Find out what is needed in your community

There are a range of ways to do this. Ask your friends and family members if there are problems or issues that they have seen that need a solution. Talk to fellow students, schools, community groups and non-profit groups or charities in the area. An example could be, an excess of litter along the canal side – to set up a project to support this, you may be able to speak to the council, the canal and river trust and local residents who may want to be part of the solution.

Once you have an idea of the issues, spend some time researching them. What is the history? Is it a new thing or been around a long time? What realistic steps can you take to have an impact? Is anyone else already doing something?

Think about what you can do – really!

Think about what you can realistically do. What skills do you have which could help?

Do you have any materials which will help? Do you have the time to devote to this project? How many people do you really think you will be able to help you – is it enough? When can you start? How long can you carry on? What skills and talents do you have?

Choose your project

Once you identify the issues in your area you may have a lot of ideas which could make a difference, so list them all down and then rank them in order of importance. Decide which of your ideas is most feasible, if you are doing this project with someone else, you may need to vote or compromise to find a solution everyone is happy with.

Think about which ideas will have the most impact whilst being the most achievable.
Develop a plan

The first stage of applying to run a Student-led Project is to complete the Idea Creation form: stage 1. This will help you to shape your idea into a workable project. The Volunteer team will review this and may have suggestions or questions before passing you to stage 2 when you will be asked to complete a full application pack.

At this stage you should think not only about the outcomes and benefits, but should begin breaking your project down into the smaller specific tasks. Think about the practical elements such as resources, volunteers, time and organisation.

As Project Leader you are responsible for the success of the project, and this includes ensuring that the project is safe and legal. The Volunteer team will support you with this, but it is important that you have thought about any potential for harm and complications which could arise.

Recruit your volunteers

If you haven’t already got a team of people helping then this is the time to get them involved! Successful projects often have a group of like-minded people at the core of them, your volunteers could be OU students, friends, family and community members who are passionate about the cause or just want to help.

When looking to attract volunteers it is important that you have an accurate role description where you are up front about the time commitment and tasks. Make sure you are realistic so that everyone knows what they are signing up to.

Again the Volunteer team can support with this, but we need to know you have thought about it already.

Set a budget and think about finances

Now that you have a plan, it is important to think about how much money you will need to turn it into a reality.

The Association can provide up to £250 to support projects and during this pilot we are unable to support projects using crowd funding or match funding. Often projects can be done on minimal budgets and there are sometimes companies who are willing to provide services or resources at a discount to non-profit groups or charitable events.

Make sure you list any items or costs will be associated with the project and don’t forget the small stuff. If you are looking to cover volunteer expenses then these will need to be included in your £250 budget, and you may wish to set a maximum distance for volunteers to be traveling to limit this cost.

Create a timeline

By now you are likely to have a rough idea of the length of your project, but it is important to be specific. Creating a schedule can be helping for you to keep track of tasks and may help volunteers to be able to offer to support you.

Try not to leave everything to the last minute and be realistic about what you can achieve in your time, especially if you are reliant on volunteers being available for set
hours as sometimes emergencies can occur which prevents volunteers from completing tasks on time.

**Publicise your Project**

The Volunteer team can support you by adding information about your projects to our website, social media and newsletters. As Project Leader you need to leave time to write your articles or adverts, this may include creating a hashtag for your project and we would ask that you create a logo too. Free online tools such as canva or typorama can be used to create logos on a laptop or computer.

If your event is happening in one area, make a list of local contacts such as TV stations, newspapers, blogs, magazines and radio stations which are local. Try to find contact addresses for these people and get in touch to find out if they would be interested in spreading the word for you. Initial contact can often be made on social media, tell them about your project, why you are doing it and who will benefit.

**Do the project!**

Now that you are prepared and all planned out, it is time to execute it all! Whether this is a one off event, a series of events or an awareness campaign try to enjoy yourself but keep on top of what is going on. Make a detailed schedule for the day itself and make sure that you have contact information for everyone involved; venue, volunteers, attendees, providers.

Don’t forget to stay active on social media and to take pictures too! These will be especially useful for writing your blog afterwards for the Association, and could be sent to local newspapers too!

**What next…?**

Once your project is over, it is time to reflect on what you achieved.

Where there things which did not go to plan? What could you have done differently? What went well? What was feedback from volunteers or participants? What did you learn about yourself? How did your project help your target group?

Don’t forget to take some time to celebrate and reward yourself for your efforts.