community Foundation](#)
- Railway Heritage Trust
- [Heritage Lottery](#)

If possible, your feasibility study should include a level of community consultation. This might entail a workshop or simply a door to door survey, depending on what you

intend to do at the premises. Follow this link to see a video of a railway station consultation exercise carried out by Angus Transport Forum [Arbroath Station Feasibility Consultation Video](#)

The feasibility study is also the time to explore areas where your group can explore ways to make the space more environmentally sustainable as this can reduce your groups maintenance and running costs in the future. Things to consider might include:-

Capital Works

- Sourcing local materials and labour
- Sourcing materials that are environmentally friendly
- Re-using materials where possible
- Installation of energy efficient heating and lighting systems
- Wall and window insulation
- Outdoor “green” areas
- Use of water saving devices

A final note on commissioned studies

It is recommended that any group commissioning feasibility studies of any kind should take steps to ensure that the contents of the study remain the property of the group and are that contents are not used by others without your permission. A statement to that effect within the publication is usually sufficient.

Once you have considered the contents of the feasibility study, you are then in the best position to decide whether or not to go ahead with the proposals.

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Intention to Proceed

If you have decided that your group wants to go ahead with their plans, you should inform the operator as soon as possible through a letter of intention. You must then wait for the operator to reply with confirmation that they are in agreement for you to go ahead.

The operator will then initiate the necessary steps towards a tri-partite agreement. A tri-partite agreement is put in place between your group, the operator (who holds the railway franchise) and Network Rail (who own all railway assets). This agreement sets out the length of your lease, period of notice, rental arrangements, sub-leasing arrangements, etc. There should be a period of negotiation where you should try to get the best arrangements for your group in place. It is advisable that you appoint legal representation to advise you during this period. As with the feasibility study, you should try to secure grant funding for this exercise. It is not advisable to fund this from your groups own income.

It is important that once you have received confirmation from the operator to proceed, you should organise your committee to oversee the work that will be involved in getting the community space and your project up and running.

The number of sub-groups and committees very much depends on the size of your group and the scale of the work to be done. Suggested subgroups might include:-

A subgroup to oversee the tri-partite negotiations. This group will be responsible for

- securing funding for legal representation
- appointing legal representatives
- ensuring that the best interests of the group are represented during the negotiations
- liaising with parties involved in the negotiations including the railway operator and network rail as and when required

A subgroup to secure a business plan. This group will be responsible for

- sourcing funds for the business plan
- initiating a tender and appointing consultants to complete the business plan
- ensuring that the business plan covers all costs
- approaching funders with the business plan

A subgroup to oversee the permissions that will be required to carry out the work. They will be responsible for

- final checking of building listings
- initiating planning permission applications
- liaising with local authority planning department
- liaising with railway operator

It is advisable to have outline planning permission before approaching funders and certainly full planning permission would be required before funding is fully approved.

A subgroup to secure funding. They will be responsible for

- Making funding applications
- Liaising with funders

5 Tips when making funding applications

- Most funders are happy for you to include volunteer time as an in-kind contribution, so if possible try to cost this
- Make sure all of your costs are covered and include some contingency funding
- Be realistic about the timescales for your project
- Your group isn't likely to be VAT registered so remember to add this onto your costs
- Make sure you can describe your project in 2 sentences

Some Funders

- Local authorities
- Architectural Heritage Fund
- Railway Heritage Trust
- CARES (if any renewable energy involved)
- Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

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Capital Funding Secured

You should issue a tender for and appoint a capital works manager who will oversee the work.

You should have finalised any specific railway operators requirements by this stage for restrictions and rules when carrying out work on railway premises, but make sure that your capital works manager is experienced and knowledgeable on railway restrictions and rules. You will also need to initiate a tender for and appoint contractors and your capital works manager will lead on this. The railway operator may have a list of contractors approved to carry out works on railway premises, so you should consult with them on this.

Once capital works are underway, you may be required to produce an interim progress report for your funders, so make sure that you are kept fully up-to-date with work progress, costs etc. Once capital works are complete, you will be required to get completion certificates from the planning department. You will also be required to submit a final project report to your funder with all documentation and costs.

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Final Project preparations

If you require revenue funding for your project and have not already secured it, you should take steps to secure it now.

In preparation for your project at your new premises, you should finalise all the policies and procedures that you may need. It is a good idea to consider:-

- Sustainable development policy
- Volunteer policy
- Staff policies and procedures if you will have staff
- Health and safety policies

Make sure that everyone associated with your project sees and understands your policies.

In addition, you should now begin to put your resources in place including:-

- Public and employer liability insurance
- Staff if applicable and volunteers, undertaking any necessary training and induction procedures
- Equipment such as telephones, computers, software etc
- Moveable equipment – tables, chairs, exhibition equipment

Notes if you have a launch event

- Remember to invite, operator, network rail, local authority representatives, funders and community
- Invite the local press and media. If they are not available compile a media brief, take photographs or video of the event and send these to press.

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