

The robustness of your Business Plan, staff competencies, the quality and breadth of services you deliver and/or goods you provide are inter-dependent and critical to your organisation's potential to survive the economic downturn.

It is, therefore, worth asking yourself a few questions about how these could be developed to increase your chances of thriving and surviving.

- 1. *Would your organisation lend itself to setting up a trading arm?*** E.g. selling disability aids, celebratory cards and gifts, gadgets or handicrafts. Or perhaps setting up a specific business support service like financial, administrative or cleaning services? If so, free support is available from Business Link on **0845 113 1234** or at [www.businesslinkwm.co.uk](http://www.businesslinkwm.co.uk).
- 2. *Have you considered fundraising?*** E.g. running balls, competitive sporting events, raffles, street collections, sponsorship activities, quizzes, auctions etc.
- 3. *Do you have a funding strategy in place?*** It is important at this time that you do not just rely on time limited grant income. Ideally, you will want to get to a position where you are receiving a mix of practical and financial support from the corporate sector, resources from trading activity and service delivery (including commissioned public service delivery) and income from fundraising. Maximising on volunteer support will also become even more crucial as demand for Third Sector services increases as the recession bites further.
- 4. *Are you maximising on the grant income that is available?*** If not, SUSTAIN's funding fact sheets can help. Contact Helen Roberts at SUSTAIN on **0121 711 3148** or [helenr@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:helenr@solihull-sustain.org.uk). The Third Sector can also secure resources unavailable to the public sector. Can you use this as leverage to develop new cross sector partnerships conducive to supporting the development of new services and the expansion of existing ones? Could the resources you apply for be used to match fund resources from the public sector?
- 5. *Are you connected into Solihull Council's Community and Voluntary Relations Unit (CVRU)?*** They are able to offer support to voluntary and community groups and actively work with organisations to provide support with funding enquiries, capacity building and development. You can contact the CVRU on **0121 704 8564** or [cvru@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:cvru@solihull.gov.uk).
- 6. *Are you commission ready?*** There are radical changes taking place right now in the way that public services are being delivered to ensure the best possible long-term outcomes for the residents and stakeholders of Solihull. With this in mind, both Solihull Council and Solihull Care Trust are keen to engage with the Third Sector with a view to commissioning us to deliver some of their services. If you are interested in finding out more contact Claire Milican, Sector Development Manager on **0121 711 3148** or email [sectordevelopment@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:sectordevelopment@solihull-sustain.org.uk).



7. ***Are you informed?*** Every two weeks or so SUSTAiN sends out email alerts with information about the latest funding, commissioning opportunities, training, events and much more. Keep up to date by contacting Charles Rapson, Operations Manager on **0121 770 8222** if you are not yet registered or email [addmein@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:addmein@solihull-sustain.org.uk) with your name and organisation name.
8. ***Do you have volunteers working with you? Are you maximising on their skills? Could you support any more volunteers within your organisation?*** Volunteers 'add economic and social value' to your organisation and its potential to deliver much needed services, and volunteering is an excellent way of developing transferable workplace skills. This is becoming increasingly necessary in a competitive job market. Contact Manjit Johal, Community Development Officer for further information on **0121 711 3148** or [volunteering@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@solihull-sustain.org.uk).
9. ***Are you connected into SUSTAiN's 'Community Footprint', Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative?*** This is helping to bring together the private and third sectors for mutual benefit, enabling voluntary and community organisations to harness support such as advice on developing business strategies or managing your finances, attracting a small team to develop a community space, getting sponsorship for an event or activity or accessing new furniture or discarded ICT equipment for office use. Contact Martin Clarke, Business Advisor for further information on **0121 711 3148** or [csr@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:csr@solihull-sustain.org.uk).
10. ***Are there any economies of scale that can be made within your organisation, e.g. by sharing back office functions with other groups, like payroll, HR and IT?*** Would you welcome SUSTAiN collating interest in this so it can be explored further? Contact Manjit Johal, Community Development Officer for further information on **0121 711 3148** or [iag@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:iag@solihull-sustain.org.uk).
11. ***Are you maximising on the potential to work in partnership with other organisations (including the Public Sector), to generate grant income?*** Not only is this a more efficient way of using the resources you have, but it can also help to reduce duplication of effort, maximise on experience, achieve common goals and enhance your fundraising capacity as well as your chances of success.
12. ***How well are you connected to your 'clients/customers' and do you understand the market in which you operate?*** Would you welcome help in making your group more prominent to attract more interest in the products/services you provide? Contact Jayne Scarman, PR & Marketing Manager for further information on **0121 711 3148** or [promotion@solihull-sustain.org.uk](mailto:promotion@solihull-sustain.org.uk).
13. ***Are you making the most of the skills base you have in your organisation?*** Could you be providing training or consultancy services on topics such as disability awareness, business development, IT, project planning, bid writing, evaluation or financial management?
14. ***Do your staff need to be upskilled?*** Have you made the most of Train to Gain? This is available to staff and volunteers working in the Third Sector and provides free or low cost training. Contact Janet Johnson at SUSTAiN for further details on **0121 711 3148** or [janetcjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:janetcjohnson@gmail.com).
15. ***What about your staff base?*** Have you staff who have been repeatedly under-performing? If so, Third Sector Magazine, 12 November 2008 suggests that a '*reduction in workforce*' could enable you to attract people from the corporate world who have had enough of the rat race, adding that the current conditions give charities a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to recruit people with the type of essential skills to help the sector survive and prosper.