

# The BA Guide to Creating a Community Bookshop

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# Introduction

If you're thinking about establishing a community bookshop, this guide is for you. There is much to think about before you take on such a project – and you will need to be part of a team of enthusiastic, committed, but realistic people to make it work.

All bookshops are in some ways community bookshops and very often, as 'high street heroes', become a hub for local activity. But this guide looks into the particular factors to consider for bookshops which are being established specifically for community benefit. What form should your community bookselling enterprise take? How will you run it? We share the experience of a range of community bookshops.

*Creating a Community Bookshop* is designed to be read alongside the BA's **How to Start and Run a Bookshop**, where more general aspects of bookselling and the book trade are detailed. You might also find it useful to read the BA's guide on **Community Activism**, looking at how to engage and influence your local community.

Do read the **case studies** featured in this guide. These community bookshops take several different legal forms and have many different activities and revenue-enhancements beyond traditional book sales, which all support their core mission either directly or through bringing in extra revenue. Each bookseller has some top tips for establishing a community bookshop. Thank you to all those who agreed to be featured.

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## The advantages of being a community bookshop

What are the benefits of establishing a community enterprise as opposed to setting up an ordinary company whose simpler motive is to make a profit to support its owners/staff?

Community bookshops, as social enterprises, offer:

- **a clear, explicit commitment to social goals.** This helps to drive the activities of the bookshop in a focused direction.
- **shared ownership or membership.** This gives people a stake, creating greater commitment and concern for the interests of the business – from employees and volunteers to customers and those who benefit particularly from your activities.
- shared ownership or a **shared vision** which can boost productivity, because people are invested emotionally, and in some cases financially, in the enterprise. For a bookshop which is selling rather than producing, 'productivity' is a peculiar measure, but it could mean a willingness to stay late for events, to smile at a customer when you don't feel like it, to work faster to complete tedious book returns or stock takes – if you are a bookseller, you will have your own definition of productivity.
- **greater engagement from the community.** Even people who do not have a specific stake in the organisation, such as customers who live in the wider locality, will often respond with enthusiasm to support a community set-up, choosing actively to buy their books and take part in events.
- **suppliers may be more loyal, flexible or forgiving** if they know your enterprise is working for a social benefit.
- **access to certain funds.** Some donors will only give to charities or limited companies which are set up with a social goal. This is because of the legal protections these vehicles provide – funds granted may only be used for stated purposes. So access to finance – whether through donors, grants or community development finance – may sometimes only be available to community enterprises rather than to a standard company.

# Section I: Before you start – research and vision



## Start researching Factors to consider

When you are thinking about setting up a community bookshop, there are many factors you will need to consider in advance.

We recommend you consult the BA's 338 page ebook, **How to Start and Run a Bookshop**, where you will find extensive guidance on key aspects of setting up a bookshop of any kind. The guidance includes:

- **how the book trade works** – publishers, wholesalers and where independent bookshops fit in.
- **your unique selling point (USP)** – what can you offer to attract customers into your shop on a crowded high street and against an even more crowded internet offering?
- **location** – where will you gain most trade? Calculating footfall, researching the locality, deciding on premises (rates, freehold or leasehold etc). If you plan to rent out space to raise revenue, or provide space for events, what requirements will you have for a building? Is there good disabled access? A storage/back area is very important for stock and staff.
- **stock** – what books should be on your shelves to attract your target market of customers? Consider stock turnover, value, re-ordering and returns.
- **non-book products** – will you offer anything other than books? Consider cards, gifts, toys, art, running a café.
- **staff** – how many do you need? Consider recruitment, managing and motivating.
- **finance** – financial and accounting aspects of bookselling. Rigorous planning of cash flow and profit and loss is critical before you start.
- **style/design** – today's customers are rarely tolerant of shabby or ill thought-out shops. How will your bookshop look and be laid-out? Consider ambience, lighting, heating, flooring, till points, stock display and non-book display for maximum sales, delivery access, etc.
- **marketing and PR**

- **web presence** – what should your website offer?
- **social media** – how to build your presence using online networking and publicity.
- **events beyond the shop** – are you and the team prepared to go out into the community to run book stalls at festivals, in schools or local events? What form will your outreach take? There are some ideas in our case studies.
- **managing the shop** – how to run your shop, day-to-day.
- **systems, wholesalers and infrastructure**
- **important legal requirements** – keeping up with the latest tax, legal, fire, insurance and health and safety guidelines and legislation.

## Do your research

In your 'pre start-up' phase, you will need to decide:

1. The business idea – your vision.
2. Who will run and control your enterprise – the legal form your bookshop will take.

Do your research before engaging the help of professional business/co-operative specialists, so you can make the most of the time they can offer you later in the process.

- **Talk to people who run bookshops** – especially community ones. You can find links to all current BA member bookshops in the Find Your Local Bookshop section of the BA website, [www.booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch)
- **Visit as many bookshops as you can.** How are they laid out and styled? How is stock organised and what are their specialisms? How do the staff greet you? What works and what doesn't?
- **Use online resources**, such as those sign-posted in this guide, to build up your knowledge and inform decision-making about the structure of your business.
- **Look into your local area** – population and demographics, footfall, planned expansion, transport links, etc. There is more detail on this in *How to Start and Run a Bookshop*.

- **What other organisations are there locally which might become customers or partners** – reading/writing groups, schools, politically-affiliated groups, arts centres and organisations, literary and other festivals, etc.?
- **What is the competition for your target customers?** Consider physical bookshops, supermarkets, online. Could any of these in fact work with you?
- **Read bookselling publications** to keep you up-to-date with market trends and changes.
- **Meet regularly with the core of people** whom you hope will form your enterprise with you.

## Resources from the Booksellers Association

Take advantage of what's on offer from the Booksellers Association (BA):

- **How to Start and Run a Bookshop.** This book, published by the BA, contains vital information for any new bookseller – the best £25+VAT you'll ever spend!
- **Transfer of Ownership: Top Tips for Buying an Existing Bookshop,** a BA guide giving additional information about taking over an existing business.
- **Community Activism: The BA Guide to Engaging and Influencing Your Local Community**
- The BA's **Introduction to Bookselling** courses are helpful for newcomers to the trade and could also provide a refresher for people taking on a bigger role in a new bookselling enterprise.
- The BA website features **Resources for Aspiring and New Booksellers**, a whole page of resources which are accessible to guide you before you even become a BA member. It includes links to information on:
  - Book industry news and publications
  - Bookshop marketing and social media
  - Bookshop supply chain and equipment
  - Employment
  - Training and networking
  - Trade organisations

- Financial and commercial business resources
- Funding and grants.

See: [www.booksellers.org.uk/jointheba/aspiringandnewbooksellers/Resources-for-Aspiring-and-New-Booksellers](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/jointheba/aspiringandnewbooksellers/Resources-for-Aspiring-and-New-Booksellers)

- Professional bookselling advice is available free to BA members through the **Unwin Charitable Trust Booksellers' Mentoring Programme.**



### BA membership

When you are ready to open or have begun trading, you can become a **BA member**. Membership will provide you with ongoing support, networking and money-saving opportunities. Many of the booksellers in our case studies have found BA support invaluable.

The Booksellers Association is a membership and trade organisation for booksellers in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The BA exists to provide support and advice for our members – around 95% of all bookshops in the UK and Ireland. We work with our members to offer a whole range of services, including invoice management, networking opportunities and promotional campaigns which will benefit your bookshop, as well as lobbying on behalf of booksellers at national and international level for the best trading conditions.

See: [www.booksellers.org.uk/jointheba/jointheba/aboutus](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/jointheba/jointheba/aboutus)

**Contact the BA's Membership Department on 020 7421 4695 pippa. halpin@booksellers.org.uk to discuss the BA resources or BA membership.**

# Case Study

## Dee Lalljee, Crediton Community Bookshop, Devon

*"All bookshops have a community element. And booksellers are a creative bunch and find amazing things to do in their communities," believes Dee, who is manager of this bookshop in rural mid-Devon. But in Crediton, the bookshop is now owned by the community.*

*"In 2012, the owner of the bookshop was retiring, and the shop was on the market for a while. A group of us in the community got together to discuss setting up a community bookshop to replace it. We held meetings around town to see what appetite there was and many people attended. There was clearly interest and a strong desire to keep a local bookshop. The meetings gave a steer on what people wanted from a bookshop," Dee reports.*

The group took advice about how to structure such an enterprise from the Plunkett Foundation, which provides information, advice and training to support setting up community businesses in rural locations. "We are a community benefit society. We are limited by guarantee, so we are a company but established for community benefit not private profit. To raise funds, we launched a community share issue, selling shares at £20 each and we have over 300 shareholders as a result."

The bookshop began in a small premises on the edge of the town, but after three years the team were able to raise a grant-loan mix to buy a high street shop which includes a work hub and event space so they could develop exhibitions, author events and an extensive schools programme. The move was made possible by a grant from Power to Change, an independent charitable trust which provides funding to support community businesses.

The shop is run day-to-day by three paid staff supported by around 30 volunteers. "We started with volunteers working in the shop to keep costs down, but it proved difficult to provide consistency of service. Running a bookshop is a remarkably complicated process! It's important to have several people involved who are driving the vision and purpose of the enterprise. Our volunteers are a huge asset in giving their skills and time to running our community activities.





For example, our schools team is made up of retired teachers. We provide training for volunteers and they take ownership of projects but can step aside if they want to.”

“We have a reputation in the county for involvement with literacy development. We work with schools across Devon, from tiny rural primaries to large senior schools, and our schools outreach programme includes author events and books fairs. We also see ourselves as a placeholder for arts and literature in the area, creating something that’s accessible to everyone and being involved in various literary festivals.”

The social enterprise also provides skills training and improved employability to projects aimed at reducing rural social isolation and invests in other community ventures. Book sales support these community ventures.

“To ensure we are fulfilling our objectives we work with focus groups, shareholders and other participants to provide feedback. Ideas are

brought to our board which meets quarterly to review progress and discuss future development. To make sure we continue to provide exceptional service we’re updating our mission statement to examine how we can do that. For example, we’re keen to work in a variety of ways with different organisations around nurturing a love of books and reading and we are developing links with the Arvon Foundation’s nearby centre at Totleigh Barton, for instance.”

Michael Morpurgo is a patron of Crediton Community Bookshop and is one of many authors who visits for events. But as well as more mainstream happenings, Dee says, “We try to curate events around books that will attract audiences who might not normally engage with a bookshop and to reflect our rural area. For example, we had the Yorkshire Shepherdess to speak, ran the event in collaboration with a local cider-maker at their works and promoted it with the Young Farmers. A survey of attendees showed that a large proportion of people there

## Case Study

had never been to a book event before. We want to increase the amount of monitoring and evaluation of our social impact like this.”

Bookshop stock and events are curated to reflect a multicultural society. “There is a big Polish community nearby and we work with an English language group, providing space for a discussion group for residents who speak English as a second language and might otherwise feel intimidated about coming into a bookshop. But it goes beyond race, the LGBT+ groups and so on, to seeing our role as encouraging the tolerance, diversity, understanding and empathy that reading creates,” believes Dee.

### In our experience:

- **“Join the BA!** The support and networking are second-to-none.”
- “It is critical to have **marketing and communications expertise** – you have got to tell your story authentically. People will hear it and want to buy from you because of it. Communication is a hard thing – it’s really key, but it’s easy to underestimate the time you need to invest in it to make the venture a success.”
- “Find **volunteers** who can bring their own professionalism and skills to help with specific activities.”
- **“Be clear about your vision** and then get proper advice about which structure to choose – it must be fit for purpose. But be prepared that the administration of a shareholder structure is not inconsiderable.”





## What is your business vision?

Why do you want to create a community bookshop? It's important to establish a clear vision right at the start – particularly where the project is being driven by a group of people. Everyone needs to pull in the same direction to make the venture successful.

Think about a 'mission statement' that sets out your aim(s) and can be a touchstone for the business as it forms and grows. It's also helpful to formulate an 'elevator pitch' – a quick description of what your business will be and its aims.

You will need a strong vision:

- to 'sell' to local people: community engagement is critical
- to attract funding from the community, banks and charitable funders
- to keep your team all working towards the same goal, at the start and once the community bookshop is up and running

## Your purpose

Think about what activity you want to undertake and why: i.e., how will it benefit the community? To achieve this purpose, will your enterprise be purely bookselling or will a wider programme of events or engagement be part of your plans? As well as the stock you sell, consider events and festivals, schools programmes, book clubs, providing a community hub, a café, your involvement in town activities and more.

Your purpose might be:

- **to ensure that the town/locality still has access to an independent bookshop, to provide books and a focus on reading for the locality.** This is a common aim in establishing community bookshops.

It may be that an existing local shop is closing down through retirement or business failure, or that bookshops accessible nearby are dwindling. What will your bookshop provide to achieve your aim?

