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Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anybody currently in the process of thinking about how to find a sustainable business model for supporting their parks in perpetuity, and who is therefore thinking about starting a Parks Foundation in their area.

It will provide you with a clear outline of what a Parks Foundation can look like and achieve, guides on governance, funding and other practical questions, as well as case studies from organisations within the Rethinking Parks programme to help understand how to adapt this innovative way of supporting parks to your own area.

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About Rethinking Parks

Rethinking Parks is a £2 million programme funded by National Lottery Community Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Nesta. Rethinking Parks is funding and supporting 13 organisations to develop innovative

ways of managing and financing the UK's public parks to make sure they are sustainable and are run more impactfully for their local communities.

About Nesta

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Rethinking Parks



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1 Introduction

Public parks play an important role in people's lives. They are valued for many reasons: as a place to exercise and play sports; as somewhere to take a break from urban life, for unwinding and connecting with nature; and as a social space or a venue for events. Free to everyone, they are widely used:

- 57 per cent of all adults use parks at least once a month or more
- 70 per cent of people aged 25 to 34 use their local park at least once a month
- 90 per cent of families with children under five had used their local park in the previous month.¹

Our public parks have a rich history. They are a vital ingredient for compassionate and community-centred urban development. From the first publicly-funded park in Birkenhead to the groundbreaking Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, they continue to evolve and offer many possibilities for the future. Public parks across the UK provide essential oases of green breathing space that is particularly valuable in pressurised urban areas. Research suggests that they also offer significant health and wellbeing benefits.²

But due to demand placed on local authorities' budgets to support statutory services such as social care, non-statutory services like parks are facing budget cuts and are in risk of decline. The increasing demand placed on land for housing and development is also a risk factor for parks.

If parks are to remain a vital asset for future generations, free for all to enjoy, we need to develop new ways of running them that tap into the right mix of skills, support and funding that can make them sustainable.

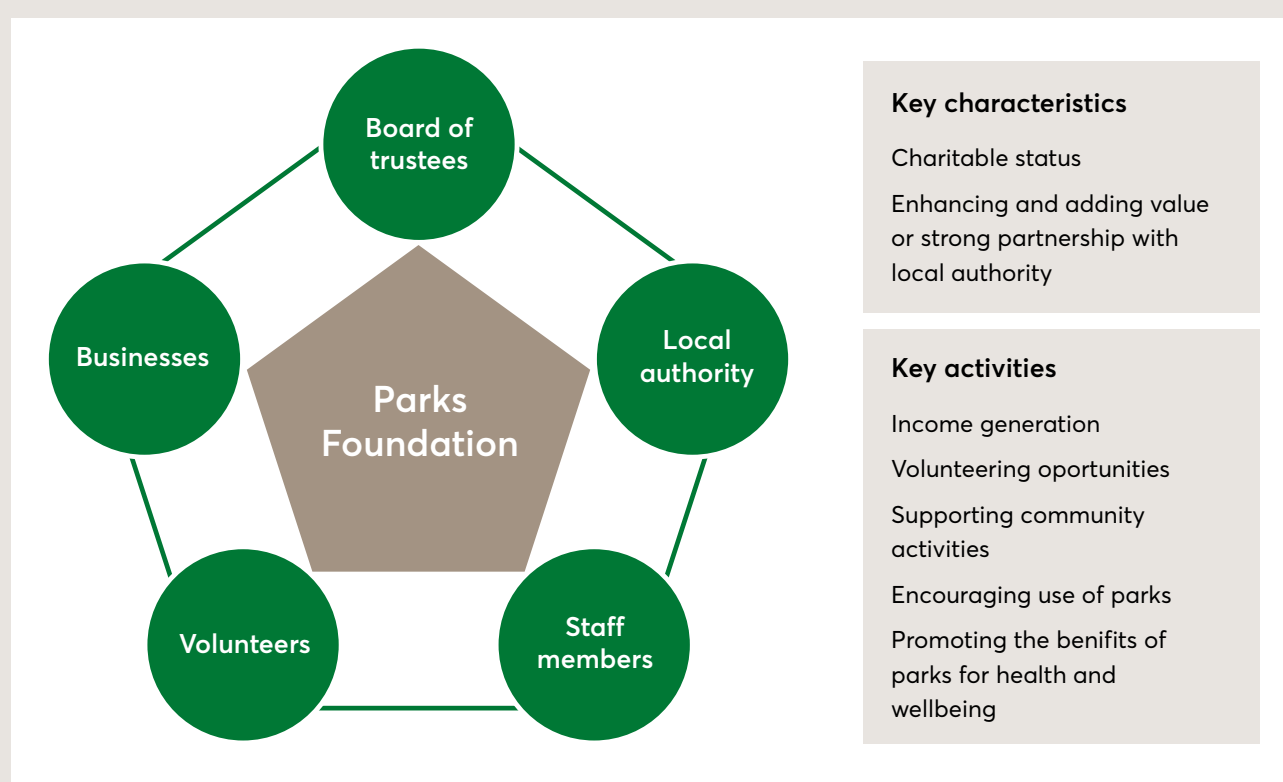
Since 2014, the Rethinking Parks programme has been funding and supporting organisations to develop innovative ways of managing and financing the UK's public parks. From community empowerment to data collection, the programme has supported a total of 24 teams that have all tested and trialed new ideas to work out how best to enhance parks and green spaces as we know them and be less reliant on core government funding.

Parks Foundations in particular show potential to tackle this challenge, and have been a successful part of the programme since we first supported Bournemouth Parks Foundation in 2014. This is now a financially independent charity, delivering innovative fundraising campaigns with total annual revenues of over £100,000. It also manages a new community cafe, runs physical and mental health wellbeing walks and free yoga sessions, and regularly raises funds through grants or crowdfunding for new additions to its parks.

This guide is based on the experience of Parks Foundations that the Rethinking Parks programme has worked with in varying ways – in public parks, with Love Leeds Parks, Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive), Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park), and Bournemouth Parks Foundation, and with one National Park, The Lake District Foundation. We hope these examples will provide some inspiration to those who are considering whether the model is right for them.

2 What is a Parks Foundation?

Parks Foundations are independent charities that support parks with time, expertise and funds.



As you can see from the diagram above, they provide an open platform for collaboration between all those interested in public parks. Parks Foundations act as a facilitator, helping parks managers and communities – and the parks they care for – work together to release their full potential.

Parks Foundations focus on 'additionality' – in other words, they bring extra benefits to a community space rather than just providing basic maintenance or upkeep, which would remain a local authority's responsibility. This could be running creative activities in parks, encouraging more diverse visitors, fundraising, maintaining a space above the general standard, working with groups to improve planting and habitats, or running community enterprises.

They are not the same as a trust that owns or manages parks and greenspaces – they do not necessarily hold or control any land. Whilst some Parks Foundations' charitable objects state that they could manage green spaces, this is not their primary vision. They do not replace existing friends groups for individual parks or other community led efforts, but support them and provide a place for collaboration and creativity.

This is an important point. Indeed, as a report on public donations in parks and greenspaces from the University of Leeds noted, it would be difficult to tap into public support of time and money if donations were used to fund general maintenance rather than additionality.³

Fundamentally, the goal of a Parks Foundation is to help a range of parties collaborate around a common desire to make parks wonderful places for local people to use. Parks Foundations bring these diverse skills into one place and support fundraising and income generation, community outreach and volunteering with the express aim of making parks better places to 'meet, play, learn, grow, breathe and enjoy nature together'.⁴

They are not encumbered with other priorities: they are fully focused on supporting public parks to thrive. They are not designed as political vehicles or community campaigning groups, as this would fundamentally undermine them as a common space. A strong Parks Foundation would help focus resources and energy on the importance of public parks.

"The love of parks and the spirit of community prevails, so everything we do would work somewhere else – it's just the impact of each activity that may vary. The key is to talk to people, know your patch and listen and experiment – if you do this, you'll work it out."

Michael Rowland, co-founder of the Bournemouth Parks Foundation



Bournemouth Parks Foundation

The History of Parks Foundations

The Parks Foundation concept originally emerged in the USA, where it is dedicated to developing and protecting parks as dynamic centres for urban and rural life. From the sunny coast of California to the bustle of New York, the country counts multiple Parks Foundations enhancing the local community life.

Parks Foundations in the USA

The model is now well established in the USA, and is represented by a National Association of Parks Foundations, which acts as a knowledge hub for the sector.

Each has a unique character shaped by local circumstances and priorities; this ability to customise is one of the advantages of the model. The City Parks Foundation in New York, for example, delivers free arts, community and sports events and environmental education classes to thousands of people in 350 parks, enabled by volunteers, cross sector partnerships and a strong fundraising strategy.

