

Managing Community Buildings

Basic advice from the Community Technical Aid Centre

The aim of this help-sheet is for you to consider what is involved in managing your building, and look at the common issues that many community groups face in setting up or running a building.

It does this through helping you to:

- Understand some common mistakes in building management
- Learn how to be prepared for problems
- Evaluate how well you are doing, or what plans to put in place
- Consider looking for support

You may already be managing a building.

We are assuming that you already have a building and want to improve how it is managed. Then you will probably already have some idea of the problems you can face. The questions below will help you put together a plan to address them.

Or maybe you are hoping to acquire or occupy a building.

Even if you do not already manage a building or premises this exercise should help you understand what might be involved, so stay with us!!

This helpsheet is split into 5 sections:

1. Some self assessment questions
2. Building care and maintenance
3. People within a community building
4. Budgeting, money and insurance
5. Legal responsibilities

Each section asks you to rate the importance of an issue to you, based on your experience or knowledge, and then asks you to suggest what you need to do, and when. It may be useful to read right to the end of each section before entering any information. Then you can complete the next section.



Section 1: Self assessment

Before you begin the actual work of improving the management of your building, you need to start to think about what you are already doing.

To get you started,

Please enter the name and the location of your building in the boxes below.

What your main purpose is, and why do you run your own building

If you do not have a building but plan to run one in the future you could put information about the type of building you want to take over and who it will serve.

Rate yourself:

In the boxes enter one of the three possible answers

We keep a strict record of everyone who enters or leaves the building

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

We are adequately insured for every eventuality

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

I know who owns our building

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

Everyone who uses the building also knows who owns it

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

We have a regular maintenance plan, and regularly re-decorate our building

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

Our building is fully accessible, or we know what is needed to improve access

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

We recently did a risk assessment for health and safety reasons

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".

We are a registered charity, and our constitution is correct and up to date.

"Yes" "No" "Don't know".



How did you do?

If you are responsible for managing a building you should have been able to say "Yes" to all the questions. In fact, every member of your management committee should be able to answer yes to all of them confidently.

At worst you should have put "I don't know".

But not knowing is not really good enough if you are responsible for managing a community building. Community buildings are often being used by very vulnerable people and you need to keep them safe.

If you answered No to any of the questions then you definitely need to look at your management issues further. Managers of a building have a responsibility to ensure it is a safe place and must fulfil their legal obligations.

Common pitfalls in managing community buildings can include:

- Essential maintenance is forgotten
- 'Assumed' or long term funding dries up
- Staff and volunteer problems
- Poor communication between management and users
- Legal responsibilities are ignored

Why you need to think about your management responsibilities

To make managing your building easier

To be prepared for a crisis or a change

To be sure enough resources are in place

To improve the services you provide

You have a legal duty as managers to provide a safe building

It is impossible to always get it right, but being prepared can help you avoid the worst mistakes.

Use the box below to write down the top three things you feel you need to do urgently and who needs to be involved to ensure they are done.

On the following pages we will look at some common issues in more detail.



Section 2: Building care and maintenance

No building will look after itself.

Just like your own home, if you don't look after your community building it will begin to look shabby, and cost you more and more money to look after. The cost of repairs resulting from a leaking roof that has been neglected for a little while will be much greater than if it is put right straight away. The old saying, "a stitch in time saves nine" is something you should keep in mind.

The problem is that unless you know who is responsible for doing something generally doesn't get done. (If you don't know, don't be embarrassed to admit it -- just say so. Ignoring a problem won't make it go away)

In the boxes below describe:

Who has the responsibility for doing minor repairs to the inside of the building?

Who is responsible for doing repairs to the outside of the building?

Whose job is it to report problems and check that repairs are carried out?

Are repairs being done as soon as they are needed?

If repairs are not being done promptly, you could comment on why this is happening?

The key to maintaining your building is to plan ahead.

Here are some things you should do to plan ahead.

Do you have a written maintenance plan,



A maintenance plan describes how the building is to be looked after, and when to check for faults. If you don't have one already you should prepare a 'maintenance plan, and make sure you use it. Remember, "a stitch in time, saves nine".

