

## What is delivering on time and on budget about?

Social enterprises are just like any other company - once you have signed a contract or made an agreement, you are expected to deliver the products or services on time and for the price that you agreed with your customer. You shouldn't start a new piece of work without having some idea of whether you can deliver on time and on budget. This involves planning adequately to ensure that you know what resources will be required to delivery successfully. Thankfully, there are a number of things that can be done before and after you start delivering your projects and contracts to help you manage time, budgets and resources more effectively.

## Why is delivering on time and on budget important?

Many new social enterprises are so focused on getting their first projects off the ground that they are willing to work on reduced budgets or with limited resources. But trying to deliver when you don't have the necessary time or resources is quite risky, especially during the initial stages. It can affect the quality of your products and services, stress your team and even damage your reputation. Delivering with delays or providing unsatisfactory services could also lead to a loss of goodwill from your customers and cost you future business opportunities. Remember that recommendations are very important and potential clients will often ask you for referees. In addition, by not delivering the standards that you agreed to, you may be breaking a contract or binding agreement with your customers.

On the other hand, if you can deliver quality products and services on time and on budget, you will strengthen your reputation, professionalism and business credentials. Being able to show a strong track record and demonstrate your ability to work to contractual obligations will help you when bidding for public and private sector contracts. Being able to plan and manage your projects, resources and operations will also help you control costs, quality and even the social and environmental impact of your products and services. This will ensure that your team, your customers and your beneficiaries are happy to recommend you.

## How does delivering on time and on budget work?

There are some general points to think about when planning and managing the delivery of your products and services. There are also some specific tools and techniques that you may find useful if your time or resources are limited.

Firstly, within the context of planning your business or writing your business plan, think about:

- **Capability:** do you have the right skills and experience within your organisation to deliver your products and services?
- **Capacity:** do you have suitable and sufficient staff, equipment and space (i.e. resources) in place to deliver your products and services?
- **Quality:** do you have processes and systems in place to make sure you deliver quality products and services that are fit for purpose? (i.e. accreditations, quality standards, etc).

### Time and Resources

Plans rarely materialise to perfection and even the best managers have to deal with unpredictable issues such as suppliers not delivering on time, key team members getting ill, trains being delayed, equipment breaking down, etc. However, if you plan adequately, you are much more likely to deliver on time and on budget.

Planning will enable you to identify the resources and budget needed realistically before you start a project. You will then be able to manage time, money and other resources more effectively during your

delivery. You should also make sure you are not forgetting anything that may end up costing you further down the road.

You can use some practical planning tools to help you estimate how much time and resources will be needed at each stage of the process and how much these will cost. It will also enable you to schedule activities in a way that maximises the use of your time and resources. Planning a project or the delivery of a contract using practical project management tools will also help you to become aware of what needs to be done and in which order. It will also enable you and your team to have a clear awareness of milestones or steps that must be accomplished.

Here are some examples of useful tools:

- **Project Plan:** this is a document outlining your goals, what needs to be delivered, schedules and other information around communications, human resources and risks involved.
- **Bespoke excel spreadsheets:** these can be tailored to your needs in a practical and effective way.
- **Gantt charts:** these are bar charts that are used to illustrate a project schedule.
- **Work-breakdown structure:** this is a results-oriented family tree that captures all the work of a project in a structured way.
- **Prince2:** this is a widely used method to manage projects which many social enterprises use to organise, manage and control the delivery of their products and services.
- **PQASSO:** a self-assessment tool and quality assurance system that can assist with planning, budgeting and allocating necessary resources.

## What you can do

Time is limited. You cannot buy any more time, but there are a few things you can do to manage your time better:

- Save time by planning well.
- During planning, factor-in time for contingencies after each stage of your delivery process to ensure that if delays occur they do not automatically affect your deadlines.
- Ensure that you are clear with your suppliers, contractors and partners about what your timelines are – follow up before deadlines to check on progress (see our guide on Understanding and managing your suppliers for further information).
- Set out internal deadlines that are sufficiently ahead of the external deadlines to allow for quality checks.
- Involve your team in defining and negotiating the planning process. Get people committed to the same goal and working towards achieving overall results rather than individual objectives.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Make sure that communication lines remain open and that issues or delays are addressed sooner rather than later.
- Choose who leads the project carefully and use the right skills where they are most needed.
- If despite all your best efforts, you think you will not meet a deadline, speak to your customer and negotiate more time to deliver. It is always best to keep your customers informed about progress and let them know (where possible) why there are delays and how you plan to address them.
- In some cases, delays and difficulties are caused by customers changing their minds or shifting the goal posts. This should also be discussed, and new deadlines and budgets should be allocated.