In Phoenix, donors can 'adopt a trail', enroll in a park stewardship program or become a member. In Seattle, city dwellers can even donate their car or other vehicles to support their local Parks Foundation. The donated vehicles are then auctioned by careasy.org, and all proceeds are then transferred to the Parks Foundation.

Parks Foundations have now made their way to the UK. In 2014, Bournemouth Borough Council was awarded a grant from the first Rethinking Parks programme to set up a Parks Foundation. Leeds City Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, Bristol City Council and Bath and North East Somerset Council have now also embarked on the process of setting up their own version of a Parks Foundation – all in a way that will suit their own area's unique character and circumstances.

Case study

Bournemouth Parks Foundation

Key stats

Number of parks covered: 160

Number of volunteers: 45+

Number of trustees: 7

Fundraising through: online, cash, cheque, legacies, crowdfunding, contactless donations, text, grants

Recent successes:

- Parks in Mind (developing a volunteering programme to improve people's physical and mental wellbeing)



- Fundraising for projects in parks (e.g. aviary, doggy drinking fountains, park improvements)

In 2014, **Bournemouth Parks Foundation** became the first Parks Foundation operating in public parks in the UK. On one hand, the Parks Foundation has been a **national innovator**, with local authorities and cities replicating what they've done. But this also meant that, at times, there were few places to go for advice or guidance – one crucial source of support throughout the setup process was the local Community and Voluntary Service (CVS).

The Parks Foundation has charitable status – this was essential for their desire to tap into donations, Gift Aid, legacies and grants. It also gave independence from the local authority, and 'the ability to chart the future' as it wished. The CVS initially helped with creating objects and articles when registering the charity.

Networking has been vital. Bournemouth Parks Foundation works, in various forms, in partnership with the Council, Active Dorset, other local park authorities, funders, GP surgeries, local businesses and more. Representatives from the Parks Foundation also take the time to attend **events** with other charities and local businesses, and have spoken at events run by Rotary Club, the Women's Institute, Soroptomists and more. They currently don't run their own events, however, as they can have a low return on investment.

The **board of trustees** brings in a wider base of skills and knowledge, and provides governance and advice when needed. Trustees were chosen due to these skills, as well as through recommendations from colleagues

and friends. It was important to the Parks Foundation that the board was local and non-political.

They also wanted to **demonstrate impact** early on in their development. Decisions were made to 'grow reputation and name'; press releases and leaflets with the Bournemouth Parks Foundation logo meant they were able to point to a track record. Getting **brand recognition** on physical sites was also key: in cafes in parks, or on work vans. These achievements were then shared on the **website**: alongside this a flexible **communications strategy** is created and updated each year. Small wins were also useful: doggy drinking fountains, for example, were a highly visible and a big hit with regular canine visitors.

As for what the Parks Foundation is proud of, there's plenty to choose from. They were the first Parks Foundation in the UK operating in public parks and the first charity to systematically test outdoor contactless donation units. They've delivered huge projects (including one worth £300,000), funded through community donations. They've also progressed from a charity generating £20,000 income in its first year to £195,000 by the end of year four. And their ecotherapy project supports 30 people per fortnight to improve their physical and mental health.

Ensuring **financial sustainability** as an independent charity is the Parks Foundation's next challenge alongside *"always getting better at everything we do."*

3 What can Parks Foundations do?

Parks Foundations are collaborative platforms: they work with local businesses, communities and landowners to protect, preserve and develop parks. This can incorporate any number of fundraising and income-generating activities, as well as supporting community groups and volunteering projects that take place in parks themselves. To function, Parks Foundations do not need to take on ownership or overall management of public parks.

The case for Parks Foundations

Parks Foundations open up new options within financing and funding. Unlike other existing bodies they are solely and completely focused on additionality and quality improvement for parks. They also enable government bodies, funders, local councils, and communities to work together towards common goals.

Bournemouth Parks Foundation, for example, has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds through support from donors, grants, individual donations and crowdfunding: £300,000 to rebuild a bird sanctuary, £20,000 to help rebuild a run-down Victorian shelter and a further £2,000 from a single contactless donation point; The Lake District Foundation raises an average of £1,000 per month from voluntary car park donations.

A Parks Foundation acts as a focal point, making efforts and actions around parks less dispersed and more focused.



Love Leeds Parks

What can Parks Foundations do?

Significantly increase options for finance, funding and support by:

- Ringfencing income raised and using it entirely for the benefit of parks in the long term
- Raising money through donations and increasing value by 25 per cent through Gift Aid
- Applying for grants from organisations that can only give to charities
- Accessing a range of charitable benefits, such as 80 per cent business rates discount and exemption from VAT for advertising (see page 40 for more information)
- Generating income from a broader base of sources, including trading, legacies and philanthropy.

Provide a clearer focus on the value of parks through:

- Demonstrating transparency and accountability, to show additional money is going directly to parks
- Developing a coherent and up-to-date digital presence or 'face of parks', strengthening awareness of their importance and of activities taking place
- Creating an independent space to capture and highlight the importance of parks, including wider benefits such as mental health and wellbeing.

A space for collaboration that offers:

- A shared platform or common space for those who want to address the challenges specific to parks
- A shared platform to influence the future direction of parks collaboratively between community, business and government stakeholders
- An organisation that can attract and work with a cross section of interests to cover areas from conservation to play to mental wellbeing
- The ability to work more effectively with parks that do not yet have an active friends group
- A vehicle where unconstituted community organisations can go for advice, and a friendly platform for applying for parks related grants.

Give greater scope for non-commercial activity by:

- Choosing to run otherwise less viable facilities like community cafes
- Having flexibility and nimbleness in procurement and cost control
- Adding in-kind value not just financially but also through community engagement, creativity and ownership.

Making it happen

To realise the benefits above, work within Parks Foundations can take a number of forms. Some examples from the Rethinking Parks programme give a feel for the range:

Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation is working with Sport England on a pilot designed to increase the number of events and volunteering opportunities taking place within their parks.

Bournemouth Parks Foundation runs a wide range of events including free yoga sessions in their parks, is developing volunteering opportunities explicitly designed to improve mental and physical health, and has started to install pet friendly drinking fountains across the town. They have utilised traditional fundraising means, such as cash and online donations and legacies, but are also trialling contactless donations in various sites, crowdfunding campaigns and are running two community cafes to increase unrestricted income.

Love Leeds Parks is focused primarily on fundraising for parks, including through business donations, cash donations in park cafes, shops and visitor attractions, and the sale of branded merchandise. Funds raised are then distributed, through a grants scheme, to support community-led projects in local public parks and green spaces.

The Lake District Foundation, which raises funds to enhance the National Park area, is trialling contactless donation hubs, non-compulsory car parking donations and plastic bag taxes across the area. They also run an 'in memory' sponsorship scheme, national and international business sponsorship schemes, and a Christmas gift scheme. This Christmas, individuals had the opportunity to sponsor items used by rangers such as gloves, boots, wheelbarrows or spades. They are also increasingly working to coordinate local partnerships to collaborate around new opportunities.

Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park) is developing a project where 'Your Park Rangers' will work with local communities to co-create a vision for their local park and achieve it by engaging volunteers and local groups. They will also meet local need by delivering specialised sessions for vulnerable members of the community to improve their health and wellbeing.

4 Is a Parks Foundation right for us?

A Parks Foundation brings stakeholders together to focus on a common, shared purpose. Local authorities and friends groups may already be doing some of the activities described above as part of their usual work; the focus of the Parks Foundation is to catalyse the assets available, drawing the strands together to make more impact on parks through connection and collaboration. As well as being a dedicated and trusted charitable body, Parks Foundations can be seen as new operating models, focused on accelerating much needed creativity, innovation and additionality to the existing parks and green spaces sector.

In the UK, there is a well established network of friends groups, friends forums, and networks for local authorities and contractors operating in parks. A new Parks Foundation needs to recognise it is not being created in a vacuum, and should set out to enhance this existing network's strengths to ensure its sustainability and success.

Before setting up a Parks Foundation, you may want to consider various aspects of the environment it will be operating in – who its stakeholders will be, for example, or what political context it will be operating in. You then need to consider what strategy to put in place to best build a collaborative group in support of the Parks Foundation. We have put together a checklist in the tools section on page 35 to help you consider whether you want to set up a Parks Foundation in your area.