Do you have a breakages or fault reporting system for users of the building, and are users encouraged to use it?

Do you maintain a list of outstanding repairs to be completed, and do you monitor and update it regularly?

Proposal for action on your buildings maintenance:

In the box below write down your "proposal for action" towards ensuring you do regular maintenance:

Buildings should have a regular condition 'health check'.

For example, churches and schools are normally checked at least every five years. A professional should do this health check, and this should be done through a condition survey or audit:

- Whenever you buy, agree a lease or take over the management of a building
- Every few years, to ensure any new problems are spotted and maintenance is up to date
- When you sell, or give up the lease, on a building.

Proposal for action on building condition:

In the box below write down when your building last had a condition survey.

In the box below write down when you next need to do a condition survey.

Do you undertake regular safety checks



Buildings also need to have their essential services checked annually for safety. This includes heating, gas and electric equipment, but may involved play equipment or other potentially dangerous facilities that users and staff have access to:

Buildings should look clean and be kept well decorated:

If your building looks run down the people using it are less likely to take care of it. You should try to keep it clean and re-decorate as often as you can afford to do so. To reduce the cost of doing re-decoration you could 'do it yourself'. Or you could try to save money on where you get your materials. But don't assume you can do it 'on the cheap'. Sometimes the quality of work that volunteers can do is not as good as you would need, and it can be a false economy to try to do it yourself.

When did you last redecorate communal areas such as entrances and corridors?

How often do you check for and remove graffiti, or repair vandalism to the building?

Do you employ a cleaner, do they have a cleaning rota, and are you happy about the cleanliness of your building?

Proposal for action:

In the box below write down your "proposal for action" on decoration and general building appearance

Preparing for an emergency

If you need people to fix something in your building it can be hard to find qualified people, especially in an emergency. You need to be prepared and have ready a list of reputable companies you can call on.



Do you hold a list of who to call in an emergency? Is this list available to staff and users who need it?

Do you have a system for ordering repairs, and do you know which are emergencies and which can wait?

Proposal for action:

In the box below write down your “proposal for action” on preparing an approved contractors list:

Your maintenance and building management priorities:

In the last few pages we have talked about

- Internal and external repairs
- The need to be quick when reporting problems
- The value in planning ahead, and to make a maintenance plan
- The need for a condition survey and when to do this
- The importance of having a clean building, and to do regular re-decoration
- Having a list of building contractors ready to do work for you.

But you may know of others issues that concern you.

Things like the lack of storage, inadequate heating systems, the quality of the land that surrounds your building, dangerous or broken furniture. There are many things that you could be concerned about.

When providing and maintaining a safe, pleasant and affordable building, the key issues is to know

- Who should have a responsibilities to care for the building,
- That they have the knowledge and resources to do their job well,
- That you can check that what should be happening does happen, on time, and is done to the right quality.

Use the box below to write down the top three things you feel you need to do urgently in terms of your building maintenance and who needs to be involved to ensure they are done.



Section 3: People are more important than buildings

Being a manager of a building is also about becoming a successful employer.

Every building depends on regular tasks being done, simply to keep it open. You can spend as much as you like on looking after your building but you still need some-one to unlock it in the morning and clean up at the end of each day. Keeping your building open depends on you knowing somebody is doing these tasks.

Even if your building relies on volunteers, they still need good support and management, just like paid staff. Maybe more so because they are not being paid to put up with poor working conditions.

This means managing a building is also about ensuring people important to the building feel valued and so do not leave at short notice, forcing the building to close or run less well than it could.

Use the boxes below to record:

The number of full and part time staff in your building.

The number of volunteers you use and what they do.

The number of people who might use your building in any one week.

The number and types of vulnerable users of your building (examples might be children, adults with special needs, the elderly, homeless people and so forth.)

Managing staff and volunteers is a very big topic in itself

Well beyond the scope of this session, so we will have to only give the most basic look at managing people. The best we could hope is to point out some things you need to be aware of.

Some of the most important things to ensure is:

Are employment policies and practises kept up to date?



Do you have a complaints and grievance resolution policy? (so you know how you will respond to conflicts before they happen?)