- **a particular social purpose or to promote a particular cause.** It might be widening diversity, promoting women's rights, promoting 'green' values, improving reading among local children, engaging a racially diverse local population, supporting the LGBTQ+ community. These are just a few of the ideas behind some BA member bookshops. Many bookshops have a broad aim of ensuring accessibility to books and literary events/outreach for all disadvantaged groups in their locality. How will you support these aims?
- **to support your local high street.** This should be a main or additional aim of every bookshop, because viable, vibrant 'high street heroes' matter for keeping local communities alive and creating social and financial value for the whole community.
- **to provide employment and/or volunteering opportunities for the area.** This can be an important additional benefit for volunteers (or staff). Work in a bookshop can provide a purpose or social focus for retired, lonely or disabled people, amongst others.

## Financial sustainability

Part of your business aim should be to make a profit to support your enterprise. The words 'business' and 'profit' might make some shudder, but even a bookshop with altruistic aims still needs to make enough revenue to cover its outgoings and more, so that you can invest in new stock, pay staff, support outreach projects, keep a rainy day contingency fund in the bank – and not just survive but thrive.

As well as the stock you sell, consider events and festivals, schools programmes, book clubs, providing a community hub...

As Cooperatives UK says,

*"Some co-operative and community-owned businesses we speak to are wary of the term 'profit' and associated financial terms. The goal of such undertakings is to develop and maintain a viable business able to deliver a service, not to be driven by a need to maximise profits. However, clearly any business needs to generate a profit in order to keep the business alive and invest in its own future. Profit is essential to the sustainability of an organisation." [The Guardian, April 2012]*

In other words, is your idea just an idea, or a **clear business vision** that could make enough money to support a wider social purpose?

## Your target market

Once you have pinned down who it is in your community whom you hope to benefit through your bookshop enterprise, think about whether your area can really support such an enterprise.

Although you may have enthusiastic support from your community for the idea of a bookshop, will they – in reality – buy books or attend events, volunteer or buy shares?

Are there enough people in your target market of customers living in the area to make enough sales? If the aim of your community bookshop is a very specific social purpose or message, it might be more difficult to find customers.

- If you are in a city, you might be able to pull in supporters and buyers with similar interests from a wider area across the city, but that will mean hard work on the publicity front.
- If you are in a small town, are there enough willing volunteers locally who share your values and will help run, work in, or finance your bookshop?

- Could you achieve your aims by keeping a section of message-specific titles among a general-interest bookshop, with, say, a bias towards your agenda in your events and activities? Or do you want all the titles you sell to be related to your aims? Limiting your offering could impact your revenue.
- To reinforce your aims, and bring in your target customers, consider whether your enterprise could sell a wider range of goods beyond books or rent out space (some of the bookshops in our case studies sell local produce, crafts, eco-friendly toiletries, or rent space to community groups, etc)
- What will you offer that Amazon doesn't?

## Business questions to consider

Once you have your idea or vision, then comes the practical planning.

- Who will be the owners, managers, directors, shareholders or guarantors?
- How will it be funded? Build a financial plan, including start-up costs, overheads, projected income streams. Where will the funding come from?
- Where do you want your bookshop to be in one year and in three years' time?
- Where will you go to get specialist business advice?
- How will any surpluses or profits be used? What plans do you have for the distribution of any profits, so that your community aims are met?
- If the enterprise comes to an end, what should happen to any remaining assets? If a CIC is dissolved, there are very specific rules meaning any remaining funds must be used to benefit the community.

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General information on setting up and running a business, including issues such as tax, child care and different types of company is provided by the UK government at: [www.gov.uk/browse/business](http://www.gov.uk/browse/business)

## Notes of caution:

### Are you a 'people' person?

There is one aspect that sometimes gets overlooked by potential booksellers who adore books and want to be surrounded by them all day. A love of books is only part of the story.

Even those who want to establish a literary hub for their community need to consider if they and their team actually like people? Are there enough 'front of house' staff/volunteers who would enjoy serving the general public, helping with their requests or working with young people in schools? Bookselling is a service industry and independent bookshops in particular are known for the level of personal bookselling that they offer. Interacting with the public is at the heart of a community bookshop.

### Are you prepared to work hard?

Starting up a bookshop business requires the injection of a large amount of cash, some of which you may have raised from members of your community or your own pocket. Your stockholding of books and rent/mortgage will ensure that this cash remains tied up in the business for quite some time. While the business becomes established, and perhaps in the longer term, you should be prepared to work very hard for a small financial return, for paid staff members and for your community shareholders or supporters.

whether your area can support such an enterprise...

# Case Study

## Case study: Maureen Ross, Orb's Community Bookshop, Huntly, Aberdeenshire

*"We had two things in our favour," reports Maureen, a volunteer who was involved with Huntly's community bookshop from the start. "There had been a bookshop in Huntly from 2001, ready-stocked with new and second-hand books. And secondly, one of its owners Annie Lamb was a member of our writers' group and we'd often looked after the shop for her when she was away – so we knew how to run it."*

It was 2013 when the owners decided to retire. Huntly Writers were given a grant by the Huntly Cultural Fund to conduct a feasibility study on whether Orb's Bookshop could be run as a not-for-profit community bookstore. "The answer was: don't start a bookshop! But we also conducted a survey with local people and the idea of a bookshop was very popular. So we threw the feasibility study over our shoulder and carried on."

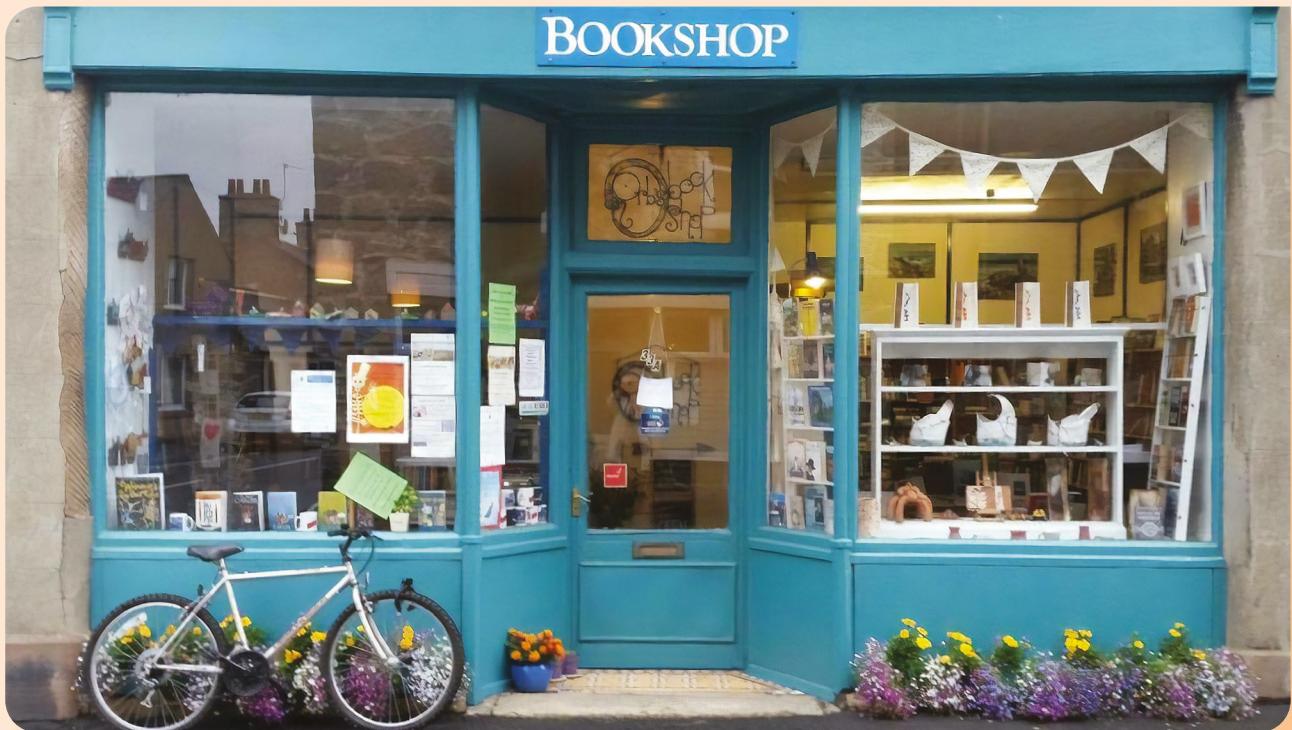
"The former owners were very supportive. We were able to use the bookshop's existing bank account while we got established, and the owners left £600 in it as a starter fund to help us. We set up with Gardners and did a big sort out in the shop. When we had to get a new bank account, we found options were limited; only RBS would give us an account.

*"We had amazing support from the BA and we also received grants from various publishers – for example, Harper Collins paid for our new computer system. And our customers were incredibly tolerant."*



The bookshop is entirely run by volunteers. "We worked with existing volunteers at first and then added new ones. We have around 18 regulars, mostly recently retired people such as secretaries, teachers and retailers. Between them, we have developed a broad skill set, including people with the knowledge to do funding applications and one who is good at online promotion. Our treasurer used to be in business and he deals with the utilities, rent and buildings. I live next door and can pop in and out to make sure the shop is running properly."

*"We have never advertised for volunteers, they just come in and offer. We ask them what aspect they want to do, and they take on what they find attractive – we cover all the jobs we need. Any progression in what we do has depended on the type of volunteer we've attracted. As they spend longer working in the shop, they get more ambitious and want to do new things."*



The bookshop is run as an unincorporated association, a not-for-profit enterprise. "This keeps the bureaucracy down – the last thing retiring people want to be is working in another organisation full of bureaucracy. Our accounts are audited every year but there is no liability resting with the volunteers. We have a board which meets regularly and we also have 'WGTs' – wee get togethers – about once a month. It's important to see what our workers are finding easy and difficult and to share experience and ideas. It's the volunteers who make the decisions – it's run in a consensual manner."

The shop is usually open six days a week and sells new and second-hand titles, book tokens and runs a small events programme. "It is a very small space, but we do have authors to speak. A.L. Kennedy was the most recent. One volunteer is experienced in community outreach and as a result, in our first year we were able to hold World Book Day events at several local schools, and now visit ten. It's a lot of work but good fun and we can sell books to parents afterwards."

Some volunteers have links to other organisations – schools, the library, the Community Council – which means the bookshop can publicise its work through these contacts. "But we have maintained our independence. That's important because some seemed to want to take over at first."

*"We make enough profit over the year to cover our expenses and to salt away some to keep a cushion of around £12,000 in the bank. We could have managed for a year during COVID-19 lockdown with that back-up. But we don't make enough day-to-day to pay a full-time manager, which we'd hoped to do. We also hope to move to a more central location in the town square, which is being renovated, which will increase our sales.*

## Case Study

"Our aim at first was simply to keep a bookshop going in the community, for the community. Now we look to promote and support local authors, to stock out-of-print items and maps about the area and to promote our community's culture and language. That includes translating our website into both Gaelic and Doric.

*"We also try to make the shop dementia-friendly – we have a checklist for volunteers to help them support customers – and we keep an eye out to help people who come in with children and so on. We want it to be somewhere people with a disability can have a chance to work or shop. We had a young disabled person working here for several years who set us up on Abe Books and trained up several other people to manage it. We've all learned new skills. I never thought I'd be able to do a sale, get BatchLine fixed and simultaneously advise a customer. It gives me a great kick!"*

### In our experience:

- "If you're taking on an existing bookshop, **listen to the previous owner** who knows the ropes."
- "Set up an **electronic sales and catalogue system** from the start. We began with an Open All Hours-era till, which struck you in the solar plexus every time it opened. This did not make life easy!"
- "Make it a **friendly place**. Volunteers should be happy to be there if they are giving their free time and customers should feel happy too. Because we're a small town, customers know who we are and know they will be welcome."
- "**Become a member of the BA.** I don't know what we'd have done without that. Go to their conference and bookshop socials, send two of you at a time – it's helpful to know that everybody else has the same problems. Through the BA, our treasurer was able to visit the community bookshop in Crediton, Devon, and share ideas."

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## Taking on an existing bookshop

The whole reason for setting up your community bookshop may be to maintain the presence of a particular bookshop in your area – so by default, you will be taking on an existing business.

If you are considering starting from scratch, however, it is worth researching whether there is an existing bookshop you could purchase.

There are huge advantages to this compared with starting up a wholly new enterprise. You will:

- **gain an instant customer base** built up over years and already in the habit of coming in to buy books
- **spend a lot less** than starting completely from the beginning, even if over time you may transform the shop into something closer to your team's vision
- **inherit experienced staff**, if you are lucky (and perhaps as volunteers), some of whom may have wide book knowledge and good relationships with existing customers
- **acquire stock** which is already in place so that you don't have to invest time and energy in completely filling a bookshop with new titles before you've sold a single book
- **remove a potential competitor** from the local scene.



However, consider why the original bookshop was failing or being sold.

It may simply be that the owner is retiring and can hand over a thriving business. But sometimes there will be problems: perhaps the shop has not moved with the times, does not promote itself well and use social media/websites effectively, fails to offer enough events to pull in customers, doesn't work with schools or has a range of stock unsuited to its location?

Whatever the challenges, will your team be able to turn around the failing aspects and make the business pay?

See the BA's guide: **Transfer of Ownership: Top Tips for Buying an Existing Bookshop**, which you can read alongside **How to Start and Run a Bookshop**, for details of how to buy an existing business.