The Lake District Foundation

Case study

Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park)

Key stats

Number of parks covered: 200 across Bristol and Bath

Number of volunteers: 500+

Number of trustees: 12

Recent successes:

- Development of 'Your Park Rangers', which will see the Parks Foundation work with local communities to co-create a vision for their local park and achieve it by engaging volunteers and local groups. They will also meet local need by



delivering specialised sessions for vulnerable members of the community to improve health and wellbeing

- Developing and delivering training to council staff

Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park) has encouraged people who had never been involved in parks before to use their talents within a Parks Foundation. They reached out to a 'big pool' of people with an enthusiasm for improving parks – many of whom had never previously had an outlet through which to give their time.

The Parks Foundation currently has **two paid staff** and a volunteer coordinator for each city, funded by the local councils, who also pay for office space. A **partner group** managed the establishment of the Parks Foundation, made up of stakeholders from local councils, Bristol Parks Forum, Bristol Natural History Consortium, Bristol Green Capital and a community fund, Quartet. They also have a **board of trustees**, recruited through an agency. A Parks Foundation Director with extensive experience in the charity sector is also in place.

The board was recruited after registration, branding and a strategic roadmap was put into place. Registration was done through a law firm with charity expertise, and was approved within three days. A facilitator was employed to produce a strategic roadmap, and an experienced agency from Bath helped with branding. A communications officer was also employed to create a comms strategy, which is

now almost fully complete.

Challenges included timelines: things taking longer than expected. Setting up a charity from scratch is challenging, and often new territory for councils; it takes time to get right. Making sure you have **buy-in** 'at a high level' in the council is key, both from individual council officers and individually. *"No matter how independent your Parks Foundation is, it will ultimately need to work with the council, and you will need high level support to open doors."*

For those hoping to set up a Parks Foundation, Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park) has several suggestions. **Take advice** early on from those who have set up a charity before: they will have important insight and expertise.

Engaging with other organisations working in the same area is also key: it's important to make sure Wildlife Trusts, friends groups or other organisations realise that Parks Foundations are collaborative enterprises and not a threat. The aim is to **create partnerships**, coordinating with other groups to share volunteers or create bigger plans.

The next step for the Parks Foundation is to ensure **financial sustainability** after the end of the Rethinking Parks funding.

5 How do you set up a Parks Foundation?

So you're interested in setting up a Parks Foundation – now what?

There is no definitive, set in stone way to set up a Parks Foundation. It is helpful to think of a Parks Foundation as a set of component parts, varying based on what you are trying to achieve and what local circumstances are. Many of the Parks Foundations across the UK have taken different routes or made different decisions about how to organise and run their projects.

Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation consider it important to have someone to take the lead on the journey and drive the process as these decisions are made. One of the key pieces of advice they received in early discussions with the Bournemouth Parks Foundation was to employ a project manager at the outset. They report that having someone in this role, whose sole focus was on getting the necessary steps completed, proved invaluable. Finding funding for a separate role might be a challenge, but the benefits will show in the long term.

a. Designing Parks Foundations: Working with the local authority or landowner

The decision to set up Parks Foundation can emerge from a number of different sources and organisations. But no matter where the idea originated, it is a good idea to look for some commitment and understanding from the landowner – usually the local authority – at an early stage. The landowner's consent is required if the Parks Foundation wants to invest in a space or to undertake certain activities in a space.

Aligning a Parks Foundation's work with a local authority can be a challenge, given both the latter's complexity and the fact that this represents a shift in established ways of working. It's not just about financial support – it's about creating a collaborative approach, and identifying champions in and outside of the council to make the case for something different.

Inspiration

The idea of a **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation** came out of discussions amongst the Bristol Friends Forum committee. The Parks Forum's secretary then played a key role in both making the initial approach and working with officers from the two councils over many months to get the Parks Foundation established. When the Parks Foundation was launched, and the board of trustees was appointed, he was elected as its Chair.

In **Bournemouth**, on the other hand, the Parks Foundation was established by the council's parks service; some of the council staff initially involved with establishing the Parks Foundation are now on the board of trustees. This close relationship has had huge benefits, enabling the Parks Foundation to draw on the expertise and support of the parks service without impacting its independent status.

Redcar & Cleveland's idea to set up a Parks Foundation originated from discussions between the council's parks and health services, based on the mutual benefits. This drew on both services' skills and knowledge.

How can I get support from my managers and councillors if I am a council officer?

Talk to your parks manager and portfolio holder about creating a Parks Foundation. Explain the benefits and additional funding that could be gained through a Parks Foundation, but also flag the challenges (and investment required) to get feedback and see if you could gain political support for this sort of initiative. Create an options appraisal of different funding models to present to your manager and councillors.

As a community member, how can I get support from my local authority and the wider community?

As a first step, speak to your local friends forum to ask for their support and find out if there have been any similar discussions in the past. [The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces](#) website lists friends forums and other networks across the UK.

It's important to be clear about what a Parks Foundation is and what it isn't. Set out what you think it can achieve – share this document with them. There is a risk that a Parks Foundation will be seen as a plan to take over running parks or replace friends groups, so be clear that this is not the aim. Ask yourself what a Parks Foundation could do to strengthen or support more friends groups and coordination of these groups in your area.

If you have a good working relationship with a particular parks officer or councillor, raise the idea with them. You need to find a champion within the local authority who can work with you and help you navigate through council bureaucracy.

A good understanding of the financial position of the parks service can also help frame your arguments. The message should be that setting up a Parks Foundation will help relieve some of the pressures that council officers are under, not create more work. At the same time, you shouldn't give the impression that a Parks Foundation is the solution to all their problems and should be realistic about timescales.

Be prepared for the fact that it will likely take time to win people over and find the right person to champion the idea, especially if the idea of a Parks Foundation has not been discussed before.

How can I formalise the agreements between the Parks Foundation and the council?

Memorandums of understanding (MOUs), or partnership agreements, are a good way to capture roles and responsibilities in writing. This is important – otherwise, you'll find everybody will need to be consulted at each decision point, making for a very slow process. You can find a list of things you may wish to consider when creating a partnership agreement in the tools section of this report (page 35).

Parks Foundations can agree on MOUs or a partnership agreement at different stages of setup. Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation decided that their newly recruited board of trustees would lead on negotiating an agreement with the council, whereas Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park) had a draft partnership agreement in place before recruiting their board of trustees, who then later agreed the final version. Bournemouth Parks Foundation developed their MOU once their board was in place and they'd received charitable status.

You will also need a lease agreement if you are solely occupying a building, or a license agreement if you're using a building or space for certain periods.

Bournemouth Parks Foundation works closely with the council to identify key funding challenges and projects which they can support.

The aviary in Bournemouth Gardens was in desperate need of repair, and while the council didn't have the funds to rebuild it, there was significant community support. Instead, the Parks Foundation took this on as their first big fundraising project, raising over £300,000.

They've also worked with the council to identify vacant assets in parks that could be utilised as community cafes to generate income for those parks, and the council has recently renovated a cafe in a park that the Parks Foundation both manages and generates income from.

Case study

The Lake District Foundation

Key stats

Number of parks covered: 1 National Park

Number of trustees: 12

Number of paid staff: 5

Fundraising through: online, cash, cheque, crowdfunding, contactless donations, QR codes, legacies, grant funding

Recent successes:

- Giving £25,000 to a mix of small community and parish projects focused on nature
- Raising £1,000 per month from voluntary car park donations



The Lake District Foundation is unique in the Rethinking Parks cohort in that they oversee a high profile **National Park**. Founded in 2017, they have made big strides in two years of existence: in their first year, they raised just over £100,000; in their second, that figure had increased to £465,000.

Set-up was fairly straightforward. The local public sector led the charge to set up a charity, with several bodies investing seed funding to allow for the appointment of a paid member of staff. Such public bodies are still involved with the Parks Foundation, which brings together multiple local stakeholders including the Tourist Board, National Trust, environment agency and local businesses. Their board features trustees who have a particular influence or skill, and meets frequently to discuss development and strategy. They see the cooperation of these partners as a hugely rewarding part of the Parks Foundation's development.

Marketing has been one challenge – the Parks Foundation says they were 'surprised at how much of what we were trying to do was marketing', and suggests creating a strategy for communications. Bridging the gap between **the public and the third sector** has also taken work. **Charity experience** is vital, the Parks Foundation believes: you're running an organisation for public benefit, not just to plug gaps in council budgets. Key organisational challenges such as managing growth, funding, and staying on message all benefit from staff with non-profit expertise.

Fundraising has been a big success for The Lake District Foundation. They raise donations through a variety of mechanisms – visitor giving, regular giving, crowdfunding, legacies and a lottery. They deliver partnership fundraising campaigns for specific programmes of work, and visitors can donate in return for a personalised plaque on a stile or bridge. With a number of different price points, this can bring in a diverse range of **donations**. Working on a fundraising strategy is an important part of the Parks Foundation's business plan; it's constantly evolving.