Do you offer regular supervision sessions for staff and volunteers?

Do you offer praise and celebrate your successes, to keep people feeling valued?

Think about job cover and training for essential tasks:

If you rely on only one person to do an essential task, and they are not available, you could find the building is closed. One way to avoid this is to know that every essential task has at least two people who are trained, ready and able to step in.

Use the box below to list key tasks you might need to provide cover for in case of staffing emergencies, and what you are doing to ensure people who are covering for others know what to do?

Communication lies at the root of many building management problems.

If people feel they don't have information they should they can get very upset. For example, if you fail to publicise management or users group meetings well ahead, you can't complain if people fail to come to them. Ignorance and poor communication can cause real problems. There are a whole range of tools, like your incident reporting book, that can improve communication.

Below you can record whether, and how, you use a range of common communication tools within your building.

As before, you can put as little or as much information as you want. Indicate what you could do if there is a problem.

Are notice-boards well maintained? (Displaying relevant and useful information, and whose job is it to keep notice boards up to date)



Are there good information signs for users? (Saying when the building is open, who to contact to report complaints or accidents, who to ask to hire the building, or how to ask for other information?)

Do you publish notices of meetings well ahead? (Are you sure these go to the right people?)

Does every group using the building get good information when they book to use the building? (This describes their responsibilities in regard to health and safety, cleaning up, storage of equipment, insurance cover, and who to contact in an emergency.)

Do staff, volunteers and management committee members have a building handbook? (That gives them the added information they need.)

Managing people and buildings requires you keeping good records:

- Get people to record what they do, through using timesheets
- Use a log book or centre manual
- Record where vital information is being kept
- Provide a complaints box, or display information about how to raise issues of concern.

Do you have a planning chart, bookings list or office diary, recording when and by whom the building is being used, and when staff or volunteers are working or on leave?

Do you have a way to record people as they come into and leave the building?



Do you have a way to receive and record complaints?

Do you have a method to resolve complaints, and who checks this?

Proposal for Action:

In the box below you can say who is responsible for checking record keeping and people management are in place. If you don't know the answer, you could instead suggest what you could do to improve how you support your staff, volunteers and users.

Use the box below to write down the top three things you feel you need to do urgently in terms of people using your building and who needs to be involved to ensure they are done.



Section 4: Budgeting, money and insurance

You need to know when managing a building that there is adequate resources to do the job, and adequate insurance cover in place.

If you are an employer, manage a building or hire out use of a building you need more than insurance for the building itself . You need insurance for people using it or employed by you too!

Agreeing responsibilities for money and insurance

In the box below write down who in your group is responsible for ensuring you have the correct insurance and budgets for the building:

Budgeting for day to day running costs

Has money been put aside for maintenance and repairs.?

You need to ensure you have the money needed to do regular maintenance. It is easy to underestimate these costs. Maintaining public buildings that are used by lots of different people can be very expensive. Every year you should agree how much money you need. It is a false economy to neglect maintenance.

In the box below write down whom you need to involve, to know how much money to put into a maintenance fund?

Budgeting for the unexpected

You must have sufficient reserves to cover any unexpected costs. If you do not put aside money to do repairs you could end up being forced to close your building. This may be because you cannot always fix essential items, like your heating system, or allow for emergency repairs following vandalism, break-ins or other problems. You can't rely on your insurance alone for this protection. It can take time to get the money paid out from an insurance claim.

Who do you need to speak to about putting money into a contingency or emergency fund for your building?

Budgeting for the long term

You should be putting money in a depreciation or replacement fund. Essential equipment will inevitably wear out, and major refurbishments will be necessary at some time. Unless you set aside money then you will be unable to afford them when you need. It can be very hard to persuade a funder to pay for something that you knew you would have to replace.



Do you budget for depreciation on equipment, and if so how do you know it is enough?**Managing reserves**

Every organisation should have some reserves, and when they are responsible for a building they need to know that their reserves are in balance with their potential outgoings. This might be to re-build your building when it finally wears out, to pay to renew a lease, or to cover relocation costs.