Your community bookshop could also be planned as a sister project to an existing bookshop. It could nevertheless be set up separately with a specific social or community benefit in mind, such as the various businesses under the Moon Lane umbrella (see our case study).

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# Case Study

## Case study: Tony Fyson, Dartmouth Community Bookshop



*"A group of us were outside the Dartmouth Arms, pint in hand, when we heard that the Harbour Bookshop was to close. I said indignantly, 'Somebody ought to do something'. There was a long silence, so I rashly added, 'It better be us then.'*

That was September 2011, when the famous bookshop founded nearly 60 years earlier by Christopher Robin Milne of Winnie the Pooh fame, closed down. Tony Fyson, now Chairman of the community bookshop, his wife Hilary and several other retired people living locally felt it important that the small town should continue to have a bookshop. They formed a group – four of whom continue as the bookshop's committee today – to explore ideas.

"We discovered that a model for a community shop was promulgated by the Plunkett Foundation," reports Tony. "The Foundation had provided advice on setting up many village stores when those privately run began to fail. They had never specifically dealt with a bookshop but saw no reason why their model wouldn't work."

This legal model is an Industrial and Provident Society, a form of co-operative. It allows people to buy shares and become members, giving them a say in how the enterprise is run using a one-member, one-vote system at an annual general meeting. The members do not receive financial profit from their investment or hold any extra power for owning more than one share.

*"We appealed for support through town meetings and publicity. The townspeople, regular visitors and second-homers rallied round. About 150 donors bought shares at £20 each, some purchasing very generous quantities. It was just the kind of support for a good cause that the town is known for. The local amenity society made a generous grant, too."*

The team needed to find new premises as the original bookshop was being sold to another business. "We were lucky to receive support from local charity the Dartmouth Trust, which offered us an initial six months free rental in a nearby shop and a ten year lease with a break clause after five years. We bought the shelving and computers from the Harbour Bookshop and spent our first weeks moving the fittings across from one premises to the other. We also benefit from much reduced rates, as although we are not a regular, registered charity – and cannot be, as a trading organisation – our not-for-profit status means the local authority treats us as a charitable enterprise."

"The former manager of the Harbour Bookshop, Andrea Saunders, was prepared to come and work for us at a much-reduced salary. And as babes-in-the-wood as far as the book trade was concerned, we certainly needed her. With her expertise to guide us, we were able to open our new community bookshop on December 5th, in time for the vital Christmas trade."



If the Community Interest Company model had been introduced a couple of years earlier, Tony feels they might have considered this legal form instead. “The drawback of having a country-wide membership is that very few members can attend the AGM. There would be advantages in having limited numbers or more local supporters. On the other hand, visiting shareholders spend a lot on books and like to feel involved.”

The shop has now expanded into a yard behind it, once the ownership of the land was established. “With our accumulated share capital, we were able to spend around £30,000 on the extension, which significantly increased our floor area from very small to just small!”

The shop has a group of volunteers who cover for the manager when she is at lunch or taking time off. The committee includes a former journalist, who helps with publicity for the bookshop, while the company secretary, Kathy Stansfield, does the website. The shop runs author evenings in conjunction with the local library, “which has a very dynamic leadership”.

“Jonathan Dimbleby spoke about his book on the Battle of the Atlantic to a packed audience – very popular in a town with such a naval history as Dartmouth,” says Tony. “Dan Cruickshank communicated his conservation enthusiasm in his own inimitable fashion. We like to do what we can to support local events and festivals, stocking up for the Food Festival, the Regatta and the Music Festival and of course liaising with schools including for World Book Day.”

*“Our raison d’être was and is simply that a town like ours must have a bookshop that is viable in the long term, which means doing more than just ticking over.”*

#### In our experience:

- “Think about **succession planning**. We are all now past retirement age. Younger volunteers would help, but so too would attractive employment prospects for people of working age.”
- “Be prepared for what seems like a **full-time job**. Volunteering takes a lot of time, and organising and training volunteers takes even more, curtailing the chance to take holidays and other opportunities.”
- “Run **outreach events** especially for schools and young people and in support of the local economy and businesses. It is this which justifies the word ‘community’ in our title.”
- “Promote **local authors**, whether aspiring or published. They may not all produce great literature, but they do represent local people and places. Providing space and events for them can be financially unsustainable for a conventional bookselling enterprise.”

## Section 2: Different types of community bookshop

You will need to decide how your bookshop is going to be governed and owned.

Your decision might be based on a number of factors such as the aims of the enterprise, its potential scale and your administrative and business experience. The structure you choose will affect the tax you pay, the records and accounts that you have to keep, as well as the ways your business can raise money.

**We strongly recommend that you take legal and accounting advice or talk to a professional adviser or body such as Cooperatives UK before deciding on what form your community enterprise should take.**

There are various different ways in which community enterprises can be set up, including CICs, charities, trusts, standard limited companies, partnerships, unincorporated associations and co-operative societies. Formally-constituted charities are complicated to establish and run, with a high level of accountability which might take up more time than you can spare from running the actual bookshop.

The bookshops featured in this guide are limited companies, community interest companies or unincorporated associations. We focus on these types of enterprise in this guide, but advice on other types is available from Cooperatives UK.

A reminder that general information on setting up and running a business, including issues such as tax, child care and different types of company is provided by the UK government at:  
[www.gov.uk/browse/business](http://www.gov.uk/browse/business)



### What is a co-operative?

Co-operatives are run by their members – employees, customers, local people, suppliers – rather than institutional investors or distant shareholders. Co-operative enterprises can range from multi-billion pound organisations (such as Co-op, the UK's fifth-biggest food retailer) to many tiny companies such as bookshops.

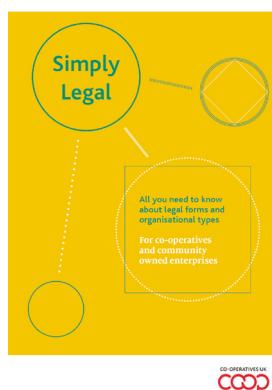
**Co-operatives UK** is the central membership organisation for co-operative enterprises. It is a network for more than 7,000 co-operative businesses across the UK, and works to promote, develop and unite member-owned businesses.



Extensive information on why and how to form a co-operative: [www.uk.coop/uk](http://www.uk.coop/uk)

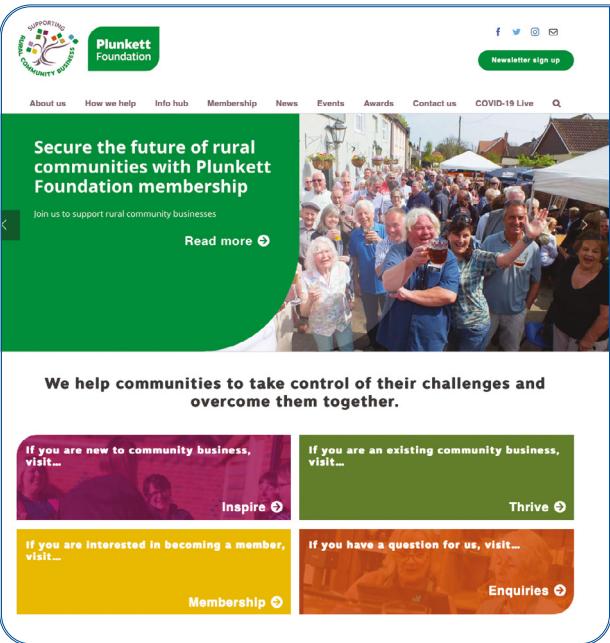


A good starting point is Cooperative UK's guide to starting up a co-operative:  
[www.uk.coop/resources/simply-start](http://www.uk.coop/resources/simply-start)



A detailed and wide-reaching guide to co-operatives is available at: [www.uk.coop/resources/simply-legal](http://www.uk.coop/resources/simply-legal)

Another organisation supporting the development of community businesses, but specifically in rural locations (including small towns), is the **Plunkett Foundation**. It provides information, advice and training to support setting up community businesses.



See: [plunkett.co.uk](http://plunkett.co.uk)

A speedy introduction to setting up a co-operative is provided in three articles from The Guardian, starting with: [www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2012/apr/05/how-to-set-up-a-cooperative](http://www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2012/apr/05/how-to-set-up-a-cooperative)

A screenshot of a The Guardian article titled "How to set up a co-operative - part one". The article is part of a three-part series from Co-operatives UK. The sub-headline reads: "With co-operatives enjoying a renaissance, this is the first in a three part series from specialists at Co-operatives UK on how to set up a co-operative. Read Part two and part three here". Below the headline is a photograph of a track and field athlete in a starting position on a running track.

## The principles behind co-operatives

Co-operative enterprises usually have some, if not all, of these guiding principles:

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control
- Member economic participation
- Autonomy and independence
- Education, training and information
- Co-operation among co-operatives
- Concern for community.

The governing documents of your enterprise will need to define what 'co-operative' means for your bookshop.

Alongside the social benefit, co-operatives must aim to bring in enough income not just to cover costs but to make a profit, with members deciding on whether that surplus is reinvested in the business, distributed among members or given to the community – so while being driven by a social purpose, it's still important to have a viable business plan so that you can support your community aims.

In a community bookshop, any profit is usually ploughed back into the business or used to fund projects that support its aims, particularly in the early years. Members shouldn't expect to see much return on their purchase of shares.

## Co-operative ownership

The groups of people who own and run co-operatives usually fall into one of four categories:

- Worker owned co-operatives, which are owned and run by their workers; for example, News From Nowhere Radical and Community Bookshop and October Books.
- Consumer owned co-operatives, owned and run by their customers; for example, The Co-operative Group. Many community bookshops fall into this category, with local people buying shares in the enterprise to support it financially. These members may or

may not become volunteers who help run the enterprise. There are several examples of different types of consumer-owned co-operatives among our case studies.

- Enterprise owned co-operatives, owned and run by other businesses, such as a farmers' co-operative.
- Mixed ownership co-operatives, which are owned by a mix of these different groups.

## Support for setting up and running a community enterprise

Co-operatives UK, in partnership with The Co-operative Bank, runs a programme of support for those setting up or expanding a co-operative business, through 'The Hive'.

This includes free workshops (e.g. 'Is a Co-operative Right for You') and you can also apply for up to ten days of support, training and one-to-one mentorship which can help in developing and setting up a co-operative.

See: [www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op](http://www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op)

The screenshot shows the Co-operatives UK website with a teal header. In the top right corner, there are buttons for 'Find a co-op', 'Log in', and 'Search'. Below the header, there's a navigation bar with links to 'About us', 'Blog', 'Case studies', 'Events & training', 'News', and 'Resources'. The main content area features a large image of two women working at a desk in an office setting. To the left of the image, there's a yellow box with the text 'CO-OPERATIVES INSPIRE Participation'. Below the image, there's a section titled 'Start a new co-op' with a sub-section 'Start by The Hive'. This section contains a paragraph about the service, a 'Get started' button, and a link to 'View the guide'. At the bottom of this section, there's a 'Featured content' section with three smaller images: one of people working together, one of a whiteboard, and one of a map. Below these images, there are three more sections: 'Start a new co-op', 'Start by Unbound', and 'Support for start-up co-op businesses'.

Membership of Co-operatives UK starts at £100+VAT per year, and for an additional £200 you can add on a package of support that gives you phone, email or face-to-face access to their expert advisers when you need it.

## Legal forms of co-operatives

There is, in fact, no such legal entity as a 'co-operative' and no one governing Act of Parliament to cover them. The term 'co-operative' is applied to many different types of enterprises, but the common factor is that their ethos is about working together for the benefit of the community.

So co-operatives can be formed and financed in different ways including by raising capital from members, loans, share issues and internal profits.

Every co-operative has a governing document, a written statement that sets out the purpose of the organisation, its structure and describes how the organisation will operate.

Co-operative enterprises commonly include:

- Unincorporated Association
- Co-operative Society
- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Community Interest Company

Through Cooperative UK's support programme, [www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/start](http://www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/start) you can undertake a questionnaire to help you decide which type of legal entity you might use for your enterprise.

Cooperatives UK provides more information on legal forms and organisational types for co-operatives and community-owned enterprises in its 'Simply Legal' guides. These include supplements on specific regulations for Northern Ireland and Scotland, and also include other types of organisation we don't cover here.

[www.uk.coop/resources/simply-legal](http://www.uk.coop/resources/simply-legal)

## Limited company vs unincorporated association

When you are deciding how to set up your bookshop, you will need to choose between establishing some form of limited company and an unincorporated association.

### Advantages of a limited company

A community enterprise can be registered as a limited company at Companies House (or the Companies Registration Office Ireland), just like any other standard company. The advantage of being ‘incorporated’ as a limited company is that the company itself is a separate legal entity. It – not the people who own or run it – is liable for its debts.

This provides a degree of security for the people who own and run the business. If the enterprise becomes insolvent – it can’t meet its debts – the members and directors are not personally liable for the debts. If its directors are shareholders, like other shareholders they would lose the value of the shares they hold in the company, but they won’t have to surrender their personal assets (such as their personal savings or their house) to meet the business’s liabilities. In the case of a Company Limited by Guarantee, there are no shareholders.