The Parks Foundation is a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), choosing not to have a membership as it 'can be unwieldy for a small organisation'. They also hold a trading subsidiary which is currently dormant but has much potential: it will allow the Parks Foundation to explore product **development** in the future.

Looking to the future, the Parks Foundation wants to focus more on climate change and low carbon work. This is part of a broader message, but also has a local focus: flooding is a significant risk in the area, and environmental issues are at front of mind for many local people.

b. Designing Parks Foundations: Trustees and legal setup, employing staff

Legal structure

All Parks Foundations will need to register with the Charity Commission. It takes between 45 days to three months to get the application processed.

A key part of the registration is for the Parks Foundation to set out its charitable objectives. You can see the objectives of any registered charity on the Charity Commission website, and the following represent some examples of the summary aims and activities as listed on Charity Commission website:

'The **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation** wants to make parks better places to meet, play, learn, grow, breathe and enjoy nature together. We will explore a variety of ways for generating new sources of funding. Building on the great tradition of Victorian philanthropy in parks, we will listen to different voices and gather evidence to understand the importance of parks and how best to improve them.'

'The **Lake District Foundation** promotes the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and cultural heritage of the Lake District by inspiring people to care for and contribute to the natural environment and cultural heritage of the Lake District and Cumbria, and by providing funding and support for conservation, environmental and cultural initiatives in the Lake District and Cumbria.'

'The **Bournemouth Parks Foundation** provides and enhances the facilities and equipping of parks and green spaces within and around Bournemouth for the benefit of the community. The Parks Foundation also aims to advance public education in subjects related to parks and green spaces and to provide leisure and recreation facilities supporting social welfare within and around Bournemouth.'

For more information, the [Small Charity Commission](#) has a guide to writing charitable objectives.

Most Parks Foundations are also registered either with Companies House as a company limited by guarantee alongside the charitable organisation, or have chosen to become a charitable incorporated organisation. Both legal forms enable Parks Foundations to employ staff and undertake certain types of trading activities. There are some minor differences which we have outlined below, but you may want to take appropriate legal advice.

Company limited by guarantee

Companies limited by guarantee have no shareholders, and no profits are distributed to those who act as guarantors for the company – instead, all profits are reinvested into the company and its aims.

Charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)

CIOs are a more recent legal form that enables charities to incorporate without registering with Companies House, while enabling trustees to have limited personal liability should something go wrong.

Model	Decreased risk for trustees	Registered with Companies House	Registered with the Charity Commission	Structure more familiar to funders	Ability to start with small income	Faster set-up
CIO	✓		✓		✓	
Charitable company	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Choosing a board of trustees

Choosing a board of trustees is an important part of establishing a Parks Foundation. Some select a board before they apply for charitable status; others register with a small number of trustees and then start to look for more. You will need at least three trustees to register, even if they only stay in that role for a transitional period whilst the organisation is set up. They will have full legal responsibilities during this period. See the Charity Commission's [guidance on the Essential Trustee](#) for further information on the role of trustees.

Some of the Parks Foundations taking part in the Rethinking Parks programme have five or six trustees; others have twelve. A balance needs to be made between the practicalities of organising larger groups and ensuring people have enough time to contribute meaningfully, alongside a desire to include a range of skills and backgrounds and to have enough people to carry out actions between meetings, particularly in the primary phases.

"It is important to consider how a new collaboration will form in practice – bringing together people with a range of varied skills, experiences, and outlooks will take careful thought and establishment of a shared purpose and vision. It may help to have Parks Foundation trustees or a chairperson who are also linked to other relevant organisations."

Sara Lom, former Chief Executive of the Royal Parks Foundation

Evolution

From the very outset you will want to bear in mind how your board will evolve as the Parks Foundation's needs change. Initially, it can be helpful to have 'doers' on your board, who help get the charity established with minimal costs. You will also need to consider whether you'd like council officers or councillors on your board and how to ensure a diversity of views and a collaborative environment.

Remember that in the early stages of any organisation there will be challenges. Choose people who can accept challenge in a positive way – everybody needs to feel they're part of something special. You may find you have trustees who struggle to attend meetings or contribute in the medium or long term: planning settling-in and roll-off periods when people are required to step down after serving a term may help to manage these situations more clearly.

As your charity develops, you may wish to add board members who have a specific role, network or influence – the CEO of a large organisation, for example, or somebody who works at a tourism board. Whatever it is, this will allow you to draw on the assets and networks of your local area, and to shape the Parks Foundation accordingly.

You should also consider the skills required for your board at different times. A mixture of skills, experiences and networks would be an important asset, as well as the ability to work together as a team.

Suggestions for board members could include people with experience in:

- Running a charity
- Grant making or fundraising
- Working with volunteers
- Marketing and communications
- Practical accountancy
- Law
- Parks or countryside management

Choosing trustees can also be an opportunity to bring diversity in skills, ethnicity and age into the parks sector. There is a wealth of experience in communities that can be represented at a board level.

Recruitment of trustees can take time, so this should be built into any initial timeline.

One of the advantages of the Parks Foundation models discussed here is that recruiting trustees is an opportunity to bring new people and skills into the parks family, each with their own innovative ideas.

Local authority trustees

Whether to include councillors or council officers on your board of trustees is a question that will inevitably be raised.

The **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation**, for example, addressed the question of control from the local authorities by establishing a steering group through their agreed MOU, where representatives of the Parks Foundation meet with those from the local authorities at least four times a year to discuss ideas for projects and to agree which to take forward. The group also provides a forum for any issues or concerns to be raised, and allows exchange of information to ensure there are no surprises on either side.

Some local authorities may be more supportive of the idea if they also have the right to nominate council officers or councillors to be on the board, giving them some degree of oversight over the Parks Foundation's activities and helping make the necessary joint working easier. (**Bournemouth Parks Foundation** has two council officers on their board of trustees.) The legal structure of the Parks Foundation offers flexibility – it could be set up to give the right for the council to nominate board members, or they could be appointed through selection as part of an open recruitment process.

However, a potential disadvantage is that a Parks Foundation with politically active local authority nominated board members would not be (and perhaps more importantly, would not be perceived to be) a truly independent organisation, potentially impacting fundraising efforts. It is important that as a charity, a Parks Foundation is non-political and is able to act independently without the perception of bias, and to make plans that are unaffected by the electoral cycle.

Careful thought is required to achieve the correct balance for your area. You may also wish to take legal advice on the rules around connecting local authority employees to charities.

Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive) sees their trustees as one of their biggest assets.

Amongst their trustees are:

- A worker from a mental health charity, who is interested in parks in terms of health and wellbeing
- The chief executive of an arts charity, interested in public spaces as 'vibrant and creative' places
- A retired police officer interested in community engagement
- The manager of a wildlife fund
- A professional fundraiser.

Appointed before strategy was created and implemented, the board was able to bring its varied skills, interests and experiences to the table to influence the direction of the Parks Foundation.

But the team also stresses that open recruitment is key – being a trustee can be a hands-on job, so you need to make sure that you're appointing people who have the time, energy and capacity to commit.

Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park) also works very closely with their board.

Initially planning to recruit six trustees, the Parks Foundation received such a high quality of applications that they eventually appointed twelve. Like Redcar & Cleveland, Bristol and Bath trustees have very different skills, all adding to the development of the Parks Foundation.

It's also interesting to note that two Parks Foundations chose to recruit their trustees at different times; **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park)** consolidated their vision, strategy and partnership agreement with the council before recruiting their board of trustees, while **Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive)** recruited their board of trustees first, working with them to develop their partnership agreement with the council and medium to long-term strategy.

Your timeline is up to you, but it will affect how your vision and remit is shaped, so it is worth careful consideration.

c. Designing Parks Foundations: Working with communities and volunteers

The UK's parks and green spaces are already supported by a large number of community groups and volunteers.

Friends groups are community groups that bring together parks users, representing their views to park managers and organising events and volunteering.

Friends forums are organisations or networks that bring together friends groups in a local area to share experiences, identify funding, raise the profile of their activities and aims, and communicate with the local authority.

As part of Rethinking Parks, Parks Community UK has been developed as an online resource for community empowerment in greenspaces, with case studies, guidance and templates. It is hosted by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, the umbrella body for the friends groups movement.

Parks Foundations can play an important role in enhancing community empowerment and volunteering in greenspaces. Community engagement is a key activity for Parks Foundations and in many cases a dedicated staff resource has been put in place.