However there is a catch (apart from actually finding the money to put aside). The larger your unrestricted reserves the harder it can be to persuade potential funders to support you.

So non-profit organisations often do not build up the reserves they should when they own or manage a building. However if you manage your reserves properly then you can avoid some of these problems.

Every year you should put a regular amount aside into a 'rebuilding or relocation' fund, and declare these as your managed reserves. This will need to be stated in your annual accounts or 'minuted' by your management group.

Do you put aside money in a reserve fund, and if not how would you address this issue?**Insurance matters**

There are at least four types of insurance you will almost certainly need if you run a building.

- Buildings insurance
- Contents insurance
- Employers liability insurance (that also cover volunteers)
- Public liability insurance.

You may also want insurance to cover:

- Equipment breakdown and servicing
- Trustees liability insurance

You need professional advice to know you are covered legally against these problems.

Use this box to write down how you will ensure you are properly insured.



Section 5: Legal responsibilities when operating a building

On the previous pages we have covered a number of issues relating to buildings management. However, there are some other important things to consider.

Is your building accessible?

Disability discrimination law requires that the service you provide is accessible. Access is more than just about wheelchair ramps and toilets. There is a whole range of needs that should be considered. People can come with mobility restrictions, learning difficulties, sight or hearing impairments and a host of other disabilities.

Laws on disabled access in community buildings changed in October 2004.

Do you know when your building was last checked that it complies with current anti discrimination legislation?

Who is responsible for ensuring your building remains accessible?

Do you monitor who uses your building, and who doesn't?

Discrimination is not only based on physical ability, but on a range of other factors. You should have an equal opportunities policy, and monitor its compliance.

Is your building safe?

Health and safety laws require you to provide safe premises, appropriate to the activity or facilities you provide.

For example you should keep a record of everyone who enters or leaves your building, so you know they haven't been forgotten in case of a fire, and to ensure your insurance remains valid.

Do you know when the last risk assessment occurred in your building.

When was electrical equipment last checked for safety?



Do you record who is in the building, and when they left?

Do you do regular fire drills and have evacuation information displayed?

Food safety:

If you provide food or have kitchen facilities there are strict rules about how those facilities are run and that the food prepared there is safe to be consumed. In many cases you will need special licences and regular inspections. More information is available from the City Council's environmental health department.

Who is responsible for ensuring licencing regulations are met

Child protection is also very important.

Following well publicised problems, particularly in residential centres, all staff who work with children and vulnerable people should be trained, have the appropriate criminal bureau record checks, and good systems should be in place for reporting and identifying problems.

Are all your policies and procedures to protect children and vulnerable people in place and being followed:

If you hire out a room to another group, how do you know that they are following good practises?

Ensuring you follow the law:

Laws change regularly and you need to keep up to date:

Describe how you train staff or volunteers:

Are you a member of an organisation that keeps you up to date.

This may be a national body to which you affiliate, a local CVS oThere are many other areas of legislation that building managers need to follow.



Legal status

If you aren't already, you should consider the need to register as a Charity, and ensure your constitution is suitable for the work you are doing.

Are you a registered charity, or should you be?

Advice on how to register for charity status is available directly from the Charity Commission. See: <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>.

Incorporation

There are a number of other ways you can incorporate your organisation, such as a company limited by guarantee, mutual society, development trust or community interest company.

You should take advice from your local Council for Voluntary Service, Local authority or professional advisors on whether you should be incorporated in this way. It can protect trustees and management committee members from personal liabilities if something goes wrong.

Is your constitution up to date and appropriate for what you do?

Community Matters is a national organisation that provides lots of advice and support for community building management bodies and community associations. See: <http://www.communitymatters.org.uk/>

Joining Community Matters provides you with access to a range of useful information sheets and other advice. They also produce useful book on managing buildings.

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) also produces lots of useful information, designed for people who run village halls in rural locations, but relevant also to community buildings in urban areas.
<http://www.acre.org.uk/>

Disclaimer:

Legal issues are often very complicated and this guide can only signpost you to some significant issues. CTAC does not take any liability for you not following your legal requirements, based on the information given here.

