How to Guide

Planning

active sussex

www.activesussex.org

Introduction

"These guides are based on real experiences from organisations working to get children and young people active. They highlight common challenges, share lessons learned, and offer practical tips from those already making a difference.

Every child's relationship with movement is different, and their needs can change over time. That's why it's important that, as deliverers and facilitators, we understand the challenges young people face in getting active. By listening, learning, and adapting, we can make sure every young person has the chance to take part in a way that works for them.

Sussex is full of incredible organisations working hard to create opportunities for children who might otherwise miss out. Through our Children and Young People Forum and Play Their Way Coaches Collective, we've seen just how much people want to share ideas, tackle challenges together, and support one another. These guides are here to continue that conversation.

This guide is for anyone working with children and young people – whether you're a project lead, a coach, or supporting sessions in any way. The insights and advice here can help make your sessions more inclusive, engaging, and successful.

We hope you find them helpful - whether it's a small tweak to how you run sessions or a new idea that sparks something bigger. However you use them, thank you for everything you do to help children and young people feel included, supported, and excited to move."

Andy Wright,
Strategic Relationship Manager for Children & Young People at Active Sussex.

Planning

Planning is what keeps everything running smoothly - it can make the difference between a great session and one that feels chaotic. A little preparation helps you create positive, engaging experiences that keep young people coming back. If you don't have a clear idea of what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how you'll make it happen, it's easy to miss things like marketing, evaluation, or staff training. This can lead to empty sessions, last-minute stress, or parents/carers and children feeling let down.

Coaches already have a lot on their plate, so adding funding applications, admin, marketing, and training can feel like too much. But having a simple plan in place from the start takes the pressure off, helps things run more smoothly, and makes sessions better for everyone.

Whether it's setting expectations with schools, spreading the word on social media, or keeping key documents somewhere everyone can find them, planning helps you stay on top of it all. Checking in with young people and reviewing your mission each year also helps keep sessions relevant and focused on what they actually want.

Common challenges: What can get in the way?

A new club is set up for children with additional needs, but not enough families sign up. To keep it running, the organisers decide to open it to all children. While they mean well, some parents/carers worry the sessions won't be as tailored as they'd hoped, and children might not get the support they need to fully take part.

Another club suddenly loses funding halfway through but hasn't planned for it. With no backup plan, sessions are cancelled, leaving children disappointed and parents/carers frustrated.

Elsewhere, a coach launches an after-school programme, but the details aren't clear. Parents/carers sign their children up, only to realise the sessions aren't what they expected.

All of these problems could have been avoided with some extra planning - thinking ahead about funding, marketing, and communication can save a lot of stress later on.

Solutions: How to make it work

Making time for what matters

- **Set aside time for marketing and feedback:** A good rule of thumb is to spend around 10 percent of your time on marketing and 10 percent on evaluation. A little planning each week - like posting on social media, sending reminders, or chatting with parents/carers - can really help with sign-ups and how smoothly your sessions run.
- **Train your team:** If your sessions are open to all children, make sure your team feels confident in making them inclusive. This could be hands-on workshops on adapting activities for children with disabilities or simple ways to use more inclusive language.
- **Check-in regularly:** Asking the children and parents/carers what's working (and what's not) can help you improve your sessions as you go. This could be a quick chat at the end of a session, a short survey, or a review each term.
- **Keep everything in one place:** Save time by storing key documents - like risk assessments, consent forms, and marketing materials - in one shared folder, such as Google Drive or Dropbox. That way, your whole team can easily find what they need and when needed.

Planning your sessions

- **Consider voice, choice and journey:** Always keep in mind the Play Their Way principles of voice, choice and journey. Instead of guessing what might work, talk to the children and young people coming along. A quick chat or a relaxed focus group can help you understand what they find fun, what might put them off, and what would make them feel comfortable joining in. Ask them about session timings too - how much time do they need to get there after school? What locations feel easy for them to reach? Get in the habit of prioritising young people's voices, as when children and young people enjoy being active, they'll be more likely to continue attending, leading to happier and healthier lives.