Limited liability also provides some protection for any assets related to the social enterprise. This protection is not usually available for an ‘unincorporated’ entity, where assets are often held in the names of individuals.

The limited company status is also familiar to banks and other funders.

### Disadvantages

A limited company has more formal legal requirements than a looser association. This could feel quite bureaucratic for a small enterprise. As well as setting up with Companies House, there is an ongoing annual requirement for information to be submitted to Companies House. There is much more accountability for how the business is run. There are strict rules

about the records that a corporate body must keep and those that must be presented to the appropriate registry. These are important because an organisation can incur liabilities and expense if it fails to keep its records up to date.

There are also extra costs involved. It costs for the company to be registered (which may be hundreds of pounds). There may then be recurring annual fees to remain registered and the administration of the company might cost (such as accountants’ fees).

Details of the company and its finances are in the public domain – you must inform the relevant registry (e.g. Companies House) about governing body members (providing information about name, address and date of birth), the organisation’s finances and more, and these facts can be accessed by others.



## Unincorporated Association

Any group of people may get together to pursue a social aim. An Unincorporated Association does not technically exist as a legal entity, but a judge defined one as: ‘Two or more persons bound together for one or more common purposes’.

The relationship between the members of an Association is basically a contract. The contents of this contract should be written down at the start to avoid dispute over its content in the future. An association’s governing document is often called its ‘constitution’.

Because an unincorporated organisation does not exist in law, it can’t own property or enter into contracts in its own name. All property will be owned by one or more of the members of the organisation and one or more members will be personally responsible for any contracts the organisation may hold (generally this is the person who actually signed the contract).

Responsibilities of the members of an unincorporated association are ‘joint and several’ – that is, they are seen as a body of people responsible jointly for the organisation, but

will also be held individually responsible if the association fails to meet its debts. This risk can be distributed unevenly among different members, depending on who has the ability to pay.



## Co-operative Society

There are two forms of these societies, a Co-operative Society and a Community Benefit Society (referred to as 'societies' here). These replaced Industrial and Provident Societies when legislation for England, Scotland and Wales changed in 2014, but that term is still sometimes used.

The Community Benefit Society legal form is common among community-owned and other forms of voluntary and community sector activity, where the emphasis is to benefit a wider community rather than the society's membership – and thus would suit a community bookshop.

Societies are incorporated, legal bodies which are registered in England, Wales and Scotland under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and administered in those countries by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). Societies pay an annual fee to the FCA, the amount of which depends on the assets held by the society (in 2017 this ranged from £60–£460).

In Northern Ireland, societies are registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 and are administered by the Registry of Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies. There is currently no fee to pay.

When a society is registered, the registrar will look closely at the society's statement about why and how it is to be operated, to make sure that it conforms to the principles of co-operative societies. The registration process can be slower than registering a limited company. The society then has to file an annual return and accounts with the registrar.

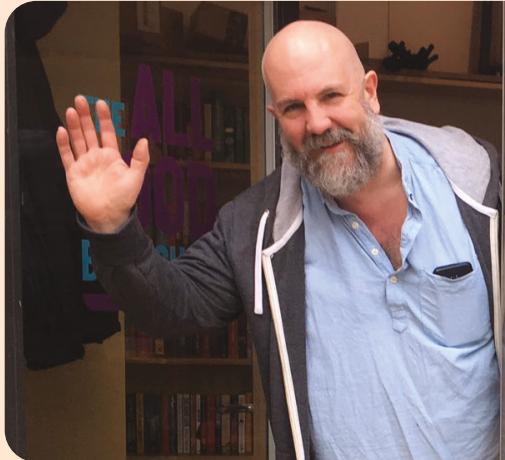
Societies have members who must hold at least one share in the society. Societies can issue 'withdrawable share capital' to members to raise funds – but a member can withdraw their shares if they wish to. Profits can be shared among members, although that might not be financially viable for a community bookshop. Raising funds from banks and charitable organisations can be difficult, simply because this form of organisation is not as well recognised or understood by funders as a limited company.

Societies operate on the basis of one member, one vote. Members have the right to appoint and dismiss directors and determine the affairs and rules of the society. Members of a society have limited liability, as the society is a legal entity in its own right.

A Community Benefit Society can choose to 'lock' its assets. This means that if it is dissolved, the assets cannot be shared amongst the members but will go to another asset-locked organisation(s) with similar objectives.

When a society is registered, the registrar will look closely at the society's statement about why and how it is to be operated...  
operative societies.

# Case Study



## Tim West, The All Good Bookshop, Wood Green, London

The All Good Bookshop story begins with the move of the Big Green Bookshop, which Tim had run with a colleague, away from London to Hastings.



To keep an independent bookshop in the Wood Green area, a group of customers suggested forming a co-operative. "We wanted to get new people interested with a new name and a new outlook," says Tim. "I've been a bookseller for many years: I have a shop, some books, I sell them – but this was the start of a steep learning curve for all of us."

*"We called a meeting of the former bookshop's customers and about 50 people turned up. Sixteen people formed a guidance group which ultimately settled down to nine. We understood the concept of a co-operative but researched the working practices through Cooperatives UK. Membership of Cooperatives UK was our biggest outlay initially, but it was probably the best £500 we've spent. It was incredibly useful; they did all our legal paperwork to set us up in May 2019. Once the legal framework was in place it then became the same as any other bookshop – it was job done, get on with running the shop."*

Tim explains: "A 'co-operative' is not a legally recognised entity as such, you have to choose whether you will be a limited company or another type of co-op. With Cooperatives UK's guidance we chose a multi-stakeholder model known as an industrial and providential society. This model allowed us to sell shares. We sold shares of £1 each in bundles of £100. To stop a controlling interest developing, shareholders – members – are only allowed to buy to a maximum of £1,000 of shares. We now have over 100 members."

## Case Study

"Members can then be as involved as much or as little as they like. All we ask of them is to vote for the board of trustees, and should the shop become profitable with time, they will be given the opportunity to put forward ideas for how that profit should be used. We could pay out a dividend to shareholders, but we're a long way off that as yet."

The enterprise has an acting board of volunteer trustees covering seven positions. Among the board members are people with different skills to support the bookshop – experts who work in marketing, publishing and equality and diversity, for example.



"We started in a three-metre square shed off the main road and then in February 2020 moved to a small shop on Wood Green High Road. We know that a large percentage of sales will be customer orders, but we now get passing trade as well. It's the first time I've worked on a main road in 13 years!" Then came COVID-19 lockdown, but Haringey supported the bookshop with a grant which covered over three months' rent.

Tim and a colleague manage the shop day-to-day. "We both get paid for four hours a day and then volunteer the rest of the time. We hope as business grows, revenue will increase so that we can add hours and eventually pay ourselves properly. I am named as manager and my expertise is in providing personal customer service and running a bookshop. I'm also vice chair of the board of trustees, and my colleague is secretary of the board. We don't have a lot of members working as volunteers in the shop – if everyone did, you'd be forever training people."

The bookshop hires out a room as a venue for various social groups including reading, creative writing, music and yoga, and members of these groups overlap with shareholders in the bookshop and help publicise its presence. This brings in revenue and builds the shop's community role.

*"It doesn't matter if a group is not book-related. Our mission is to provide both a bookshop and a community hub, a place where projects can take place. We could even provide space for a pop-up shop for other local businesses, possibly on a profit-share basis."*

"To publicise that we were opening, we were lucky to have the previous mailing list of 3,000 people, but if you are taking on an existing bookshop, you can also use its connections. We get involved with the local – and national – press as much as possible, making ourselves available for interview. We are active on Twitter but though we do have a Facebook page, we need someone



who has the time and aptitude to update it. We also get publicity through the social media of the groups that use our space.”

*“Our marketing guy produces a newsletter. It’s important to keep your publicity presence up, even if you’re saying the same thing again. But word of mouth is still the best form of advertising.”*

“The co-operative model has reduced the stress of running a bookshop for me. There is no personal involvement with big loans against your house. If you gather the right people around you, you have a great support network.”

*“Members receive a membership card and a share certificate and are able to hire our room at a reduced rate. But the most popular thing is a simple members’ badge saying, ‘I own a bookshop!’ Members’ involvement and their word of mouth creates customer loyalty.*

### In our experience:

- “Initially we were working in a small area with only seven bays of shelving. You really have to work on **stock control!** To avoid expensive initial outlay, we chose some ‘prize-winnery’ titles but essentially opened with a half-empty shop. Customers then told us what they were interested in through their orders. Thus we drip-fed the stock, filling it up gradually without spending lots of money up front. We’ve done the same thing again in the new shop. It is also a good way of engaging with customers: they are pleased to see titles they’ve chosen appearing on the shelves. It makes them feel, ‘This is my bookshop.’”
- “Set the **ground rules for meetings and committees** early: how you treat each other, how you give fair opportunities to speak so people don’t feel side-lined, how to offer reasoned arguments not personal gripes. Issues will arise that you didn’t predict and it’s amazing how un-co-operative people can be.” Caution matters on social media too and on internal communications such as the messaging service Slack for staff and board members. “There is no tone, so a quick comment can be read as a furious one when it was meant to be a joke.”



## Company Limited by Guarantee

A CLG, or ‘company limited by guarantee not having a share capital’ is a legal form often chosen by community enterprises and is usually ‘not-for-profit’.

A Company Limited by Guarantee has guarantors and a ‘guaranteed amount’ – that is, each member guarantees a certain amount (usually £1 or €1 in the Republic of Ireland) in the event of the company being wound up with outstanding debts. The amount of the members’ liability is set out in the company’s articles (its governing document).

Just like any other limited company, these companies have the benefit of being a separate legal personality from the people who run them, who have limited liability. But they can’t raise funds by issuing shares. Start-up funding would have to be found from other sources such as grants or loans.



## Community Interest Company (CIC)

A Community Interest Company (or CIC) is a special form of limited company in the UK, which does not have formal charitable status but nevertheless exists primarily to benefit a community or which trades with a social purpose. In other words, it is set up to benefit a community and not for private gain. A political party or a purely political campaigning organisation cannot become a CIC.

CICs were only established in 2005, so were not an option for community bookshops formed earlier on. They have the same ethos as other types of community enterprise, but are a more bespoke option for a community-focused business which you want to establish as a limited company.

The screenshot shows a GOV.UK page titled 'Community interest companies: guidance chapters'. It includes a summary of the information provided, publication details (2 August 2013, updated 14 November 2019), and links to two chapters: 'Chapter 1: introduction' and 'Chapter 2: preliminary considerations'. Each chapter has a download link (PDF, 512KB, 13 pages and PDF, 442KB, 14 pages respectively) and a note about accessibility. A 'Related content' sidebar on the right lists other resources like 'Community interest companies: forms and step-by-step guides' and 'Articles of association for a CIC that is limited by guarantee'.

There is extensive government guidance about CICs at: <https://www.gov.uk/set-up-a-social-enterprise>

You can get more information and forms to set up a CIC from: [www.gov.uk/business-and-industry/community-interest-companies](https://www.gov.uk/business-and-industry/community-interest-companies)

The screenshot shows a GOV.UK page titled 'Community interest companies'. It features a 'Sign up for updates to this topic page' button. Below this, there are sections for 'On this page' (with links to Services, Guidance and regulation, News and communications, Research and statistics, Policy papers and consultations, Transparency and freedom of information releases, and Organisations) and 'Services' (with links to 'CIC36: application to form a community interest company', 'Articles of association for a small membership limited by guarantee company', 'Articles of association for a large membership limited by guarantee company', 'Articles of association for a CIC limited by shares - schedule 2 small membership', and 'Articles of association for a CIC limited by shares - schedule 3 small membership'). Each service link includes a brief description of its purpose.

A CIC must be ‘incorporated’ – i.e. set up in the same way as any other limited company. They are governed by the requirements of the Companies Act (and their own Articles of Association). Information about limited companies is held on the public register, which is available for anyone to see.

Just like ordinary limited companies, a CIC is a form of business which is legally separate from its owners (typically shareholders) and directors. Even if a limited company has just one person involved as the sole shareholder and lone director, it is still legally separate from that person. Because the CIC is a form of limited company, if the business fails or can’t meet its debts, the owners are not personally responsible.

### A CIC can be set up in three ways:

- a private Company Limited by Shares. This means the CIC can issue shares to raise capital. The shareholders buy shares in the CIC and can vote on managing the company. Ordinary shares can have a nominal value of any amount (from 1p to £100 or higher); a nominal value of £1 is common. A CIC Limited by Shares is allowed to pay dividends to its shareholders up to a set ‘dividend cap’, although in the early years of a community bookshop, you would expect any profits to be ploughed back into company activities to benefit the community.
- a Company Limited by Guarantee with no share capital. This kind of CIC does not have shareholders but has guarantors (see above on CLGs).
- a public limited company (PLC) which allows wider public investment and is probably a bit large scale for most bookshops!

A CIC is allowed to give some of its profit to investors, but this amount must be ‘balanced and reasonable’, whilst ensuring true community benefit is always at the heart of any CIC.

