

Helpful resources

Introducing paid work to your Transition Initiative

So you have secured some money for one of your Transition projects, or you are planning to do so? This can bring great benefits in helping your group to achieve its aims, and reduce problems of over reliance on your volunteers which can so often lead to burn out.

However, it's important to pay attention to how you intend to use this money to pay people to do work for you – introducing money raises all sorts of sensitive issues, both when creating a paid role, and then when a person is actually in post.

This simple guide suggests the most important things to consider – the examples and links are from the UK but hopefully much of this is applicable to other countries.

Cheerful disclaimer! This is not an attempt to give comprehensive and authoritative advice about all the issues that can arise once you start paying someone for their work. Instead we're trying to give a flavour of what your group will need to consider, with an emphasis on the value of open, structured decision-making and the need to pay attention to both the emotional and the practical consequences of this important step. It's important that you draw on expert practical experience available locally - both within and beyond your group.



Expectations and feelings

Most of our Transition Initiatives (TIs) consist of volunteers who are not paid and who contribute their time and energy generously - if starting to pay someone isn't managed skilfully, then feelings can easily be hurt...

"Is there any point in me volunteering any more if someone is being paid – am I still needed and valued?" or "I've put blood, sweat and tears into this project, and now someone else is going to get money out of it, that's not fair" etc.

There may be expectations about who has the 'right' to be awarded certain paid roles, and problems can arise if these expectations are not met. Here are some questions you might want to discuss in your group:

Helpful resources

Introducing paid work to your Transition Initiative

- If someone has done the ground work to create a role, and apply for funding, are they then entitled to do the paid work? Or if someone has been doing a similar role unpaid for a time, do they automatically get the paid one?
- Who makes the decisions about what's in a funding application, the design of a recruitment process and job description, and then appointing someone? At the point at which key decisions are made e.g. selection decisions, salary, terms & conditions and so on, it's helpful to ask people to declare any personal interests, and step out of the meeting.
- How can we use external people to give a neutral perspective, especially if there is potential conflict?
- How might we balance the principle of equal opportunities, i.e. making paid work available beyond the networks of the existing people involved, with the cost of this, especially for short term contracts.

Then once the paid worker is in post, others can load all sorts of expectations onto this role, assuming that as the person is being paid, they can pick up all sorts of things that need doing, or are going to perform miracles!

There also needs to be clear accountability and appropriate authority for what this worker can and can't do, for example, what level of decisions can they make without consulting others, or the wider group? Often there are unstated expectations around all these things. It can also be useful to consider issues around power and rank when a paid post is introduced to a largely voluntary project.

All these issues can usually be addressed by being fully transparent and very clear about defining work roles, authority and accountability, and how paid work is allocated - ideally you establish an agreement with your core group (or managing body) about how you will do this.

This will help avoid false hopes or unrealistic expectations, and give you the best chance of finding the right person for the job, who is then gladly welcomed into the group (if they are not already part of it).



Helpful resources

Introducing paid work to your Transition Initiative

Common sense suggests that the process you use when there are charged dynamics (e.g. someone feels entitled, others don't agree, or some really oppose paid work on principle and others see it as essential) probably needs to be designed and applied with even more care and awareness, compared to when you have easy consensus.

If there are charged dynamics, you could bring in an external facilitator to help surface what's causing the charge, and see if it can be resolved. If not, it's still worth giving time to exploring potential problems and how you could pre-empt or manage them well.

Bringing clarity and transparency

Job descriptions

What does the funding cover? What are the responsibilities of the worker? What skills and experience do they need to have? Who will manage them and support them on an ongoing basis?

Your approach and level of detail need to reflect the work on offer – here are a couple of examples:

- An [informal, but well-defined job brief](#) for a short-term, self-employed activity as advertised by the TN.
- Documents used to recruit a 3 year, full-time employed manager for TT-Totnes include a [detailed job specification](#) and [an application form](#).

Pay rates

It's up to each TI to decide how much it wants to pay its workers (above the legal [minimum wage](#), and ideally also above [the living wage](#)). TT-Totnes and the TN have each set roughly 3-4 pay levels, that reflect the nature of the work, the sector (typical charity rates) and the location (most roles are Devon-based, rather than London-based for example). These pay rates are agreed by the managing boards. There are some significant differences even between these 2 organisations. Some places even offer part payment in a local currency!



Helpful resources

Introducing paid work to your Transition Initiative

Don't forget there are usually project costs (needed for the paid worker to do their work, perhaps travel expenses, equipment etc.) and also overhead costs – firstly it takes time and effort to run a recruitment process, then the worker needs to be paid, managed, supported and given direction. This can be a significant amount of time and requires certain management skills and experience to do this well, especially if performance issues need to be addressed.