- A strong partnership can be reflected in the Parks Foundation's governance arrangements: parks forums are likely to remain separate bodies in order to represent park users' interests. Bristol Parks Forum has played a key role in establishing the **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation**, for example, with its secretary becoming a trustee of the new charity.
- Parks Foundations work with existing friends groups through fundraising and charitable activities. For example, Love Leeds Parks are supporting a number of community groups to deliver projects through grants.
- Parks Foundations can run activities that take place across multiple parks or initiate engagement and volunteering in parks that do not yet have a friends group.

In **Bournemouth**, the Parks Foundation is running the Parks in Mind project, which creates and facilitates volunteering sessions to help improve people's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Love Leeds Parks distributed over £23,000 in grants in 2019 to community projects to improve public green space. The project's first grants round had an environmental focus following the declaration of a climate emergency by Leeds City Council in March 2019. There was lots of interest in the grants programme, and 13 community groups and environmental non-governmental organisations from across the city secured between £500 to £2,500 after pitching for funds.

Projects funded include the restoration of a heavily silted pond to make it more accessible to the community, tree planting to promote biodiversity and provide shade around a play area, and strengthening river banks in North Leeds through traditional woodcraft to alleviate flooding risk.

The money was generated by donations from Leeds businesses and park users at some of the city's busiest park sites, following a targeted community engagement and fundraising campaign. Friends of Gledhow Valley Woods, one of the most active conservation groups in Leeds and entirely volunteer run, was one of the successful applicants. Martin Calvert of Friends of Gledhow Valley Woods said:

"We are delighted and very grateful for the grant which will help us create a permanent, sustainable pond and new habitats for wildlife including newts, dragon flies, insects and butterflies. The pond can be visited by the general public and will encourage local schools to get involved in our work."

Rob Acton-Campbell, Chair of the **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park)** believes that expanding volunteering in parks *"needs the support of Parks department staff at all levels."*

In Bristol, the Parks Foundation has developed and delivered a training programme to help operational staff understand how working with volunteers can increase their job satisfaction, as well as benefiting the volunteers and the parks.

The Parks Foundation also asked them to think about how they would support or lead volunteer activities in parks, and come up with ideas for volunteer activities in their parks.

Case study

Love Leeds Parks

Key stats

Number of parks covered: LLP serves all publicly accessible green space in Leeds – 4,000 hectares

Number of volunteers: 15 volunteers contributed 60 hours of work each in the last year

Fundraising through: online, cash, cheque, bank transfer, legacies. The majority of donations have come from corporates and cash donations on park sites

Recent successes:

- Creating a bold, cohesive brand
- Developing merchandise based on this brand,



available for sale across parks and community events in the area

Other key info: Hosts a steering group with Leeds City Council, Leeds Community Foundation, University of Leeds and Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Forum

The **Love Leeds Parks** team say that one of the most rewarding things about working on a Parks Foundation has been collaboration. They are currently a partnership group founded by Leeds City Council, but are now looking at becoming an independent charitable Parks Foundation to allow for more flexibility and deeper collaboration. Partners outside of the council include Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Forum, the University of Leeds, and Leeds Community Foundation (LCF). This has created an opportunity to engage a wider audience, promoting the many benefits of parks to local communities.

Engaging the public has been a significant focus, in fact. Love Leeds Parks utilised a partnership with the University of Leeds to develop surveys and focus groups, and has also run a public roadshow, visiting community sites across the Leeds area in order to spread the message of the Parks Foundation. **Social media** has been key: individuals, businesses and civic organisations have all engaged with the Parks Foundation's pro-environmental message online. Building on this engagement, the Parks Foundation's first individual fundraising project will be launched soon.

A strong **relationship with the different partners** has been invaluable. For example, the council approached

LCF so an independent charity did not have to be set up, and with Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Forum and the University of Leeds already partnered with Leeds City Council, there were other relationships to benefit from too.

Being part of the LCF means that Love Leeds Parks do not have their own board of trustees, but a **steering group** made up of partners and stakeholders meets regularly to plan, discuss progress and decide on future priorities. In 2020, the Parks Foundation will be pulling together their own fundraising advisory board to help promote themselves to the business community.

The council has also helped in other areas. The Parks Foundation's **brand** and initial **marketing strategy** were developed by Leeds City Council Parks and the Countryside Service before the Rethinking Parks project started, with paid support from two external design agencies and a film making company.

As for **lessons learned**, the Parks Foundation stresses the importance of having an understanding of the 'significant level of resources required' over a number of years to make your project successful. They will now look to become an **independent charity**, with full charitable status, with the associated challenge of **securing core funding**.

d. Designing Parks Foundations: Resourcing and income generation

One of the benefits of a Parks Foundation is freedom – the ability to use the model in different ways, with more flexibility than in traditional parks projects. Charities can raise funds from a wide range of funders, collect 25 per cent Gift Aid and make income from certain types of trading. Fundraising and income generation is an area in which there is much potential to be creative.

Income can come from any number of places.

- From **funds and grants** from large organisations/corporate partnerships
- Grant applications to trusts and foundations
- Through **crowdfunding** for one-off campaigns, building projects or parks features
- Through **one-off visitor giving**
- Through **regular giving**
- Through profit-making **cafes, shops, car parks and tourist centres**
- From **legacies**
- Through **fundraising events, e.g. a sponsored run or dog walk**
- By **partnering with philanthropists**



Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park)

These examples from the Rethinking Parks groups below may inspire you.

Bournemouth Parks Foundation has engaged in a number of creative income generating activities. They recently launched a **crowdfunder**, to which local people, supporters and businesses can donate, to install pet-friendly drinking fountains throughout their parks.

They've raised over £300,000 to rebuild a sanctuary for rescued cage birds through support from major donors, grant funders, individual donations, text donations, regular donors and a crowdfunding campaign.

They also rebuilt a Victorian shelter with the help of both council backing and community donations, which came to over £20,000.

They are also trialling a campaign to tackle climate change, with visitors to Bournemouth town centre being encouraged to give money at contactless donation points. For every £2 donation made, a board showing a polar bear illuminates, his heart beating as a thank you gesture: this raised over £2,000 in six weeks. For this type of project, it is good to consider different ways to approach behavioural insights. [Behavioural Insights Team](#) has good resources available online.

The Lake District Foundation has tested numerous innovative fundraising tools. For the past 15 months they have trialled **contactless donation** campaigns: they are now breaking even and the technology shows medium to long term potential for income generation.

They have also switched mandatory payments for **voluntary donations in car parks**, with the tagline: 'It's free to park here, but it costs to look after the area. Please donate.' Donations are currently reaching an average of £1,000 per month.

From legacies to collection tins to corporate support, **Love Leeds Parks** are also experimenting with various fundraising exercises. Recently, they have designed and are selling mugs, badges and other Parks Foundation goodies that boosted their branding efforts and are pleasing Leeds parks users.

Getting a balanced mix of income streams

Role of local authority in finance

Experience of the current Parks Foundations (which are still relatively young organisations) tells us that the local authority will play a vital role in funding and providing support (buildings, payroll, insurance, advice, IT support, board members, etc.) for an indefinite period.

The initial investment from local government will of course taper off after the setup and establishment of the Parks Foundation, and the development of a mix of income streams – but local authorities should be prepared to see involvement as an investment that will reap many rewards in the longer term, and to provide ongoing support to the Parks Foundation in some form, as well as establishing a long-lasting partnership.