CICs are subject to an ‘asset lock’ which ensures that assets are retained within the company to support its activities or otherwise used to benefit the community, rather than used for the benefit of individuals. When the CIC is set up, ‘Asset Lock Provisions’ are specified, naming the organisation(s) to which the assets of the CIC should be transferred if it is dissolved.

Directors of a CIC can be paid or unpaid, but either way are subject to the same rights and responsibilities as directors of any limited company. The members of a CIC have the same governance and decision-making role as in any other company, but they (and the directors) are under a stronger obligation to work for the wider community and involve stakeholders in its activities.

A CIC has more formal legal requirements than an unincorporated enterprise and than a standard limited company. When it is being set up, as well as registering with Companies House, the CIC’s prospective directors have to submit information describing the social purpose of the company and providing various other details. These have to be reviewed and approved by the CIC Regulator before the CIC can be established.

Then, on ongoing basis, the CIC must make annual returns of information to Companies House and file accounts with HMRC. It must also submit an annual Community Interest Report. The CIC Regulator will check whether the CIC is still serving the specific community it was established to benefit.

The structure you choose will affect the tax you pay,  
the records and accounts that you have to keep,  
as well as the ways your business can raise money.  
as the ways your business can raise money.

# Case Study

## Meera Ghanshamdas, Moon Lane Ink CIC, Lewisham, London

When Tamara Macfarlane, owner of Tales on Moon Lane children's bookshop in London, decided to set up a sister bookshop in nearby Lewisham, in collaboration with her co-director Paul Chin, she chose the CIC model.

*"It made sense to set up a Community Interest Company," says Meera, now manager of this sister bookshop, Moon Lane Ink CIC. "Because the directors wanted to create change not only within the Lewisham community, but in the wider book industry, they wanted a community enterprise which could be driven closely by its directors. It can become complicated when there are too many stakeholders in a co-operative managing things."*

The enterprise aims to raise equality in children's books: equality of access to books for all children, equality of representation of diverse communities within content and equality of roles within the publishing industry.

Lewisham Borough has a high degree of children living in economic deprivation. To promote books and reading and develop an interest in older children in working in publishing, Moon Lane Ink holds a wide range of events in schools and in the bookshop, from author visits to book festivals. "In 2020 before lockdown, we held a variety of World Book Day events, including an illustration workshop and a choral workshop to encourage wider engagement and unlock a love of reading. We also offered free story times highlighting new titles, especially to Years 5 and 6 who are not always read to regularly." Among many activities, the enterprise hosts the Lewisham Primary Book Awards and supports



the Secondary Awards, run with school librarians to encourage reading, and now has 39 schools involved from the wider locality.

Meera keeps ahead of the game in researching new titles and debut authors from diverse backgrounds. "Last year that included events with Nadine Wild Palmer, Nathan Byron and Dapo Adeola. It's not just about race, but about class, disability, gender, LGBTQ+ issues, culture... wherever voices are in the minority."

The bookshop also offers free space for community meetings, and rents at reasonable rates to a range of groups, bringing people into the bookshop who might not have been before.

"We have to keep money coming in," Meera says. "How much our bookshop sales support the community enterprise changes month to month, and our general revenue tends to pay for smaller projects. But as a CIC we are also allowed to charge for some services and events. Between the first and second year of trading [2018–19] the social enterprise revenue increased by 250%." The fact that Meera herself comes from a business background helps to drive the financial as well as the social elements of Moon Lane Ink's work.

*"Being set up as a CIC also increases your chances of getting external funding for projects. Applications are time-consuming, and if you are applying for funds to support an event, always include a charge for your time in organising the event, which can take you away from running the bookshop. But these grants can make things possible. For example, we receive Arts Council funding which supports our schools' festival and pays for two interns. Often match funding for grants is required, and we have to find that from our revenue."*



"Running a community interest company is not for the faint-hearted," advises Meera. But for Moon Lane Ink, the community response outweighs the complexities of running a CIC. "In 2019 we won the Lewisham Mayor's Local Business Award for the contribution to literacy and learning that we make – we were genuinely touched that we'd come to mean so much to the community after just a few years. And we proved our worth with the first day's trading after lockdown, which was like Christmas sales, with regulars and new customers buying. We're a

little bookshop on a big main road with no other high street shops nearby, yet people come here from miles around, which is a long way with so much competition in London. It's a symbiotic relationship, we work with the community to develop the community."

### In our experience:

- "You must go in with your eyes open and **set it up with rigour**. Accountability is key. You need to prove to Companies House through your annual Community Interest Report that you have continued to be managed for community benefit, showing how you have allocated your revenue. Every receipt is important, you must file everything and be meticulous. If you have a lot of bad debt, such as an event which hasn't been paid for, you have to explain why."
- "If you are setting up alongside an existing shop, it may be best to **keep the business separate**. We are under the same umbrella with Tales on Moon Lane, Moon Lane Education and Moon Lane Ramsgate, but we remain a separate entity as a CIC. Each business is run separately so that other parts are financially protected if one entity goes wrong."
- "Having a **mission statement** is key in a business sense as well as a social enterprise one. It gives you something to get behind. It's important that all staff understand the mission. We needed to be radical and to challenge the industry – this is our mission and what drives us."

The enterprise aims to raise equality in children's books: equality of access to books for all children...children...

## Republic of Ireland

The rules governing companies and co-operatives in the Republic of Ireland are slightly different from those in the UK, but we hope that this guide will provide ideas and a springboard for anyone wanting to establish a community bookshop in the Republic. BA membership, the BA's Unwin Charitable Trust mentoring scheme and other resources are all available to Irish BA members.

Community enterprises in Ireland are often established as Companies Limited by Guarantee. Information about types of company and how to register is available from Companies Registration Office Ireland: [www.cro.ie/en-ie/](http://www.cro.ie/en-ie/)

The screenshot shows the homepage of the CRO website. At the top, there are links for Skip Navigation, Gaeltacht, and accessibility options (A A A). The main header reads "COMPANIES REGISTRATION OFFICE AN OFIG UM CHLÁRÚ CUIDEACHTÁI". Below the header is a search bar with the placeholder "Input your search...". The main content area features a "Welcome to the Companies Registration Office Ireland" banner with the subtext "The central repository of public statutory information on Irish companies and business names". To the left, there's a "Latest News" section with a "Processing Dates as of 30th September 2020" article and a "Popular Tasks" sidebar with links like "Search / Purchase Company Info", "Register a Business Name", and "File an Annual Return". On the right, there are several service modules: "CORE Companies Online Registration", "RFS Online", "Beneficial Ownership", "RBO", "Coronavirus COVID-19", "CRO COVID-19 Measures", "Filing Fees", and "The CRO Gazette".

Support in developing a business in Ireland is available through Local Enterprise Offices, which provide a range of complementary supports for starting up or growing a small business.

[www.localenterprise.ie/](http://www.localenterprise.ie/)

The Republic also has a network of Local Development Companies (LDCs) which could provide advice. LDCs work on community and rural development, labour market activation, social inclusion and social enterprise services.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Local Enterprise Office website. At the top, there are links for Home, About Us, FAQs, Documents and Publications, and News & Events. The main header reads "Local Enterprise Office Making It Happen". Below the header is a search bar with the placeholder "Search the Website". There are four main buttons: "Find Your Local Enterprise Office", "Discover Business Supports", "Enable Enterprise Culture", and "Response Covid-19 Supports". The main content area features a "CHANGE IS COMING JAN 2021" graphic with two people at a desk. Below this are two calls to action: "Brexit Change Get Ready - sign up for our workshop" and "Prepare Your Business for Customs". To the right, there's a news section with three items: "24 National Women's Enterprise Day SEP 2020", "09 BREXIT BACK IN FOCUS FOR IRELAND'S SMALL BUSINESSES SEP 2020", and "23 Key supports for re-opening your small business JUN 2020". At the bottom right is a "See All News" link.

[www.localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports/](http://www.localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports/)

If you are exploring setting up a co-operative instead, the Registrar of Friendly Societies is responsible for the registration of new co-operatives in Ireland. The main membership body for co-ops in Ireland is ICOS, the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society, which serves and promotes commercial co-operative businesses and enterprises.

[www.cro.ie/Society-Union/Overview](http://www.cro.ie/Society-Union/Overview)

[www.icos.ie/starting-a-co-op/intro/](http://www.icos.ie/starting-a-co-op/intro/)

The screenshot shows the homepage of the ICOS website. At the top, there are links for About, ICOS in Europe, ICOS Skillnet, and a sign-up for newsletters. The main header reads "icos". Below the header is a navigation menu with links for "Introduction", "What is a co-op?", "Starting a Co-op", "Co-op principles", and "Start a co-op flow chart". To the right, there's a large image of people working in a field. Below the image, there's a section titled "Co-operatives are one of the most sustainable business models for new enterprise start-ups. Co-operatives provide over 100 million jobs around the world, 20% more than multinational enterprises." At the bottom, there's a section about the history and mission of ICOS, listing its aims and principles.

# Case Study

## Joanne Hunter, General Manager, Books At One, Louisburgh, County Mayo

Books At One was founded in 2016 when a benefactor holidaying in remote Louisburgh, on the west coast of Ireland, felt it needed a bookshop. The idea led to the creation of One Foundation Books CLG, a philanthropic organisation which aims to create a new movement of independent, destination bookshops which will provide community hubs as well as sell books. Louisburgh is the first and will provide the model for others.

Joanne is general manager of Books At One – and more. “I became involved after applying to One Foundation Books CLG to try to get a community bookshop where I live in County Cork,” she reports. “Then I found myself not only managing that project but taking overall responsibility as General Manager of Books At One, overseeing the existing project in Louisburgh with a view to replicating community bookshops around Ireland. Part of my job is to help communities to access funding such as grants and donations in places where starting a commercial bookshop from scratch wouldn’t be feasible because of social disadvantage or remote locations.”

*“In the Republic of Ireland, the idea of community bookshops is quite new. The most beneficial and pre-accepted structure for community organisations seems to be a company limited by guarantee, rather than a trust or a co-op. The liability for directors is limited to their stake which is usually just one euro.*

“To set up a bookshop, you need to find financial support, but once established, our local authorities are very keen to support community events such as mini literary festivals, writing workshops or author visits. They are interested in spreading the arts outside the major cities. These



events benefit not only their audience but the people organising them, learning new skills which they could use to progress to a bigger scale.

“At the moment, Books At One is working towards opening a village community bookshop in County Galway, in a building that once housed a blacksmith’s forge. Planning permission is a slow process, as renovating an old building to modern building standards is complicated, but hopefully in another six months, we’ll be up and running.”

“Once we get this one done, we will advertise for people to put their own community forward for a bookshop, where a suitable building is available. It can be difficult to find affordable buildings, particularly when landlords and sellers believe that we have big money behind us – but these bookshops are to provide financial and social benefit to communities, and we can only pay a normal commercial rent, especially if we are paying for building renovations. By occupying a derelict building, we contribute to rural regeneration in areas where there is no existing bookshop or library.”

“It’s also important for the community to know that we provide paid employment. Staff pay re-circulates and benefits the local economy.”

Books At One sells both new and second-hand books. “We aim to break-even, with any profit reinvested in the project. We hadn’t anticipated how much we would come to rely on good

# Case Study



quality book donations, but because we are a holiday area, people come in and buy new and then donate the books back before they leave. They'll come in again if they return, because they want to support the bookshop. We also get donations from further afield as people like their books to contribute to the success of a not-for-profit organisation. But we also like to sell new books because we want to support the whole community of the book industry, from shop back through publisher to author."

The ethos is about providing a local hub. "There are couches to sit on and we serve tea and coffee under normal circumstances, as well as a small courtyard to enjoy, so people can come in and talk about books, attend a writing group or explore our local heritage books. They are made to feel welcome, whether they've ever bought a book before or not."

"We also have a little printing press and can support self-published authors to print small runs of books to be sold here, through our website and to their friends and family. Some of our bookshop events are for just such authors to launch their book.

"We provide a place for local people to give classes – on everything from traditional Irish crafts to astronomy – charging a reduced rate until they are established. We have book clubs and writers' groups. We also have a co-working space which both locals and holidaymakers use, providing good internet access for this remote location. It can be abused when visitors take advantage of the free WiFi by allowing their children to come in and play on phones but not buy anything. Generally, when families enter, we encourage the children to explore the second-hand children's section."

"We know how much our community values us and our takings: this July, post-COVID, were up on last year because people want to support us. Our service is very personal – we know our local customers and they feel comfortable here. We had one lady recently who had forgotten her glasses so she told me what she wanted and I took her round the store and read out the cover blurbs to her! Where else could you get that?"

## In our experience:

- Books At One has paid staff but also uses **volunteers**. "We do need them but be careful not to pile too much on to one or two competent volunteers, or they will burn out. It can be a huge pressure on them. Use volunteers to cover specific tasks, such as providing lunchtime cover for paid staff, stock taking, helping with events etc, but make sure they are trained up, especially in cash handling which people are very nervous about."
- "Have a **volunteer policy** which they sign when they join, so they know what's expected of them."
- "It's great to have teenagers who come in for work experience or Saturday work – it spreads the idea that books are for everyone. But allocate simpler tasks to them that they are comfortable with. If you have under-18s working in your shop, you need to have a **child protection** policy in place."
- "**Join the BA!** It's the first step you should take. They are hugely helpful. I attended their course on how to set up a bookshop and went to London Book Fair with their help. I made so many useful contacts with people who really care about bookshops. And their members' network on Facebook means you can find an answer you need so quickly."
- "**Get all the support you can.** In Ireland, the Local Enterprise Office or Local Development Company can provide training and support."