Depending on their status (see below), you may have tax and (UK) national insurance implications. Ideally you have already taken these into account in your budget.

Here's an example of a way of defining pay levels based on skills, where a salary or salary range is allocated to each level:

Skill level required for role	
Many people could do this job. Some type of basic skills are required e.g. skilled admin, basic co-ordination, practical training, simple project delivery.	1
A number of people could do this job, requires some special skills or knowledge. E.g. project management, expert horticulture.	2
Few people could do this job, requires very special skills or knowledge. Significant experience and capability to manage large, complex projects and large budgets. E.g. in charge of a training programme, managing staff and resources. Senior project manager, project manager overseeing several training programmes.	3
Significant leadership role, managing many projects, broad ranges of interpersonal and technical skills, very wide knowledge base, initiate and maintain relationships at high levels in other organisations. Think strategically over a wide range of issues. Contacts, fundraising abilities.	4

Recruitment process

How will you find the right person for the job? As already discussed, you may already have someone you think is the right person for this work, perhaps they have been doing it unpaid for some time. However, it's good to be careful about making any such agreement. It sets expectations that you may not wish to follow for other volunteers, which can lead to difficulties later... "why didn't I get that job automatically, when Bob got his without having to apply?!" etc.

It can be much cleaner to run an open recruitment process, and invite that 'ideal' person to apply – of course you need to be open to finding that other candidates might be even better, if you are to avoid a pointless exercise.

In some cases, the funding application will require you to have already made a decision about who will do the work even before you know if you got the funds, and the particular skills and experience of someone you know may be a crucial selling-point, or make the project plausible in the first place.

Helpful resources

Introducing paid work to your Transition Initiative

In these cases the decision about who gets the work is made much earlier in the process, and may raise questions about the sense of running an open recruitment process if the ideal candidate is obvious. If you are advertising, you can do this in local or even national press and use job websites – this can be expensive and time consuming but has wider reach. Or you can just ask for applications from within your current TI group or local area – this is cheaper and simpler but may limit your choice.



Your choice of approach ideally reflects the type of work and the full-time/part-time nature, and takes into account the effort involved from you. For example, TT-Totnes did a national recruitment campaign for their general manager role, as this was a 3 year funded full time role and warranted the effort and cost.

Of course, local people were welcome to apply too! On the other hand, for part-time project workers for Transition Streets, they just advertised the job through free local channels and networks.

You also need to think about your interview process. All of the TT-Totnes jobs were allocated via an interview panel of 2-3 people. A set of questions were agreed in advance and applicants scored formally or informally against the requirements (per the job description). It can be useful to have an 'external' person on your panel who brings a level of neutrality, as it can be very difficult for a close group of people to choose one of their colleagues in an unbiased way.

Worker status

There are two basic ways to pay someone to do work for you. A person can be taken on as an employee (whether part-time or full-time, permanent or fixed term) or they can agree to provide services as a self-employed independent contractor. There are legal, tax and management implications depending on which of these approaches you use, and we strongly recommend that you find someone locally who can give you advice on this right at the start of the process. It's important that you understand what sort of contract you are creating and what obligations, risks and opportunities it creates for your group.

Generally, it seems sensible that a small Transition group should contract with people on a freelance self-employed basis initially, if possible, as it's simpler and easier. It's not in our scope to provide advice on this issue, but please ensure you get someone locally (e.g. an accountant) to advise you on the legal, tax and management implications of your choice of status.

Regardless of worker status, you'll want to get a written agreement in place with the worker so you are both clear on your commitments, deadlines, payments and management lines:

Helpful resources

Introducing paid work to your Transition Initiative

- Here's a simple example of something appropriate for [short-term, self-employed, small value contract agreements](#).
- And here's the more formal official [employment contract](#) used by the TN for its paid staff. When taking on new employees, it's normal to agree a probation period, and it's important to offer appropriate support and guidance during this period.

It's also a good idea to be clear about the duration of the role, and what will likely happen at the end. Will more funds be raised to continue the work? Who would do this? How far in advance does this need to happen? What if this is unsuccessful and will you know before the notice period? Will you/can you go back to volunteers?

In summary – giving careful attention to this potentially highly charged area will usually help you introduce paid workers much more smoothly, and for the benefit of everyone involved. If you can, have someone familiar with recruitment help you create your job descriptions, and design your application and interview process – this can help ensure you avoid issues which may come back to bite you later!

Want more help?

[ACAS](#) (UK) gives good advice including help by phone, and [KnowHowNonProfit](#) offers help with recruitment and management of staff and volunteers. Also see the [UK Government's](#) guidelines around pay, contracts and hiring.

Author: Fiona Ward, March 2014. With thanks to all the people who gave input.