



Support to develop a lending library

If your organisation is keen to set up a lending library, ELWA, in collaboration with your borough council, may be able to support with funding for:

- The 'stock' items for hire (but also look for donations of items from local residents, trade companies and see if any established lending libraires have 'seed stock' they can offer you)
- Storage e.g. shelves, cupboards (if cannot be sourced second-hand)
- Publicity materials (purchase of leaflets / posters / banners etc)
- The online system / hire platform to manage your stock/ hires/ borrowers. This includes guidance on using the platform and help setting up your lending library on it.
- Costs to cover a part-time manager for up to 18 months. This person will be responsible for keeping hires up to date, meeting borrowers for the hire and return of items, managing the maintenance (although someone else may undertake the actual maintenance of items), responding to queries etc. A paid employee brings oversight, ownership and responsibility, although volunteers may also be valuable.
- Costs of sending your designated maintenance person on a PAT testing course and purchase of a PAT tester.

The budget, business model and operating methodologies can all be discussed. We would agree target levels of hires/ members to enable the library to fund itself over time. This will be based on current footfall and using estimates of use from other libraries, as well as relevant overheads.

Questions to answer in preparing your business model:

- What difference do you want to make in setting up a lending library?
- Who are the people you want to serve?
- What do locals want? Ask them about: Timings, accessibility, prices.

You will need to:

- Ensure your organisation has a constituted structure. This may already be set up, but if not, suggestions include CIC, CSO or Charity.
- Get public liability insurance. Note that Law Works offer free legal advice if needed.
- Get your policies in place. [Draft policies](#) are available as templates from existing libraries. You'll need to ensure all staff and volunteers are aware of GDPR requirements.
- Set up a system for cataloguing your items. Online systems include Lend Engine and My Turn.



- Set up a management system. Not just a computer system - ensure you have paper copies of procedures in case of IT failure. Not all volunteers will be confident online, so don't underestimate the power of paper!
- Establish terms and conditions of hire, including explicit mention that hirers should only use an item that they feel competent to use – if they are unsure, they should seek guidance. Upload all user manuals of items to the hire portal as a reference.
- Confirm your pricing policy and keep it simple. (See examples below).
- Be clear about hire expectations (hire, use, clean, return), and reference late fees not just in the Ts and cs, but also when the hire is made.
- Request that borrowers complete their membership in person: to sign up, they must offer photo ID and proof of address.
- Create an incident log for any near misses. These need to be recorded.
- Create a system for how/ where to store items.

Developing your stock of hire items:

You can start by asking: *What does the community need and want?* Identify what the 'core stock' is from other existing lending libraries and refine this according to which items your customer base are likely to hire. To help identify this, do some research before your library is operating – you could attend local events with a stall and ask visitors to complete a survey, share questions via your newsletter or on social media. This will also help build interest in the concept and develop your user base.

In general, avoid anything needing specialist skills to use or requiring a license or separate insurance. No hygiene items. Nothing too big or heavy to fit in a car.

Once open, your community will tell you what they want – you could have a chalk board available to add items to a 'wish list' of hire requests. You might find that users will offer some items as donations to the lending library over time. Be ok saying no to accepting donated items if you have enough or they are the wrong item, but:

- Have a list of where else items could go (charity shops, recycling centre, freecycle etc)
- Refer to the chalk board to highlight which items are requested.
- Be clear that you are not a shed clearance company!
- Establish links with local charity shops, house clearance companies and fixers to help keep items in use.

Maintenance of items:



Safety of use is a key consideration, so maintenance is required on each item before it is hired or rehired. Quarantine items after each use – have a 1-week period where they are checked, PAT tested, washed/ cleaned if needed, before being allowed to be hired again. It is useful to have a 'quarantine' shelf/ area and a 'ready to hire' shelf/ area, so you are very clear on which items are at each stage.

There will need to be at least one dedicated person available to test every incoming item and confirm it is safe to rehire, has all relevant parts available, and that it is in good, clean working order. This person would need to be trained to undertake PAT testing for electrical items (which we may be able to fund). You could add a sticker to items to offer visual confidence to people that the electrical item has been checked and approved as safe to use.

It is recommended that you keep some income aside to replace items / duplicate items as needed, and to purchase any consumables. Items should be hired with a basic supply of consumables so that all items are ready to use at the point of hire e.g. a sander - give people one new sheet of sandpaper with it and expect people to buy more if they need them. Add the cost of the consumable to the hire fee.

Hire Fees:

There are various options in determining hire fees. Some use a % of the purchase cost of the item, others keep it simple with a flat fee for similar types of items. Hire durations are a week as standard but can be longer by arrangement. Hire fees are deliberately kept low to remain affordable to all.

Model from Letchworth Garden Shed:

- £1 per week – most items
- £4 per week – items with multiple parts
- £12 per week – more costly / larger items
- £10 a year membership fee (could speak to Housing Associations to see if they would pay the membership fee for their tenants)

Model from Walthamstow Tool Library:

- 1-year membership scheme enabling borrow of up to 5 items at a time with no additional fees. Variable membership fee.
- Regular: £40/year
- Concession: £15/year for those who cannot afford the regular fee
- Sponsor: £55/year for those who want to sponsor someone else's membership
- Resident Membership: £15/year for those who live in Priory Court



- Trial Membership - £10/2 months to have a go with us
- Community Group £60/year for those who work together and need more tools (10 tools/loan)
- Community Group Sub-account £5/year extra 5 tools for Community Group
- Gift cards are also available

Getting started:

- Engage businesses to seek donations of stock items
- Explain the concept (many people will think they buy the items)
- Set targets – number of members, hires, items
- Start publicity to gain interest (and hirers): social media, on the street, at local events, posters locally
- Accept donations, but don't be afraid to let donors know that anything that is not suitable will be passed on to Freecycle/ recycling / disposal.
- Look for trustees with a particular skill set e.g. advertising, health and safety, accounting

Building a presence locally:

- Invite people to sign up to a mailing list
- Create social media followers
- Send information about your organisation to other organisations
 - local groups (WI, charities, community groups),
 - local businesses (Co-Op, repairers, DIY shops),
 - local councillors,
 - partnerships for learning (green festivals, existing repair cafes, education establishments)
 - housing associations (may have funds to support you, and tenants to access as hirers)
 - chamber of commerce, small business network, business improvement district (instrumental in shaping the town centre)
- When speaking to people, opt for conversations over a cup of tea to get to know individuals and their interests. Don't ever ask for money!! Instead, ask for ideas and advice. Be clear about what support you want. Always be open to conversations, but don't push on a closed door (noting that timing is everything and that the door may open at a later date)
- Offer training courses (funded by grants specifically for training) e.g. sewing sessions to train up a qualified sewing machine repairer, ladder handling and maintenance (yes, there is such a thing!!)
- Share your enthusiasm! Attend local events to share the word
- Have an online form for people to add their name to
- Find a good social media person – use a fun animal to draw people in!



How to generate a volunteer base

- Seek volunteers from existing repair cafes nearby to get started, they can show you how it works
- Attract people via social media and at events. Have a sign up/ interest sheet ready so you can contact them again later with details
- Put on an event, and volunteers will come! E.g. Host Big Fix/ Repair café events and encourage people to get involved.
- Contact local universities and colleges
- Get fixers on the board of directors
- Make friends at your local charity shops – ask for their PAT testers
- Find volunteers with skills that you need
- Get Health and safety people to train your volunteers
- Offer tea and coffee! Get people involved and make them feel valued
- Contact local interest groups – WI, Men's Sheds, existing traders, skilled practitioners: Facebook groups, local volunteer groups, community and voluntary services