# Section 3: Building your enterprise

Don't forget to consult the BA's ebook **How to Start and Run a Bookshop**, talk to other booksellers and compare the experience of bookshops featured throughout this guide.



## Funding

Before you apply for funding, you will usually have to first establish and register your enterprise legally, having decided what form it will take.

Although grants and loans may be available to support your bookshop and its wider aims, it is unsustainable to rely purely on external funding. You need a viable business with regular revenue that covers costs, but an injection of cash from a grant or a loan might help your set up costs or support a particular project.

It is better to create a business your members want and need and then see if there is grant funding to fit the criteria.

You will need to build a strong business case for acquiring funding from any source. If you are taking on an existing bookshop, you must be aware of reasons it might be failing and ensure that your plan will overcome these difficulties.

A list of business development workers around the UK who might be able to help you formulate your business plan is available via: [www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/find-adviser](http://www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/find-adviser)

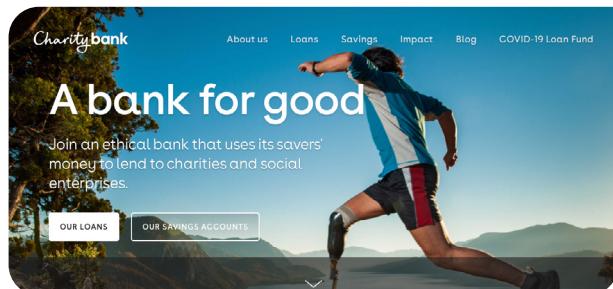
CICs and co-operatives can begin raising capital by offering shares to members of their community. Be clear about what this entails for those who buy into the enterprise.

## Banks and government initiatives

A small CIC or co-operative bookshop is likely to need only straightforward funding services, such as an overdraft facility to smooth cashflow difficulties; or a mortgage or loan, to finance an item of capital expenditure such as a premises, computer system and your stock. Some banks have dedicated teams supporting social/community enterprises, but your income projections will need to be robust to attract funding from banks.

At national level, there are some financial institutions which, the Government reports, look particularly favourably on social enterprise:

- Charity Bank – an 'ethical savings and loans bank' [charitybank.org](http://charitybank.org)



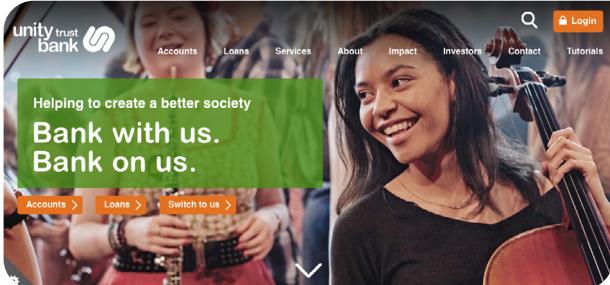
- Triodos Bank – 'Sustainable finance to benefit people and the environment' [www.triodos.co.uk/business](http://www.triodos.co.uk/business)



- Co-operative & Community Finance – 'Providing supportive loan finance' [coopfinance.coop](http://coopfinance.coop)

Although grants and loans may be available to support your bookshop and its wider aims, it is unsustainable to rely purely on external funding.

- Unity Trust Bank – ‘Helping organisations to prosper and contribute to economic, community and social change’
- [www.unity.co.uk](http://www.unity.co.uk)**



- Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) are established in the UK to support social enterprises, and operate in many different parts of the country, offering a variety of services and loans.
- The Enterprise Finance Guarantee scheme is a UK Government-backed scheme to provide guarantees on loans to small firms with viable business proposals which are unable to obtain conventional finance because of a lack of security. Loans are provided by banks; the Government guarantees 75 per cent of the loan.

## Grants from charities

In order to secure grants from charities, as well as ‘financial return’ (profit) you will need to demonstrate the ‘social return’ that your activities will bring.

Make sure you target those bodies most aligned to your activities, rather than wasting time on long-shot applications.

Although grants have the obvious advantage that they don’t need to be paid back, conditions attached to grants (designed to ensure that the money is used for the purposes intended) may limit the capacity of your enterprise to operate and expand. Many grants also require you to provide match funding from your own resources. You might be able to raise this through local fundraising if it is for an attractive project.

Be aware that the application process for grants can be time consuming and quite onerous in some cases.

There are various individual charitable trusts that might support your enterprise. Don’t forget to look into local charitable organisations. Big national names in charitable funding include:

- The Community Shares Booster Programme, available via Cooperatives UK, supports community share offers with development grants and matched investments.
- [www.communitysharesbooster.org.uk](http://www.communitysharesbooster.org.uk)**

- Power to Change Trust aims to ‘create better places through community business’ in England **[www.powertochange.org.uk/get-support](http://www.powertochange.org.uk/get-support)**
- The Plunkett Foundation supports rural/small town projects. **[www.plunkett.co.uk](http://www.plunkett.co.uk)**
- The National Lottery Community Fund aims to ‘fund great ideas that help communities to thrive.’ **[www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)**
- The Esmée Fairburn Foundation aims to ‘fund the charitable work of organisations that are building an inclusive, creative and sustainable society.’ **[www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk](http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk)**
- The Princes Trust aims to help 18 to 30 year-olds start their own business. **[www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/support-starting-business](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/support-starting-business)**

# Case Study



## Tracy Kenny, Kett's Books, Wymondham, Norfolk

"Wymondham had an independent bookshop for many years, but it was going to close at Christmas 2013," recalls Tracy, manager of Kett's Books. "Sixteen local people answered the call to save it – we met in the pub that September, all strangers but all lovers of books. We shared a vision. 'How difficult can it be?' we asked. We've spent seven years answering that question!"

"In the next frantic weeks, we built a fund of £24,000 in unsecured, interest-free loans, raised from among those 16 people. By the 1st of January 2014, we had formed a company, written a business plan, chosen a name, branding and logo, and begun marketing. We had secured a bank account and a lease on a small town-centre property, recruited volunteers, and sourced stock. There was a lot of pressure not to leave much of a gap after the bookshop closed on 24th

December, to keep the momentum going. We opened on 1st February."

The group saw that a salaried manager would help steer the bookshop, and Tracy remains the only paid member of staff. The first volunteers were recruited without formal interview. "We still don't do that. I try to get people chatting, find out their interests, what their values are, get a sense of whether they are trustworthy. Are they good with people and do they have good book knowledge?"

Kett's Books was established as a Community Interest Company, with members guiding the running of the enterprise. "There was lots of debate about what form to take, but we liked the idea of membership, with one member, one vote, rather than someone with more shares having more ownership or influence – a CIC is more egalitarian. It's been a good choice. In 2021, we'll probably ask all members to reassert their commitment to the bookshop, because we want our members to be active."

"We count all our members as volunteers, even if they don't have a shift working in the bookshop. We have 20 members, many still from the original group of 16 supporters. Everyone

## Case Study

offers some level of engagement, many behind the scenes with marketing expertise, social media networking, strategy and policy, helping with people problems. We also have other volunteers, including youngsters doing their Duke of Edinburgh's Award experience." The bookshop has a Friends scheme, where for a minimum donation of £20, supporters receive a 10% discount on books, free entry to events and an annual bookshop social gathering.

*Tracy is now reviewing the bookshop's volunteer policy. "It's my job to get them to run the bookshop. Our vision is to develop a community of active and professional booksellers, who can respond to the changing needs of our town. We want to create more of a learning environment where bookshop volunteers are expected to take on particular responsibilities and are helped to develop the necessary skills. I'm a huge fan of policy. Then you can say, this is our policy, this is how we do things, and you won't hurt someone's feelings if you need to correct them."*

"I've created a whole new section on our intranet, a private section for volunteers on the website, where there are explanatory resources including videos of how to do certain tasks. This should help with sharing knowledge amongst the volunteers and also enables a more sustainable form of training."

It's important to remember that in terms of community contribution, "The volunteers are our first audience. They get the immediate benefit from working in the bookshop. One guy told me point blank that without the shop, he'd have retired to his chair and died."

"Financially, we do make a profit and we also apply for grants to support projects," Tracy says. "We receive some funding from our local Waitrose, which is keen to support community projects – it's an interesting cross-over between a small independent and a big business."



Kett's Books works with local schools, holding assemblies and advising on books for children. There are also book groups for adults and children. In 2019 the shop launched 'One Community, One Book', a town-wide, year-long book group, where everyone reads the same book. The project was established with the help of a donation in memory of one of the original volunteers who died in 2018, as well as grants from South Norfolk District Council, the Alderman Norman Foundation, Waitrose and a BA Inclusiveness and Diversity award.

"We want to reach the hard-to-reach. There's a lot of isolation in this rural area," says Tracy. "The chosen author commits to visiting three times during the year, and word of mouth sells copies of their book and engages people with the bookshop. We take the author into schools, or in the case of writer Francis Liardet, into elderly care homes. The project has been very popular and builds conversation."

*"It's really important to tell our story,"* Tracy believes. Annually, she produces a glossy brochure showing activity in the previous year. "It's called More Than Words and is professionally printed and highly info-graphic, so it looks beautiful. We give it to anyone who shows interest, to grant-making bodies and so on. It tells our story and what our challenges are."

"It's important to celebrate our success, but we're also reviewing our mission statement now. Where do we want to be, as a mature shop, in the future? How can we be even more of a positive influence and bringer of change to the town? We'll be discussing this at the AGM."

To keep members and stakeholders informed, Tracy sends out a regular email with the week's news.

*"An anecdote, then bullet points of what we've learned, what they need to be aware of such as embargos or care for a particular customer, any changes and the rota for volunteers. I swear by my Friday night email. Everyone sees behind the scenes and sees the full picture. Again, it creates loyalty."*

### In our experience:

- When you are setting up, appeal for help to **save the bookshop**. "The public are always happier to help if they feel they are saving something. They feel a sense of ownership if they succeed and it creates loyalty."
- "**Choose a name** that is part of a shared heritage, not just a town name. Something everyone can feel part of." The Wymondham bookshop is named for local hero Robert Kett, who in 1549 led a revolt against the enclosure of common land which was destroying livelihoods.
- "If you are taking **youngsters on work experience** for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, for instance, we have learned you need a set programme. They do twelve hours altogether, always on the afternoon when there's a volunteer who likes working with them and they are only assigned set tasks."
- "**Play to the strengths of volunteers.** Find out what they are good at. It might be data entry, social media, dealing with customers. It makes them feel good about themselves and is more efficient for us. We also strongly encourage people to do whole days – with half days, the handover is really destructive."

We want to  
We want to reach  
the hard-to-  
reach. There's a lot  
of isolation  
in this rural  
area



## Your people

As you develop your idea and before you open, Cooperatives UK suggests establishing:

1. A governance plan – who will do what and how and what will happen if key people move on
2. Ways for those involved to communicate
3. Ways for those involved to make decisions
4. A clear membership offer – what you get for membership, and what's expected in return
5. A series of key milestones which those involved can use to tick off progress towards opening the shop and getting any programme of events/community involvement underway.

## Governance

The way your enterprise is governed will differ depending on the legal form in which your bookshop is established, and on how you decide it should be run. Check the specific governance requirements when you are looking at which form your bookshop should take.

Often, a community bookshop will have directors who run the business on a day-to-day basis. Some members who hold shares or are guarantors of the company may be asked to be part of a board which will meet from time to time to discuss, influence and vote on major decisions and projects. If there is a wider community membership beyond this board, they may meet less often, perhaps quarterly, to consider important issues such as expansion or change of premises. Members who have bought a share/shares in a Co-operative Society usually have a right to vote at an annual general meeting on important issues and election of board members, but as this can be a large group of people, they don't need to be involved in day-to-day decisions.

In a workers' cooperative, the workers themselves are the owners and will collectively run the enterprise. In an unincorporated association, the bookshop may or may not make enough revenue to pay staff, but the group of

volunteers who are part of the project, along with any staff, will be involved in the decision-making process.

It is very important to set out the responsibilities of members at the start. In some cases, they might be asked to volunteer in the shop, run events or provide advice or behind-the-scenes services such as help with marketing or community engagement. Others will prefer simply to buy a share but take no part in the management.

Members need to know when and how often they will meet to make management decisions. Consider an internal social media vehicle (such as a closed Facebook group) where meetings, changes and minutes can be posted.

## Communication and respect

Establishing a good working relationship with your supporters and volunteers is vital, even when you are in the early pre-set-up stages. Regular meetings, whether formal or informal, are important. You could also use social media – a private group on Facebook for example – to communicate developments, particularly if a larger group is involved.

Democracy is important, as is tact. Everyone needs a chance to speak and give their thoughts. At meetings, you may need a chairperson who is skilled in politely heading off more left-field ideas and in allowing quieter voices to speak. You may also need someone to moderate a social media group.