Child first coaching

Making sure young people's voices are heard is key to creating sessions they'll enjoy. Find out more about the importance of youth voice and child-first coaching here: **activesussex.org/children-and-young-people/youth-voice**

> **"Youth voice drives everything we do. Each year, we regularly check in with the young people we work with to make sure our mission still reflects what they want, from session content to how we advertise. They're the experts on how to reach their own peers."**
>
> *– Jade Hand, DanceHub CIC*

- **Work with schools and local groups:** Schools and youth clubs can be great partners - they can help spread the word, share sign-up forms, and suggest children who'd benefit from your sessions. You can run taster sessions at a school or try a School Club model, where you run a free after-school club for students, and in return, the school lets you use their facilities for community sessions at no cost. It's a win-win that helps more young people get involved.

> **"Schools know their students and families best. By working closely with them, we can support the right children, help parents/carers feel reassured, and make sure sessions really work for those who need them most."**
>
> *– Jess Barnes, The Russell Martin Foundation*

- **Have a backup plan:** Things don't always go to plan - a venue might fall through, fewer children might turn up than expected, or funding could run out. Thinking ahead can make these situations less stressful. Check if local councils or sports governing bodies have small community grants, or explore funding opportunities on the Active Sussex website. You could also try creative ideas, like setting up a GoFundMe for optional donations or asking local adult activity groups to sponsor a young person so they can attend for free.
- **Be upfront about what to expect:** Let parents/carers, schools, and young people know how your sessions will run, if they need to commit to attending every week, or if spaces are limited. Clarity from the start can avoid any confusion later.
- **Learn from others:** Take the time to connect and engage with other local groups, networks and partnerships. Often, they will have tackled similar challenges, whether it's sorting DBS checks, securing venues, or dealing with unexpected costs. Chatting with them could save time and help you avoid common mistakes.

Children and Young People Forum

You can also swap ideas and get support by joining our Children and Young People Forum - it's a great way to connect with others who are running sessions in your area: **activesussex.org/events-and-networks/children-and-young-people-forums**

- **Train up more volunteers:** Having a strong team makes everything easier. If more volunteers know how to run sessions, it takes the pressure off and keeps things running smoothly - plus, if someone can't make it, there's always someone else ready to step in.

Applying for funding, what helps?

- **Talk to local groups first:** Before applying, have a chat with schools, youth clubs, housing associations, or other local groups to see what's already happening in the community. If they tell you there's a real gap - such as not enough inclusive sports sessions - that can help make your application stronger.
- **Show the impact:** Funders want to know why your project matters and what difference it will make. Try to be as clear as possible - how many children will take part? How will it boost their confidence or skills? The more specific you can be, with evidence to back it up, the better. For example, if a child who was once too nervous to join in is now confidently leading an activity, that's a great way to show how your programme has helped them grow. Or, if your club runs a volunteering scheme where young people can develop coaching skills, that's not just helping them in the session - it's building their confidence, leadership abilities, and even creating future career opportunities. Real stories like this bring your impact to life and help funders see the difference you're making.
- **Check reporting requirements early on:** Some funders will need specific data or reports on your project's progress. Find out what they require from the start - whether that's attendance numbers, feedback from children and young people, or case studies - so you can track the right information along the way.
- **Highlight partnerships:** Funders love to see organisations working together. Partnering with schools, charities, housing associations, or local youth clubs can help show that your sessions are part of something bigger and have strong community support. Or, if you can line up your timings with another local group or session, it could help more young people get involved in both, making your programme even more valuable.
- **Keep track of positive feedback:** Save any quotes or success stories from children, parents/carers, or schools. Whether it's a child who's found a new love for sport or a parent who's seen their child grow in confidence, these real-life stories can bring your application to life and help show the impact of your work.