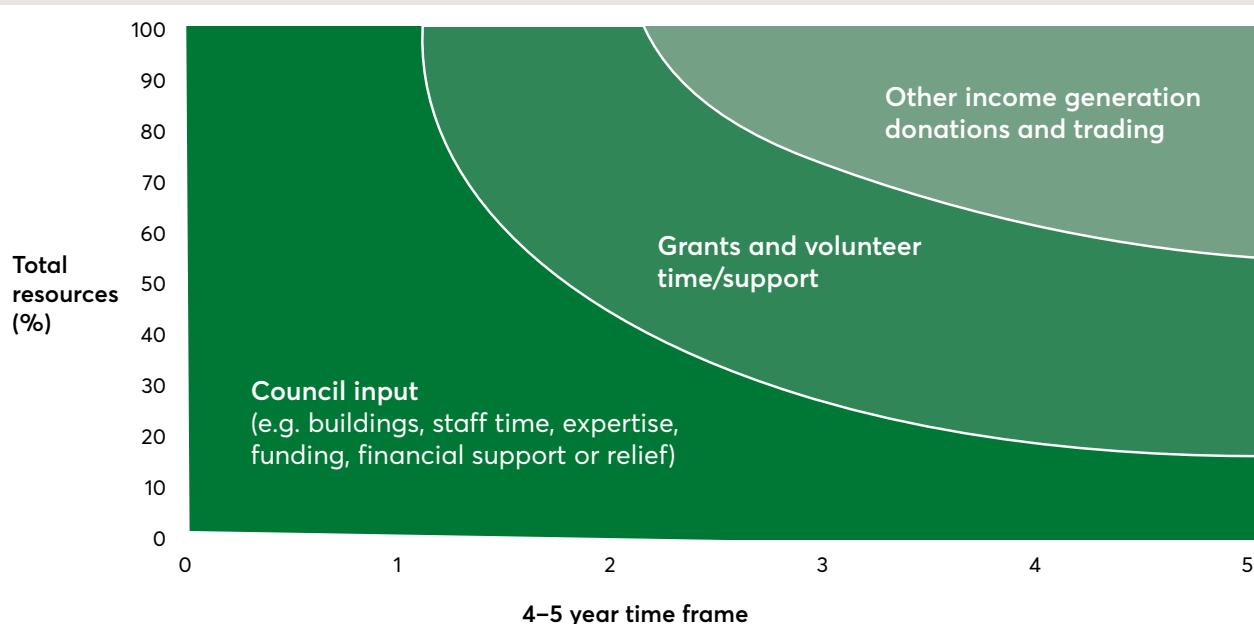
Bournemouth's board of trustees, for example, pitched the Parks Foundation funding model to councillors to pay for a Parks Foundation manager for a further two years, once its initial seed grant from Rethinking Parks had ended. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council continues to support the Parks Foundation through a peppercorn lease on its office premises. Financial returns and unrestricted funds are made over time, with reinvestment in further trading opportunities, contactless donation innovation and as partnership funding for grant applications. Social returns will grow over time as the Parks Foundation builds its network and collaborations.

This isn't to say that income generation is always straightforward, and there are numerous challenges when it comes to raising funds.

Timing

It is important to plan for the medium term and to aim to build a resilient range of income sources and in-kind support over time. Your income streams may take a while to stabilise; support from dedicated staff is essential, as they will have the drive to lead and inspire others to collaborate and create an innovative new organisation. It is likely that the council will play a greater role in funding and staff time at the start of the journey, followed by grants as you become more established. Other fundraising streams are then developed and will come into play to help fund your Parks Foundation from its first stages into a more sustainable footing.

Diversify resourcing steadily over time



In the following two examples of Parks Foundations running costs, both are based outside London and were initially funded by a grant from the Rethinking Parks programme.

Example 1

	Year 1	Year 2–3	Year 4–5
Core costs	£500 Housed within council premises so supported in house	£2,500 More if paying for office accommodation	£4,000 More if paying for office accommodation
Staffing structure and costs*	Project Manager £30,000	Parks Foundation Director c£40k pro rata Fundraising and Marketing Officer £25–£30k (could be p/t) Project Leader £20–£25k	Parks Foundation Director c.£40k Fundraising and Marketing Officer £25–£30k Project Leader x 2/3 £20–£25k Book keeper £5k (contractor)
Total	£30,500	£97,500	£104,100

Example 2

	Year 1	Year 2–3	Year 4–5
Core costs	Council provided office space and IT support for Project Manager	£22,852 IT, Office space, Insurance, Accountancy, Marketing, Meeting allowances	N/A
Staffing structure and costs*	Project Manager £32,000 Trustee recruitment £4,000 Legal and business strategy advice £7,000 Website, branding launch event etc. £31,000 Stakeholder engagement events £5,000	2 x 0.8FTE Parks Foundation Director Fundraising/marketing/communications overheads including NI, pension, payroll etc. at 15 per cent Allowance for training / staff developments costs Allowance for one-off staff costs (recruitment etc) £68,400	N/A
Total	£79,000	£91,252	N/A

Grants and funds

Some grants and funds are available to support your Parks Foundation. As the benefits of parks are quite diverse (e.g. activity and mental wellbeing as well as conservation) you should look widely for imaginative opportunities. These can be big lump sums or smaller amounts, given out by community funds, organisations like the National Lottery Heritage Fund or other funders.

These opportunities are competitive and time limited – although you may have support for several months or years with a particular grant, it won't last forever. Working out how to build up income generation within your parks or from other sources is important before grants or projects end. This is where the local authority and volunteer support can play a crucial bridging role toward longer term sustainability.

Expertise

Income generation takes time and resources, especially for small organisations. You may not have funds to employ a professional fundraiser early in your development, but having a fundraising strategy and dedicated time for trustees, volunteers or your paid staff to do this will be vital to your longer term success.

There are lots of fundraising resources and reduced cost training available from organisations such as the Parks Foundation for Social Improvement and Small Charities Coalition.

In-kind support

While some councils have provided initial support for a project manager, further staff will be needed, with benefits to demonstrating independence from the council. In **Redcar & Cleveland**, for example, a council expert in fundraising is supporting the development of the Parks Foundation, and in **Bournemouth** the team that set up the Parks Foundation was originally instigated by council officers. In kind resources can be vital particularly in the early stages, whether it is volunteer input, staff time or use of buildings or expertise - thinking in a holistic way about what resources can be tapped into is a wise way to develop support, sustainability and networks.

Test and learn

Outside of established income generation streams, finding out what works – and what doesn't – can be tested in small ways alongside more traditional forms of fundraising.

Online fundraising campaigns can be run for minimal costs, but have a much bigger impact on generating funds and awareness for your Parks Foundation. Building this awareness is vital in early stages. Being able to track how your donors hear about you, measure return on investment and tweak campaigns quickly is all part of the journey.

Bournemouth Parks Foundation was funded by Rethinking Parks to test an outdoor contactless donation unit. As part of the project, they've now installed four units, including a solar powered donation post, to prove this platform can work in an outdoor environment. Learning through observation of supporter's interactions with the units and marketing messages has been crucial in developing new communications and technology enhancements to the product.

e. Designing Parks Foundations: Communication, branding and online strategy

Many parks will not have a website or social media presence. But communicating what you're doing with your Parks Foundation is an absolutely vital opportunity for a number of reasons:

- To **engage and involve** the local community (particularly to appeal to new volunteers)
- To **promote your cause** and **encourage donations**
- To **raise awareness** of parks and parks services
- For **accountability and transparency** that will help build trust
- To **ensure understanding of what a Parks Foundation is and is not**

This can be done effectively and at low cost through online activities – developing a website, for example, or building a social media following. It is important to keep this simple and up to date. Crowdfunding also falls into this category – although its primary goal is obviously raising money for specific projects within your park, it also lets people know you exist, and communicates what you're doing and how you want to do it.

Branding

Before you set up a social media profile or design a website, thinking about branding is key. How do you want your Parks Foundation to look in promotional materials and online? What are you trying to convey? Developing a strong visual identity can help people connect to your Parks Foundation, as well as communicating a message about what you're trying to do. It can also provide a useful prompt to discuss values and vision with key stakeholders. As a charity you may be able to access support through organisations like the [Media Trust](#).

Discussing ideas in a group with a graphic designer or marketing agency could be a good start, as well as looking at examples from other Parks Foundations. **Love Leeds Parks**, for example, have put a lot of thought into how their brand can be used: they have summer and winter versions of all their information, with bold and distinctive designs that draw attention.



Love Leeds Parks

They are exploring how to use branding in fundraising efforts, too, selling branded mugs, badges, keyrings and greetings cards.



Branding brings your Parks Foundation to life, making it something friendly and approachable that the local community can recognise and relate to.

Speaking at events can also be a good way to get your brand out there. Some of the Parks Foundations discussed here have sought out opportunities or accepted offers to speak at events run by branches of organisations including socially conscious networks such as the Women's Institute, Seroptomists and the Rotary Club.

Social media

Social media is another invaluable tool for communication.

Firstly, it gives the local community a direct line to your project: they can better engage with your vision and execution, add their comments and suggestions, and develop a real sense of solidarity and camaraderie with others involved in local ventures.

There's also an additional level of **transparency** and potential for responsiveness and **accountability** through using social media: unlike many more traditional local authority projects, there's a place for people to both see what projects are taking place and how money is being spent, and to interact as it develops.

For more information on using social media as a small charity, Skills Platform's [Charity Social Media Toolkit](#) is a good start.

A number of Parks Foundations have used social media to their benefit.

Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park) uses Twitter to retweet poetry, share pictures and videos, and link to other Parks Foundations and parks. Their feed has a strong identity – they have a clear pro-environmental stance, which positions them as real experts in green space and in fostering community.

The Lake District Foundation has been trialling '[Instagram Trails](#)', which allow visitors to browse and select guided walks.