Set the ground rules about behaviour early on and ensure they are reiterated clearly for face-to-face meetings, for online forums such as Zoom, Facebook and Twitter, and for working in the bookshop itself when it is up and running.

As the vision begins to form up, set clear objectives, divide up tasks and ask individuals or smaller groups to look into specific areas; for example, marketing, finance, stock sourcing, building community links, dealing with schools. Then agree a process for individuals to report back to the whole group on progress.

## Gathering expertise

Often community enterprises start with a small group of committed people who drive the idea forward. As this group of key volunteers emerges, consider between you what knowledge your team needs and, if you are lacking expertise, where you can find it. Consider the skills of your founding team and the wider volunteer group:

### do you have anyone with experience of, for example:

- finance and accountancy
- premises management
- grant applications
- social media management
- event management
- marketing
- publishing
- teaching/schools
- and of course, bookselling?

Be aware of the time you will need to cover the elements of running a bookshop beyond staffing the shop, such as administration, planning events, setting up and maintaining social media presence and websites. You will need to make allowance for these elements. Talk to existing booksellers and find out how they manage their time.

Be clear about what is expected of volunteers on your board, in the shop or behind the scenes. How much time do you expect from them? Can you offer someone else to help them in their particular task? How often will you meet?

Be prepared for key people to move on after being heavily involved in the initial ideas stage – this happens quite commonly. How can you harness their skills before they leave? What will be missing and how can you replace it?

## Recruitment, training and management

For volunteers/staff who will work on the shop floor, you need people who are enthusiastic, good with people, motivated, honest and trustworthy, reliable and preferably – but not necessarily – with broad book knowledge.

For more on recruitment, managing and motivating paid staff, see the BA's publication **How to Start and Run a Bookshop**.



One thing to consider: if you are paying a manager, they may have considerable responsibilities – managing volunteers, managing budgets, steering policy with board members, controlling stock, managing the building and so on. They may be committed to your aims and prepared to work for a shop assistant-level minimum wage, especially when you are starting up, but it is a lot to ask of them in the long term. Do review managerial salaries regularly.

Volunteer help is invaluable to many community bookshops, and some are run purely on a volunteer basis. Our booksellers say it can sometimes be difficult to maintain continuity with a very big team of volunteers working in the shop, so consider staffing carefully. If you can afford it, a mixture of paid staff and volunteers is a popular model.

Managing volunteers can be a delicate task, compared with paid staff; they are generously giving their time for free and therefore it can be difficult to ask them to stick to your ways of working or work at certain times. They may have very definite ideas about how things should be run – which may not necessarily be the same as yours or your board's!

Tact is a key skill for managers. Making clear at the outset exactly what is required from each volunteer role will help.

The Charity Retail Association and Save the Children have produced a guide to managing volunteers, available at: [www.charityretail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/01/pm\\_essentials.pdf](http://www.charityretail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/01/pm_essentials.pdf)

## Charity Retail Association®

The voice of charity retail

We include here a few key points, some of which will apply to paid staff as well as volunteers. The Charity Retail Association's guide contains more detail.

**I. Planning.** This is a crucial stage and in the process it may help you firm up your ideas about how you want to run the bookshop:

- **Define role(s).** Your volunteer role definition will eventually become partly a marketing document to attract volunteers, as well as a job description that you and they will work from in practice. There are various 'Volunteer role templates' available by searching online.
- **Volunteer profile(s).** Include in your role definition not only required/helpful technical knowledge (books, social media, schools, etc) but also personal characteristics (good organiser, people person, etc).
- **Practicalities.** Where will they work from (in the shop, helping with tasks from home, etc). What hours will you need and are these flexible? Are travel expenses available?
- **Volunteer management.** Who will be their main contact point?
- **Criminal records check.** If they will have frequent contact with children or vulnerable adults, seek advice from the disclosure and checking system in your country, (either VDS, DBS or AccessNI)
- **Under 18s and under 16s.** If any volunteer is under 18, you are strongly recommended

to gain the consent of a parent/guardian, including any relevant health info (e.g. allergies). Many local authorities require work permits when under 16s are volunteering in a profit-making activity (such as a shop) to ensure this is not taking them away from their education. Requirements vary widely, so check locally (local authority education department or education welfare service).

- **Timeline for setting up.** Work out when you want the volunteers to start, then work back to create a timeline of dates for the stages of attracting, recruiting, holding informal interviews, taster sessions, induction and training dates, start dates and other key dates for your bookshop.
- 2. **Market and attract.** This will form part of the process of publicity for your proposed bookshop.
- 3. **Recruit**
  - Create a standard volunteering form to capture the essentials. Always include emergency contact details.
  - Consider offering 'taster' sessions so they can see if the role is for them
  - Arrange informal interviews.
- 4. **Select.** Make careful choices that meet the needs of both your shop and the applicant; in some cases this means declining a potential volunteer if you can't find a suitable role for them due to a need for particular skills, for example. In this case, refer them to a more suitable role or the local volunteer centre or agency. Let them know the outcome as quickly as possible.
- 5. **Induct.** Welcome and agree mutual expectations from the outset. Ensure the volunteer can access key information and guidance easily.

Find ways to ensure that every  
about the enterprise and pos

Key induction areas will include:

- The basics including checking their completed registration form and references, introducing them to the team, showing them where to store personal belongings as well as the kitchen and toilet facilities, talking them through discounts and expenses. Clarify mutual expectations.
- Health and safety – how to keep themselves, colleagues and customers safe at work
- Communication – how to use the rota, talk to colleagues, sign in etc
- Stock and finance – show them the systems for replenishing stock, taking payments, etc
- Customer service – let them know how you would like them to treat and talk to customers

#### **6. Manage, coach and communicate.**

This includes encouraging a culture of team working, inspiration and enthusiasm, motivating volunteers and staff to achieve your enterprise's goals. Some volunteers may be particularly nervous about handling money or mastering the various ordering and financial computer systems, so be patient and make sure they are fully trained.

**7. Thank and celebrate.** As well as day-to-day encouragement, consider hosting thank-you events for your volunteers, perhaps in conjunction with another local business.

**8. Develop and learn.** Encourage sharing of ideas and set up forums for this to happen. Set up buddy/shadowing schemes for new volunteers. Arrange for them to visit other shops or attend BA training and/or networking events.

**9. Transition and broaden support.** Some volunteers may not want to change from their initial roles, but some may want to take on more with time.

**10. Exit and end.** Make sure that if they choose to leave, you know why and they are properly thanked. Find ways to ensure that every volunteer who leaves feels positive about the enterprise and positive about their own experience.



#### **Staff working alone**

If you need your staff or volunteers to work alone from time to time, then you must have policies in place that outline what action to take in the event of difficulties.

For example, is there a panic alarm, or even just a phone number to call in the event of an emergency or if they feel unwell? Everyone who works in the shop needs to be aware of what to do in emergencies.

Bear in mind that not everyone will be prepared to work alone. In particular, asking volunteers to staff a shop on their own is a very big responsibility.

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itive about their own experience.

# Case Study

## Mandy Vere, News from Nowhere Radical and Community Bookshop, Liverpool



News from Nowhere was founded in 1974 and co-operative worker Mandy Vere has been part of the team since 1976. "It was formally established as a co-operative in the early '80s, consciously becoming a women's workers' co-operative. It's a company limited by guarantee, which means we can't issue shares outside the membership. All our members are employees and all are directors – there is no formal oversight of a board. But we have to produce annual accounts as a small business and these are put together by our accountants and one of our members."

"When workers join the co-op, they have a six-month probation period, not only for us but for them to see if it's what they really want – it's a big commitment. They have to purchase a £1 share, which is their liability. If the company wound up, that's all they will owe. Technically, we could do a distribution of profits to members, but we've never done that."

"The workers split tasks between them. I do most of the book buying, someone else does the accounts, someone the non-book stock, someone building management, and we share other tasks such as cleaning, serving customers and unpacking and shelving books. We have proper employment contracts and full employee rights. Our salaries are paid out of revenue – so that's meant decades on minimum wage! Much of the worth of the company is tied up in our building which we purchased in 1996. It's a five-storey building on a major road in Liverpool city centre and is now worth a lot. The mortgage was paid off three years ago, so we have been able to increase our wages a little."

Mandy describes the building as "a hive of activity". Space is rented to community-minded organisations such as a grassroots magazine, John Moore's Foundation (which supports community-based charitable work), and the Methodist community bread-making church. Pride was based in the building for a while, while in the basement there's a social activist centre which runs a vegan café.

"The shop is very big and we have built up stock gradually. It's mostly new books, with a small second-hand section, and includes general new literary fiction, which draws people in. Regular clientele have their favourite specialist sections – most titles are chosen on the basis of their contribution to social justice, including fiction, culture, arts, and a large children's corner. We have every subject under the sun – black liberation, feminism, lesbian and gay, disability rights, environment, 'Mind Body Spirit', politics

and labour history and a lot of international books and local history. We sometimes get criticised for stocking certain books, but we try to show different sides of an issue."

**"Because all our outreach is supported by revenue, we don't discount books unless offered them by the publisher. We also sell a few low-cost treats such as local and fair trade crafts, cards, 'zines' and badges."**

News from Nowhere supports many schools in the Merseyside area with bookstalls. "We stay all day and take a big range of children's books which focus on diverse content. We give ten percent of the retail price to the school. We also support community organisations who work for refugee rights and other causes close to our hearts. Our window can provide campaigning space for groups we work with such as The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or the 'Northern Flowerhouse' project of Grow Wild. They feel it's their bookshop."



"We have always run a programme of events both in the shop and elsewhere, but in recent years have cut down because Liverpool has got so much going on we can't always compete. We do pioneer authors who are less well-known – Bernardine Evaristo was here before she was famous. Now we often partner with other organisations and take bookstalls to their events,



such as at the Writing on the Wall Literary Festival, poetry events run by the University of Liverpool English Department, or the Green Party and Labour Party conferences. We will travel further for events such as the National Women's Aid Conference."

"It's an absolute joy working with books and running our own business but with the back-up of shared responsibility. We've got each other's backs."

#### In our experience:

- "Your **collective of people** is absolutely the most important thing. Your commitment and how you will work together: you need a vision, something beyond selling books and something to carry you through hard times."
- "**Location of your premises** is key. Liverpool city centre is relatively small and we are on a busy, bohemian street full of small independent shops, cafés and bars with an international feel."
- "**Contacts beyond your co-operative** are important – campaigning groups, community groups. They will publicise your shop and bring in custom. Do the groundwork and build up these contacts before you start."
- "Think about **succession planning**. One of our workers is retiring soon but it's been very hard to find the time to train people up to replace her."



## Engaging the community

### Early ideas meetings

Before they are established, many community bookshops begin with meetings of local people to gauge the interest in such an enterprise. Several might be held in different locations around the town and repeated meetings may be needed.

If you are setting up meetings, publicity is key. Engage local press in the process, spread the word via any local online forums, put posters around the town, get other local groups involved to promote the meetings to their members and on their social media, ask other local businesses to promote – and of course mention the idea to everyone you know!

Your local council might provide financial seed-money to support such meetings as a way to look at the feasibility of a community bookshop, as part of council efforts to support the locality.

A key message will be to stress the importance of keeping the high street alive – local press and other shops and businesses will be more likely to support you if you widen your focus beyond your particular aims to supporting a thriving high street and a thriving community.

At a meeting, you could use the traditional business tool of a SWOT analysis to discuss the potential Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of your proposed bookshop and community benefit. Perhaps seed a few ideas with people you know who are attending, so they can put forward suggestions to get the ball rolling.

Once a core team of interested supporters emerges, make sure it is not all hard work for them. Can you offer them money off in the shop, free access to events, special openings?

## Promotion and ongoing engagement

It is helpful to have a broad PR plan of key dates and what should happen on them in terms of social media activity, advertising, posters/leafleting, press releases and so on, so that you don't lose sight of PR aspects. Through the early stages and on, drip feed information through your publicity channels – tell people about town meetings, decisions made, premises sought/bought, support received from a charity/bank/local authority, shares available, volunteers sought, bookshop opening, promotional deals, first event etc. Find every opportunity you can for a 'story'.

If you have set key milestones during your planning process for opening the shop, these can provide you with good reference points for bursts of PR activity.

Make friends with your local press, radio and online town noticeboard or bloggers. Invite them to meetings, openings and events for free. From the off, feed them with regular stories and photographs – if you can word articles or press releases yourself which will save them time, so much the better (but be prepared for them to completely rewrite your text!). Be aware that many local newspapers have a skeleton staff and can't 'chase' news stories as they did once, so all the help you can give them will be appreciated.

Consider cheap promotional items such as badges, small window-posters, pens, mugs, balloons, for members and supporters, 'I support XYZ bookshop', which can be fun and also help spread the message.

When you establish your website, don't forget tell the story of your bookshop and explain how it is set up – and how people can get involved. Again, it's about that sense of ownership.

It is easy once an enterprise is established to let publicity slip. Keep your eye on it. Your success depends on the continuing engagement of your community.

