

# Capacity Building Project



## GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 2

**The Organisation:**

MRECA (Mildenhall Road Estate Community Association)

**The Challenge:**

To raise finance for the Phoenix Project, a new community centre for the Mildenhall Road Estate in Bury St Edmunds

**The Response:**

A strategic approach to project management and fundraising

**Examples of Good Practice:**

1. Business planning
2. Community engagement
3. Partnership work

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## **The Organisation:**

MRECA (Mildenhall Road Estate Community Association)

MRECA was formed in 2003 with the aim of promoting partnerships and projects in the local community of the Mildenhall Road Estate in Bury St Edmunds. The organisation developed out of the Mildenhall Road Estate Residents Association, another local group which campaigns on a wide variety of issues affecting the quality of life of people in the community. MRECA's flagship project is the Phoenix Project, which will be a new community centre on the estate with activities and services for the local community.

MRECA's mission is to:

- Promote the health and well-being of the community in the Mildenhall Road Estate area, ensuring the inclusion of all members of the community without discrimination;
- Involve the community, particularly people from disadvantaged groups; and
- Work in partnership with the local community, local authorities, voluntary organisations to encourage inclusion of local people.

## **The Challenge:**

To raise finance for the Phoenix Project, a new community centre for the Mildenhall Road Estate in Bury St Edmunds

The community centre currently located on the Mildenhall Road Estate is in a building attached to the church. Facilities are limited and the building requires substantial modernisation. The vision of the Phoenix Project is to create a bigger, more modern community centre, fit for a community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a range of enterprises and activities aimed at improving the lives of disadvantaged members of the community.

MRECA needed to raise £625,000 for the capital project and £85,000 revenue for operating costs in the first five years of the project. As a charity run entirely by volunteers, this was an ambitious project for MRECA. At the commencement of the project, the Trustees had little experience in fundraising and project management, but they had a vision for the community and the enthusiasm and commitment necessary to bring that vision into being. To date, MRECA has raised £553,000 of the capital funds required and £62,000 of the revenue. This is sufficient to commence building works in Spring 2006. Fundraising continues for the balance required.

## **The Response:**

A strategic approach to project management and fundraising

A strategic approach to project management and fundraising has been crucial to the success of the Phoenix Project so far. Initial funding from St Edmundsbury Borough Council enabled MRECA to employ a professional fundraising consultant and a part-time Community Worker to lead the project in its development phase. The consultant produced a detailed business plan for the Phoenix Project, which provides the strategic overview of all aspects of the management of the project. The business plan has been an essential document supporting the development of funding bids, particularly the organisation's bid to the Big Lottery.

The fundraising consultant also identified potential funders to be approached and wrote some of the larger funding bids, before handing on the writing of bids to the Community Worker. Other key tasks for the Community Worker have been developing partnerships with a range of stakeholders with an interest in the project and engaging the local community.

## **Examples of Good Practice:**

The success of Phoenix Project to date has depended on three key aspects of their project management: business planning, community engagement and partnership work. Good practice in these areas has made a clear difference.

### **1. Business planning**

The business plan is a comprehensive plan that clearly sets out the vision of the project and provides details of the project implementation. The plan includes an assessment of risks and a contingency plan, as well as detailed timelines, financial projections, partnership arrangements and marketing strategies.

The plan covers a three-year development phase followed by a three-year operational phase. The development phase includes key milestones in the planning for the building project as well as focusing on fundraising, marketing and the appointment of a Community Worker. The operational phase includes consultation with target groups and the development of a range of community events, social enterprises, activities, services and educational opportunities.

Research was undertaken to obtain evidence in support of the project. The research findings demonstrated the need for a new community centre and identified the types of activities that were most needed. There was also strong support for the Phoenix Project from the community. This was a substantial piece of work and the data obtained has been crucial to the success of MRECA's funding bids. Funders generally want proof that there is a real need for the project they are being asked to fund.

### **2. Community engagement**

Engaging the local community in the Phoenix Project has been essential to the success of MRECA's fundraising strategy and is emphasised in the business plan as an essential requirement for the future success of the project. There has been consultation with the community about their needs and interests and there are opportunities for members of the community to get involved. The Trustees of MRECA come from a cross-section of the people in the community and an advisory group has also been formed which includes representatives of voluntary groups already working in the community.

There is also a separate fundraising committee with a fundraising target of £11,000 per year to help cover the running costs of the new community centre. SAVO led a training event for this committee, helping them generate fundraising ideas and plan events. So far, the committee has raised funds through a variety of DIY fundraising events such as raffles, bingo, quizzes, charity market events and the "Buy a Brick" campaign. In addition to raising funds, these events are excellent opportunities for the community to come together, building community cohesion and raising interest in the Phoenix Project.

It has also been important for the fundraising consultant and Community Worker to pass on knowledge and skills to the Trustees of MRECA and to others involved in the project. This commitment to capacity-building will enable the longer-term success of the community centre as a community-led project.

### 3. Partnership work

MRECA has quickly become respected and supported by a range of stakeholders and has established partnerships with some key stakeholders with an interest in the project. These include:

- Local voluntary and community groups interested in using the new community centre facilities for a range of educational activities and social services
- Local educational institutions, churches and businesses
- Local councils

Relationships with councillors of the St Edmundsbury Borough Council were particularly important for securing funding from the Borough Council. They agreed to match the funding raised from other funders, up to a maximum of £250,000. This proved invaluable to the success of MRECA's bid to the Big Lottery. Some other partners who have shown their support for the project by providing funding include the Havebury Housing Partnership and the Town Council.

### Sharing the Learning:

MRECA's success with the Phoenix Project is the result of good management practice. From the business plan to their emphasis on community engagement and partnership work, they have demonstrated good practice throughout the project. MRECA have proved that small organisations can succeed in raising large amounts of money for community projects.

#### Lessons Learnt

Working to a business plan is good management practice.

A business plan should demonstrate that there is a need for the project you are trying to raise funds for. Research may be required to collect this evidence.

It is important to have the right skills for certain fundraising tasks. Training is available if you want to learn how to write a business plan or a funding bid. Another option is to employ a consultant.

Anyone can get involved in fundraising. Good planning will improve the success of your DIY fundraising events. Ideally, you should form a fundraising team and provide them with training.

In planning and delivering your project, you should consult and engage members of the community you serve.

Are you trying to go it alone or do you work in partnership with statutory agencies or other voluntary groups?

#### Questions To Consider

- Does your organisation or project have a business plan?
- Do you have evidence demonstrating there is a need for your project or services?
- What sort of research could you undertake to collect the necessary evidence?
- Do you have the skills within your organisation to prepare a business plan and funding bids?
- Are there people willing to undertake training to learn how to do these tasks?
- Could you secure funding to employ a consultant?
- How can you encourage people to get involved with fundraising?
- Do you plan your DIY fundraising activities?
- What training does your fundraising team need and how can you provide this training?
- Are members of the community on the management committee for your organisation or project?
- Could you conduct a survey or consultation event?
- Who are the key stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes of your project?
- Do you have good working partnerships with them?