Resources, which can include people, money, skills and equipment, are also limited – but you can usually find ways to access more if needed:

- Lease additional equipment or space and hire agency staff or contractors.
- If your enterprise hasn't got the cash flow to pay for additional resources try to borrow or exchange resources.
- Depending on your relationship with your suppliers, you may be able to ask for additional resources and negotiate payment terms that are more achievable (see our guide on Understanding and managing your suppliers for further information).
- Recruit volunteers and interns wisely to help you deal with the volume of work.

- Work in partnership by involving other people or organisations to increase your capacity and access their resources. It may be that this will have a financial cost but in most cases it is better than failing to deliver (see our guide on Collaborations and partnerships for further details).
- Carry out some research on the government programmes, grants and support available to social enterprises and sign up to newsletters from third sector and public bodies. You may be able to access free or subsidised IT equipment, resources and even staff (e.g. the Future Jobs Fund).

## Quality

There are many measures of quality, such as how well the benefits of your products and services meet your customers or beneficiaries' needs, how satisfied your customers are, or how much extra value for money you provide. For social enterprises this is also likely to include aspects of your social and/or environmental impact.

When planning and delivering, remember that the quality of your staff, operations and processes will have a direct impact on the quality of your products and services. Working with limited time or resources doesn't mean you should neglect or reduce quality because this will affect your customer satisfaction. This can be particularly damaging if you are a social enterprise working directly with beneficiaries. See our guide on working with quality standards for tips to help you improve and maintain quality.

## Things to look out for with delivering on time and on budget

If you are starting up and preparing to deliver your first products or services, make sure that you are ready to begin running your business before committing to any contracts or customers.

Look out for a few simple things, including:

- **Specific legal or industry requirements.** Your enterprise may need to have certain licenses, registrations or policies in place before you start trading. See our guide on Ensuring your enterprise complies with legal requirements for further information.
- **Access to resources** (people, space, equipment, etc) and the capacity to deliver (time, skills, etc). Try to address any potential shortcomings before they become an issue.
- **Lack of preparation.** The best way to address this is to test yourself and your enterprise with a project carrying little risk before committing to real customers. For example, if you are an event management company or caterer, try running a test event. If you are delivering services, you could run a pilot programme with a small number of customers or beneficiaries. This is also a great way to generate a track record and get direct feedback on how well you delivered.

If you are an existing social enterprise, you will need to think about how you are going to grow, and you need to be able to determine when you need extra capacity to deliver your products or services. See our guide on Growth, replication and franchising for ways to scale up your business, and our guide on Funding and finance for social enterprise for ways to access money to help you grow or expand.

Finally, do not consistently under-budget your projects or services when applying for funding or bidding for contracts because it will harm your growth in the long-term.

## Further information

Visit the Association for Project Management website:

[www.apm.org.uk](http://www.apm.org.uk)

PQASSO (a Charities Evaluation Services tool) - a self-assessment tool and quality assurance system:

[www.ces-vol.org.uk/](http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/)

Prince 2 – Project management and training resource:

[www.prince2.com](http://www.prince2.com)

**Project Smart is a project management resource that helps managers at all levels to improve their performance:**

[www.projectsmart.co.uk](http://www.projectsmart.co.uk)

**Read our guide on Funding and finance:**

[www.blondon.com/Enable/Financeandfunding/Financeandfunding.aspx](http://www.blondon.com/Enable/Financeandfunding/Financeandfunding.aspx)

**Read our guide on Growing your enterprise:**

[www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Strategy/Developyoureenterprise/Growingyoureenterprise.aspx](http://www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Strategy/Developyoureenterprise/Growingyoureenterprise.aspx)

**Read our guide on Partnerships and collaborations:**

[www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Planning/Collaborationsandpartnerships.aspx](http://www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Planning/Collaborationsandpartnerships.aspx)

**Read our guide on Understanding and managing your suppliers:**

[www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Planning/Understandingandmanagingsuppliers.aspx](http://www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Planning/Understandingandmanagingsuppliers.aspx)

**Read our guide on Ensuring your enterprise complies with legal requirements:**

[www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Compliance/Complyingwithlegalrequirements.aspx](http://www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Compliance/Complyingwithlegalrequirements.aspx)

**Read our guide on Working with quality standards:**

[www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Compliance/Workingwithqualitystandards.aspx](http://www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Compliance/Workingwithqualitystandards.aspx)