You can read more about promoting your bookshop in **How to Start and Run a Bookshop**.

Remember that publicity and marketing can be very time-consuming if they are to be effective. You may need volunteers to help, but if you can find experienced marketers/PR people/social media specialists, choose them over someone who might be enthusiastic but unskilled.

Give volunteers guidelines if necessary; once something is on the web, it never goes away.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Booksellers Association Bookshop Search. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Join the BA, Bookshop Search, Member Services, Campaigns, BA Events, Industry Info, and Member Shop. Below the navigation is a search bar with placeholder text "Search...". The main content area features a banner with a mug that says "BOOKS ARE MY CUP OF TEA". Below the banner, there's a message welcoming visitors to the Bookshop Search page and instructions for finding local bookshops. A map of the UK with numerous orange pins indicating bookshop locations is displayed. A search bar at the bottom of the map shows a query for "bookshops within 5 miles of E7".

Make sure you take advantage of the BA's tools to promote your presence such as Find Your Local Bookshop **booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch** and Caboodle **caboodle.nationalbooktokens.com/booksellers**

The screenshot shows the homepage of Caboodle. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, How Caboodle Works, Local Offers & Events, Competitions, Caboodlers' Corner, Sign up, Log in, and a search bar. Below the navigation is a teal header bar with the text "Caboodle: local marketing for bookshops". The main content area features a small image of a bookshop interior, a paragraph about Caboodle's rewards programme, and a "Bookseller registration" button. There's also a link for "Already a member? Log in.". A sidebar on the right contains a section titled "More information for booksellers" with a "How Caboodle works for consumers" link and a note about Caboodle encouraging bookshop loyalty.

## Beyond books – ways of involving your community

In your planning process, you will have set a direction for your enterprise, and therefore the nature of community engagement and side projects you get involved in will depend upon that direction. But here are some ideas for events and engagement – remember that grants may be available from local authorities, charities or patrons to support community engagement. You might also find it useful to read the BA's guide on **Community Activism**, which explores in more detail how to engage and influence your local community.

- Build relationships with like-minded **local groups**. This could include environmental groups and wildlife trusts, reading/writing groups and libraries, local history societies/National Trust local associations/nearby historic properties/museums, art and art history groups, women's festivals, sports clubs, photographic societies... the list is endless. Can you offer events or discounts which you share with them or promote to them? Build loyalty and a sense of ownership by offering them something special, at the same time meeting your community aims.
- **Rent out or donate space** for community groups and enterprises, if your premises allows. This can be a big source of income, but by allowing small groups (such as reading groups or networking groups for disabled or older people) to use the space for free, even if it is just a table within the shop, you will build loyalty. If you have a café, consider discounts.
- Set up your own **groups to support literacy and reading** – from book/poetry groups to creative writing groups to storytimes for local mothers with toddlers.
- **Local care homes** can benefit hugely from free events offering storytelling, poetry reading or oral history sessions.
- **Schools activities** are an important aspect for many bookshops. Be aware that many state schools have very limited funds for attending events, so it can be helpful if you can go to them with author visits, story times,

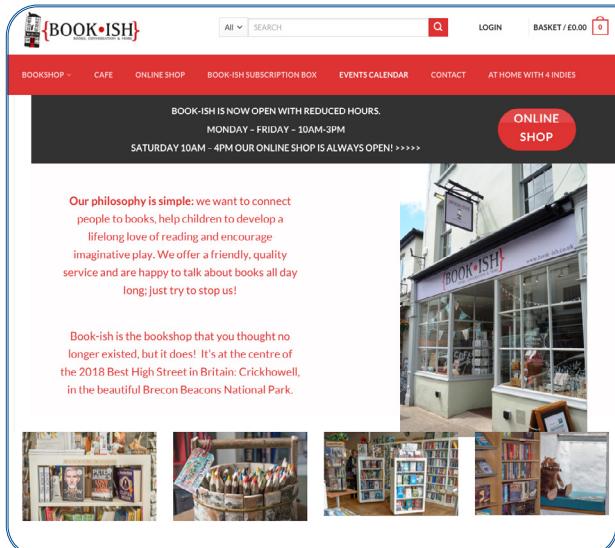
boxes of discounted books, World Book Day engagement, book festivals – but of course, some groups may also come to the bookshop. If you have expertise in your team, can you curate reading lists for particular age groups, or offer special evening events for teachers to come and browse new stock over a glass of wine? Moon Lane Ink, for example, has a specialist sister enterprise, which provides a huge range of school engagement activities, including literary festivals bringing a range of authors from diverse backgrounds into schools, plus secondary school enterprise days when pupils can set up micro-enterprises.

See: [www.moonlaneeducation.co.uk](http://www.moonlaneeducation.co.uk)

- **World Book Day.** Go to the website to see the big range of resources, special £1/€1.50 books and event ideas offered by this annual book celebration aimed at children and reluctant readers: [www.worldbookday.com](http://www.worldbookday.com)

- **Neighbouring businesses and the wider town** can be a great source of ideas and comradeship, as well as a chance for shared events. Joint promotions might be possible – are your cinema or theatre showing book-related productions, does the local restaurant have a theme or would share in a cookery author event? Once you are established, you might be able to develop a high street-wide event such as a late Christmas opening, music or literary festivals during tourist season, perhaps focusing on famous names or happenings associated with the area. (Make sure you have the resources to carry these off successfully, however, as they can be very time-consuming.) Talk to other bookshops and network via the BA to get ideas. For example, Welsh bookshop, Book-ish, although not a community enterprise per se, is well known for its town engagement, bringing together

Crickhowell's businesses and people to win High Street of the Year ([www.book-ish.co.uk](http://www.book-ish.co.uk)).



provide specially signed copies unavailable elsewhere/give an exclusive talk such as their literary relationship with the area/attend your opening party which will in turn promote their books? In time, they might commit to being involved in a longer relationship such as Kett's Books' One Community, One Book.

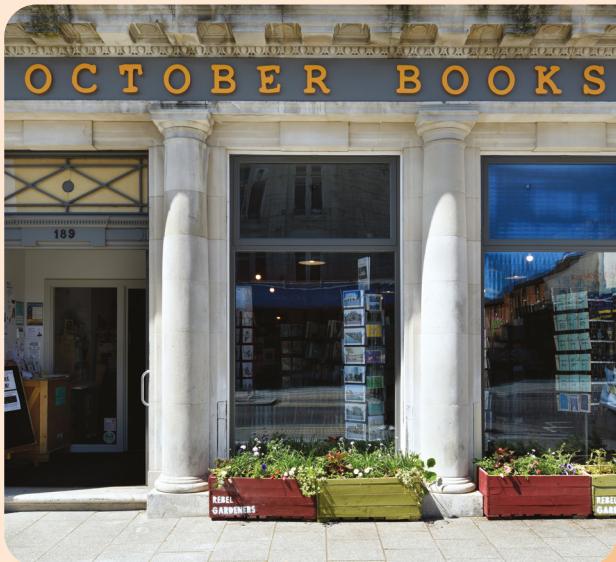


- **Business forums** such as chambers of commerce or other local business support organisations, the mayor and town councillors and other local influencers – keep them in touch with your plans and invite them to opening and ongoing events. They may be able to help you with ideas, information and grants.
- **Existing local events** – find out who organises them and provide a book stall for others at literary or town events and festivals, Christmas shopping events etc, some of which may be beyond your immediate locality.
- **Local authors.** Ask around – or ask the publishing reps – if there are any well-known names living nearby who might support the bookshop, as patrons who visit regularly or who might give a reading or attend an event, even when they are not on a book tour. If you're taking over an existing bookshop, pick the proprietor's brains before they vanish to retirement. There may also be smaller-scale local authors who can talk about topics specific to the area and will be very pleased to be invited to speak at an event and will bring in friends and family to the bookshop. Follow authors on Twitter, Facebook etc. Some authors will be happy to donate time to a worthy community enterprise, but you should always find the mutual benefit – can they

- This applies to **other authors** too – you never know who might be pleased to support you, even if they have no obvious connection to the area. Promote them on social media and they may mention your bookshop to their many followers. Attending BA networking events may also be a chance to meet publishers who in turn might push their authors in your direction.
- After you have been up and running for a while, you could hold **further town meetings** to look for ideas about future development, particularly if you are thinking of expanding or changing your premises. Remind people of opportunities to get involved.

Once you are established, you might be able to develop a high street-wide street-wide event...

# Case Study



## Clare Diaper, October Books, Southampton

October books was set up in 1977 and registered as a workers' co-operative in 1981. The bookshop moved premises in 2018 and took the opportunity to relaunch its role as a community bookshop and hub.

"We've got a very strong local community base," reports Clare, a co-op staff member. "Even after 40 years there are still people around who supported the shop from the start and there's vast supporter base locally. But we don't necessarily appeal to the wider city of Southampton, so we are working on a vision for achieving that."

"In 2018, things had wound down a bit with fewer events, less use of our space and rent from a private landlord which was becoming extortionate. We wanted to provide space for community events and our old shop had filled up with 40 years of clutter. During several community events, we explored what a radical community bookshop could look like for the 21st century. We amended our rules to allow customers to become members and participate in the governance and management of the co-operative, alongside workers.

"We'd already handed in our notice in the hope of finding cheaper premises when a former bank building further along Portswood Road came up for sale. We held more events to discuss whether we should buy it – would it be crazy? We asked for pledges of financial support and raised over £400,000, much of it from local people and partly with a loan from Cooperative and Community Finance towards purchase and renovation." The latter organisation provides advantageous loans for the co-operative and social enterprise sector.



*"It was so lovely when we put the windows in and the once-forbidding bank building opened up and became inviting." Local people got the message: on the day of the move, they formed a human chain along the street and moved 2,000 books between them. "People were getting off buses and joining in, local shopkeepers offered hot drinks – we were overwhelmed with the support. The story made it into The Guardian and then to The New York Times and Washington Post and even got coverage in China!"*



October Books sells a range of eco-friendly and ethically sourced food, toiletries and cleaning products, as well as locally-made gifts, alongside a carefully curated range of books including best-sellers and titles which reflect the shop's ethos. "We are as inclusive as possible with stock," Clare says. "We hold bring-your-own book club where people can share ideas, be inspired or made to think. They don't have to buy a book every month, but it gives us ideas about what people are reading."

Room hire is a big part of the community presence. "We have a room which seats 40 people, a smaller one-to-one room, a kitchen and a disabled toilet. We are starting to pick up a range of users, including a pop-up café, film evenings, Quaker meetings, choir practices and yoga classes. We charge a small rent to hire the space, which is depends on the use," says Clare.

"We'd love to offer use for free to some groups in time. If the bookshop was in financial need, we might consider hiring space out to a more permanent tenant. The leasehold of the upper floor was sold to a local homeless charity, the

Society of St. James, and we have 11 former homeless people living there. Some of them have become customers at the pay-as-you-feel pop up vegan café when it is operating."

*"The bookshop has five workers who are permanent but part-time as well as several temporary staff and we are building up our volunteer numbers, with 12 who help on a weekly basis. Volunteers and staff sign up to a code of conduct, reflecting our values of social responsibility and social justice. Everyone understands what we do and the dedication that's needed. Our main income is trading income, and traditionally we have not relied on grants or external funding. We cover our costs from what we sell and room rental."*

# Case Study

The wider customer membership meets quarterly and can have a say in what the enterprise does, influencing the goods and services it provides and its ethical purchasing policies. The day to day finance and management lies with a committee of eight people, which meets monthly. "Decisions about the complexities of the work we do would be too difficult to transfer to the wider membership. The committee has staff and members' representatives and investor representatives. There are also working groups, formed from our members, one focusing on community engagement, one on finance and one on building maintenance and repair."

*"Our constitution is rather out of date now, it's from the 1980s and says we sell 'books, magazines and pamphlets'! But we are working on a new vision statement and we want to define the social value we provide – what we do, our membership base and what we provide through the building we own. It will allow us to measure our social impact better."*

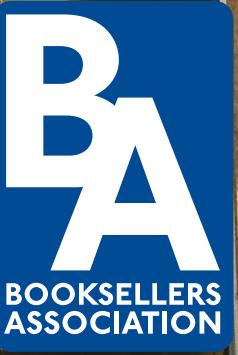
The bookshop team are doing this with the help of the Community Business Trade Up Programme, run by the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) in partnership with Power to Change. The Programme provides development training for social enterprises.

## In our experience:

- "It is important to have a conversation about **your vision** in the development phase. You need to have something to refer to, so that one can ask whether something you propose to do refers to our original vision."
- "**Take your time in setting up.** Make sure the core team work well together and have the skills and dedication to take the project forward. Particularly, think about money – do you have people who understand finance? We spent so much time unravelling financial aspects that could have been better set up in the first place. If the finances don't work, you don't have a community business."
- "**Listen to the community.** Use open events to get local people to have their say and consider where and what time to hold events so that you can draw in different audiences. Stop and think about every task: how can we involve the community? When we set up the new shop, we had people come in to help decorate, and to clean up the old shop.

We hold bring-your-own book club where people can share ideas, be inspired or made to think. They don't have to buy a book every month, but it gives us ideas about what people are reading...

## Notes



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