Their Instagram page is successful: it's full of beautiful photographs and interesting facts, and positions the park as a great place to be. They also find the Crowdfunder platform, promoted through Twitter, effective to run time-limited campaigns; boosted Facebook and Twitter posts are a great way to reach donors.

Bournemouth Parks Foundation used social media channels to launch a crowdfunding campaign to reach the mid-point of their aviary fundraising campaign. As part of 'Giving Tuesday', they raised over £1,670 in 24 hours by sharing video and photo content across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. They also had success in reaching people with historical parks photos and local wildlife pictures and videos.

Websites

Like social media, a clear and up-to-date website is an important part of your communication strategy – it can provide a window into what is happening across local parks that is timely, creative and engaging. It also allows you to collate information and allow the wider community to easily see what is going on.

It is also a good place to add information about the Parks Foundations model and your own Parks Foundation, and to use branding to give you a cohesive, compelling look across all platforms. Your website can also provide a platform to accept online donations and inform your supporters about how your fundraising appeals are progressing, and to be accountable on where money has been spent.

It can also be another way for anybody to get involved or ask questions about the project, with easily accessible contact forms or information available on the site.

Website builders or content management systems such as Wordpress are easy to use, even if you don't have experience of managing a website, with templates to choose from to help you create a site with minimal fuss. Make sure your platform can be edited by the team easily, and keep messages and info simple and effective. You should also have opportunities to donate directly on the website; platforms such as Charity Checkout, [CAF Donate](#) and KindLink provide donation tools you can integrate in your website.

Email newsletters

It can also be beneficial to start collecting contact information from your supporters to communicate with them on a regular basis. Think about the frequency of your email newsletters and what content you'd like to include – only send something out if you've got something your supporters would actually like to hear about! Software such as Mailchimp is simple and free to use. It is important to be aware of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) when gathering personal data so you can gather it and use it with confidence.

Case study

Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive)

Key stats

Founded: 2019

Number of parks covered: 8

Number of trustees: 5

Recent successes:

- Working with Sport England on a pilot designed to increase the number of events and volunteering opportunities taking place within its parks
- Recruiting five trustees in relevant areas: mental health, creativity, community engagement, wildlife and fundraising

REDCAR &
CLEVELAND
PARKS FOUNDATION



PARKS ALIVE

- **Other key info:** Council is seconding a community development officer to the Parks Foundation for one year
- Currently developing fundraising, business and communications strategies

Registered as a charity in November 2019, **Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive)** is relatively new. They have charitable status as a charitable incorporated organisation, and had their official launch in April 2020.

At time of writing, the Parks Foundation is young, so at present they are working on their fundraising strategy and will start raising funds after launch. They are developing this strategy with the local authority's external funding feed. Eventually, they will be distributing funds to projects or grants to benefit local parks.

They have also recruited five of the 12 possible **trustees**, each with their own skills and expertise. These include a worker from a **mental health** charity, who is interested in parks in terms of **health and wellbeing**, the chief executive of an arts charity, interested in public spaces as '**vibrant and creative**' places, a retired police officer interested in **community engagement**, the manager of a **wildlife** fund, and a professional **fundraiser**.

As well as board members, a steering group made up of council, voluntary and community sector workers are also involved in strategy. This group was created before trustees were appointed, and in fact were responsible for the interview process and recruitment of the five who are now in place. The board, however, is leading on negotiating an agreement with the council. It describes the challenges of developing shared clarity amongst these stakeholder groups on what the Parks Foundation could deliver over and above traditional models.

They're new, so there are plenty of works in progress. They are working with the council to create ways to facilitate **volunteering and social action**, and is engaged in plenty of innovative projects – they're currently working with Sport England on a pilot designed to increase the number of events and volunteering opportunities taking place within its parks.

And as for why the Parks Foundation was set up? The team wanted to 'give the community more ownership of parks and open spaces'. This is an opportunity to really revitalise our parks, they say – 'but don't underestimate the time and commitment required to make it work'.

6 Tools

1 Checklist: Is a Parks Foundation right for you, and how do you set one up?

The following checklists are designed for group planning sessions as a way of discussing how to manage a shared to do list. Information on all aspects listed is referenced elsewhere in this guide.

Pre-set up: is a Parks Foundation right for us?

- ☐ We know what the benefits and challenges of a Parks Foundation are
- ☐ We know what geographical area the Parks Foundation would cover
- ☐ We have a team who are willing to spend time working together to develop the idea further
- ☐ Both the local council and community are supportive and willing to collaborate
- ☐ We know what parks management models are available – review Womble Bond Dickinson's guide to assessing which financial model is right for your parks depending on your local authority's political appetite
- ☐ We have got a good sense of what groups and organisations are operating in the local parks sector and have spoken to them
- ☐ We have a sense of how long it takes to set up a fully functioning Parks Foundation
- ☐ Someone is clearly responsible for leading development
- ☐ We have an idea of what activities the Parks Foundation would initially focus on
- ☐ We have an idea of what the initial staffing arrangement will be like
- ☐ We have spoken to a wide range of stakeholders and there is support to progress



Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive)

Setting up a Parks Foundation: what are the different activities to take into consideration in the early months and first year of operating?

The list below shows more specific details to take into consideration. This is not a linear process.

- ☐ We have an initial plan of activities and fundraising
- ☐ We have a realistic timescale in place that allows for engagement and collaboration
- ☐ We have a team in place that will help set up the Parks Foundation while ongoing staff/secondments and board of trustees recruitment are being completed
- ☐ We know what area the Parks Foundation will be operating in and who the stakeholders are
- ☐ We have recruited the Parks Foundation delivery team (e.g. a director, fundraising officer, and marketing and communications officer)
- ☐ We know how to be an independently operating organisation (i.e. manage payroll, pension, accounting software) and processes (i.e. managing donations, how to open a charity bank account, how to set up a website and negotiate discounts)
- ☐ The Parks Foundation is registered with the Charity Commission
- ☐ We have recruited our board of trustees
- ☐ We have a partnership agreement in place between the Parks Foundation and council or landowner
- ☐ We have developed a shared and collaborative vision, mission and values
- ☐ We have created marketing collateral and channels to communicate with supporters (e.g. leaflets, website, social media)

Designing Parks Foundations: trustees and legal setup, employing staff

- ☐ We know what legal structure and governance model we want to put in place
- ☐ The council or the Parks Foundation have recruited the new team and the board of trustees
- ☐ We have established subgroups of the board of trustees to lead on various priorities of the Parks Foundation
- ☐ Our practices are transparent and communicated on our website
- ☐ All the required charitable articles and policies are in place
- ☐ If employing staff directly: we have a pension scheme and payroll set up

2 What are the benefits and challenges of a Parks Foundation?

We suggest you use this as a discussion guide for prioritisation and risk assessment to help ensure you have considered which areas may need to be addressed first and where you may need support.

Whilst each Parks Foundation will differ in numerous ways, they often share a thread of successes and challenges.

Benefits	Challenges
Flexibility – allows new ways of working and looking at social issues	Traditional council or local authority structures struggling to deal with rapid change
Parks Foundation could offer training to councils in new areas, for example volunteering	
Getting new expertise and experience into the parks sector	Having the right mix of skills amongst a board of trustees and staff members, especially as a small organisation
Ability to focus purely on charitable objects, working on a plan to make parks better without getting blown off course by complaints or politics	Bringing a representative group of people together who will work collaboratively and happily together, with give and take
Ability to recruit volunteers who wouldn't traditionally volunteer for the council	Volunteer recruitment
Facilitation of partnerships	Confusion around roles in both pre-existing and new organisations in the same space
	Lack of control when working with councils or local authorities
Independence - the freedom to make choices with less constraint than in traditional models, for example procurement	Navigating political landscape whilst trying to remain neutral
	Amount of time spent setting up a charity
Freedom to seek funding from a range of sources and increase investment parks – whether that's financial, volunteering, social/ environmental impact	Costs and overheads
	Ongoing income generation and sustainability

3 What are the benefits and challenges of different fundraising opportunities?

We suggest you use the following list as a discussion starter and prioritisation tool for your team to decide how to go about beginning to fundraise. It may be that you focus entirely on one area to start with, or you could try a number of things in parallel. Making a conscious choice on where to spend time, and for how long to expend effort in a given area, will be an important decision.

Whilst each Parks Foundation will differ in numerous ways, they often share a thread of successes and challenges.

Benefits	Challenges
Funds and grants from corporate partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can bring either small, medium or large income to the charity Increased awareness of Parks Foundation because of association with strong brand Encourage payroll giving within corporate organisation Tax benefits for the company that is giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often comes with requirements (i.e. specific project to be completed, targets) Time consuming to build relationships Corporate organisations have less disposable income, nowadays may be more likely to run a volunteer programme
Grant applications to trusts and Parks Foundations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can bring either small, medium or large income to the charity Can bring support to team Highest return on investment (ROI) for fundraising resource/return 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often comes with requirements (i.e. specific project to be completed, targets) Applications are time consuming and not always successful Partnership funding often required (from unrestricted income reserves)
Crowdfunding/online campaigns for one-off campaigns, building projects or parks features	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good way to communicate about a project Good way to promote the Parks Foundation Generate donations from tech users Broadens the network of the Parks Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be exclusionary for people not using technology or digital tools Time and labour intensive for the team running the campaign Crowdfunding can be risky if you have to achieve a donation target to receive donations Most likely restricted to specific projects

Benefits	Challenges
Major donors	
High ROI for time with donor Once relationship is build with donor, likely to donate multiple times	May take time to steward and build relationship with donors, especially as a new charity Can be difficult to find local philanthropists
One-off visitor giving	
Donors who may not want to make regular donations can still contribute Start to build relationship with supporters and engage in donor journey	Unpredictable for the Parks Foundation
Regular giving	
Enables a clear income forecast Unrestricted income	Need package or 'return' for donor, e.g. National Trust membership includes free parking
Profit-making cafes, shops, car parks and tourist centres	
A great way to interact with all Parks Foundation stakeholders and park users Showcases what the Parks Foundation is all about Unrestricted income	Requires initial capital investment by the Parks Foundation or council; social investors may be an options Requires volunteers or staff to run The need to consider if a trading subsidiary is required
Legacies	
Can generate substantial donations for the Parks Foundation	Unpredictable Can take up to ten years to receive a legacy
Fundraising events, e.g. a sponsored run or dog walk	
A great way to interact with all of the Parks Foundation stakeholders and park users Can generate donations for the Parks Foundation Can bring more people into green spaces and get them active	Time and labour intensive Cost opportunity may not always be met Cost benefit analysis may show that time is better spent on other fundraising channels

4 Useful guidance and information

There are lots of websites, organisations and guides to help you along your way. These include guides around accounting and employment, inspiration for social media, and contacts for organisations who can offer specialist advice and support.

Websites for each of the Parks Foundations:

- **Bournemouth Parks Foundation:** www.bournemouthparksfoundation.org.uk
- **Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation (Your Park):** www.yourpark.org.uk
- **The Lake District Foundation:** www.lakedistrictfoundation.org
- **Love Leeds Parks:** loveleedsparks.org.uk
- **Redcar & Cleveland Parks Foundation (Parks Alive):** www.parksalive.co.uk

More information on US Parks Foundations can be found on the website for the National Association of Parks Foundation: www.the-napf.org

Information on charitable rate relief can be found on gov.uk: www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/charitable-rate-relief

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces website lists friends groups and other networks across the UK: natfedparks.org.uk

The Small Charity Commission has a guide to writing charitable objectives on its website: charitysetup.org.uk/checklist/write-your-charitable-objectives

Parks Community UK has been developed as an online resource for community empowerment in greenspaces, with case studies, guidance and templates: www.parkscommunity.org.uk

Behavioural Insights Team has resources on its website: www.bi.team/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insight

The Media Trust has resources on how to develop a communications strategy: mediatrust.org/communications-support/resource-hub

Skills Platform's Charity Social Media Toolkit will help you built a social media strategy: www.skillsplatform.org/charitysocialmediatoolkit

CAF Donate can help you with online donations with several tools: www.cafonline.org/charities/caf-donate

Information on starting a charity can be found on the NCVO KnowHow website: knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-get-started-guide

For guidance and advice, the Small Charities Commission can help: www.smallcharities.org.uk/help-advice

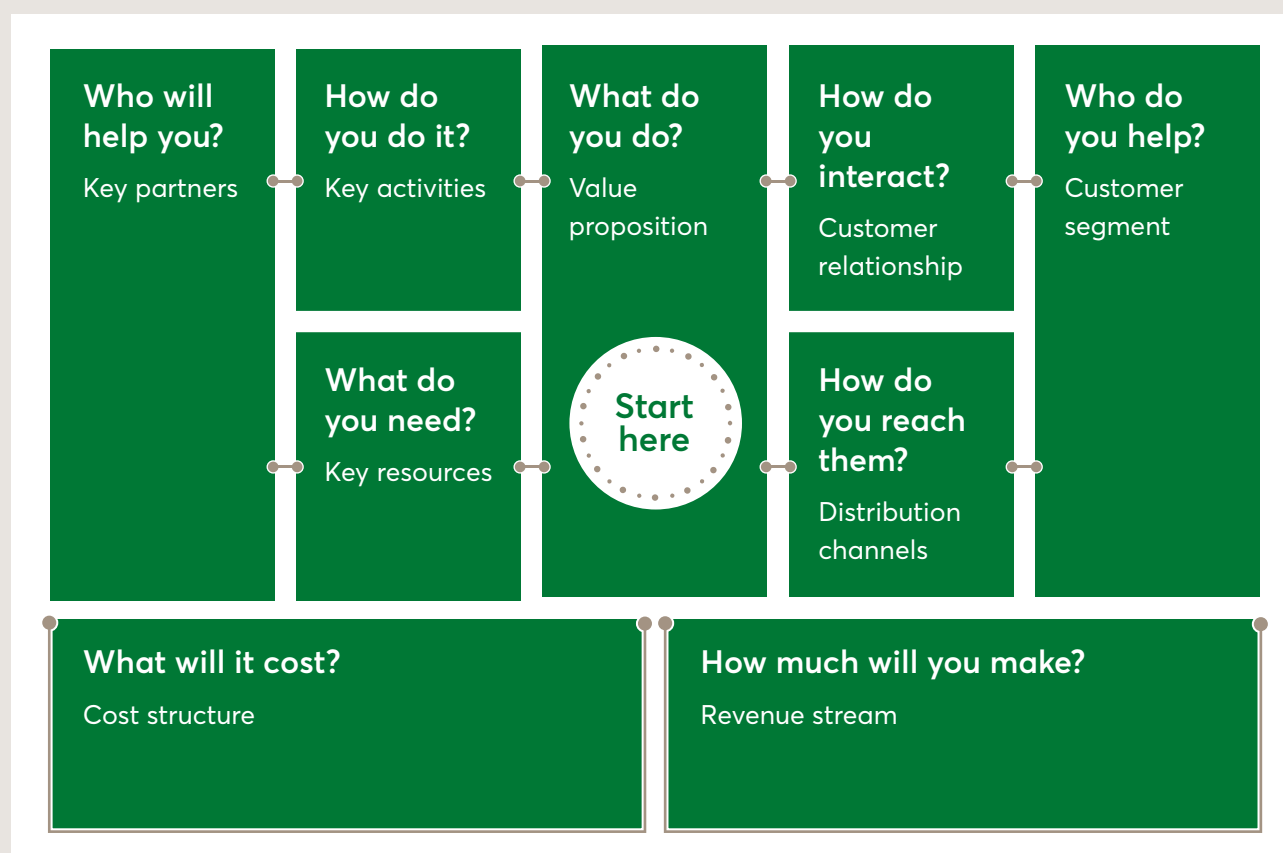
Nesta's DIY Toolkit features 30 practical social innovation tools that are quick to use and simple to apply: www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/diy-toolkit

5 Visualising your operating model with the Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas⁵ is a one page overview that lays out both what you do (or want to do), and how you go about doing it, enabling structured conversations around management and strategy by laying out the crucial activities and challenges involved with your initiative and how they relate to each other.

This visual format, first introduced by Osterwalder and Pigneur, is intended to help you identify opportunities while becoming more efficient by illustrating potential trade-offs and aligning activities.

You can use it to plan and work out how to make your Parks Foundation real. The individual elements prompt thoughts within the separate activities or resources, while the capability to have a complete overview encourages fresh perspectives on how those pieces fit together. This structure also helps to keep group discussions more focused, and brings everyone onto the same page. We suggest you use a flip chart and Post-its to facilitate a discussion around these areas and create a rough visual plan in collaboration with your team. This can then be neatened and recreated in a digital template to be used as a communication tool



Adapted from [Nesta DIY Toolkit](#).

Endnotes

1. https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/attachments/state_of_uk_public_parks_2016_final_for_web%281%29.pdf
2. <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/revaluing>
3. <https://futureofparks.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2019/07/Final-report-Charitable-Giving-to-Parks-and-Green-Spaces.pdf>
4. <https://beta.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1182217&subid=0>
5. <https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/diy-toolkit-full-download-a4-size.pdf>



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