Stay updated on funding opportunities

Need funding for your sessions? Check out the Active Sussex Funding page for grants, funds, and other opportunities to help keep your programme running. **https://www.activesussex.org/insight-and-funding/funding/**

Keep learning and improving

- **Get feedback often:** A quick chat at the end of a session can tell you a lot. If you're adapting activities for children with additional needs, check in with them or their parents/carers to see what's working and what could be better.
- **Make small changes as you go.** If attendance drops, you might need to rethink how you promote sessions or tweak the format. Remember to consider voice, choice, and journey. Ask young people what they'd like - maybe they'd enjoy more free play or more structure - to help keep them engaged.
- **Keep in touch with volunteers:** If your sessions happen in different locations, such as a cycle ride or hike, setting up a volunteer WhatsApp group can be a simple way to check in, share route updates, and make sure everyone is on the same page. For any WhatsApp groups, make sure you also always follow best practice, such as the guidelines laid out by the CPSU.

Evaluating your activities

Running sessions for children and young people? Whether you're planning or reviewing your activities, we have a tool to help you measure your impact. Check out our evaluation tool here: **https://www.activesussex.org/insight-and-funding/evaluating-your-activities/**

- **Take notes for next time:** Jot down what worked well and what didn't, whether in a notebook or a shared document. Keeping track of these little details can help you improve next time.

Useful tips straight to your inbox

From funding advice to session planning, staying organised makes everything run smoother. Join our mailing list for helpful tips, funding opportunities, and practical tools to help you stay on track. Sign up: **activesussex.org/email-newsletter**

Case study: A real-life example

Brighton and Hove Girls Mountain Bike Network

Brighton and Hove Girls Mountain Bike Network wanted to create a space where girls, non-binary, and trans young people could enjoy cycling without pressure - whether they were confident riders or beginners. They kept things flexible, making sure no one was left behind, adjusting ride speeds, and supporting those just starting out. From the start, they listened to young people and parents/carers, using their feedback to shape session times and decide how to spread the word. By making sure everyone knew what to expect and felt welcome, they created a space where more young people felt comfortable giving it a go.

"The most important thing for keeping this going has been training up more volunteers as leaders. Sharing responsibilities has meant that if life gets in the way for one of us, someone else can step up. Having a strong team has made it all possible - we look after each other, support each other, and plan together. It's not just about the sessions, it's about nurturing those relationships so we enjoy working together."

Lucy Chadburn,
Brighton and Hove Girls Mountain Bike Network

Recommendations: Quick ways to improve

Practical tools:

A simple plan can make a big difference - you don't need anything fancy. A quick spreadsheet, notebook timeline, or even a one-page plan can help keep you organised. Spending just 20 minutes thinking ahead can save a lot of last-minute stress. If you'd rather use a ready-made template, the one below can help get you started.

Section	What to include
Objectives	What do you want to achieve? (For example, 20 regular participants, 2 new volunteers)
Target audience	Who are you aiming the sessions for? (Ages, communities, local schools, etc.)
Core message	Why should people care and want to take part? (For example, fun, free, builds confidence)
Inclusivity	Are you catering to children with different needs? (Think about training staff, accessible venues, etc.)
Channels	Which methods will you use for marketing? (For example, social media, flyers, word of mouth, school newsletters)
Timeline	Key dates? (For example, 4 weeks before launch: social media posts. 2 weeks before: distribute flyers)
Roles and responsibilities	Who does what? (For example, coach handles social media, volunteer prints flyers, partner promotes in local groups)
Budget	What funds are needed, if any? (For example, social media ads, printing costs, venue fees)
Evaluation	How will you know it's working? (For example, track sign-ups, session attendance, parent feedback, funder reporting)

Check out our Community of Learning

Good planning makes everything easier. Our Community of Learning has case studies from other projects Active Sussex has been involved in so you can learn from them to help keep your sessions running smoothly. See what's new to help you stay organised. activesussex.org/insight-and-funding/community-of-learning

Top three quick wins:

1. **Set up a simple weekly plan:** Make sure some time or budget is set aside for marketing (10 percent) and feedback (10 percent).
2. **Get local partners involved:** Schools and youth clubs can help spread the word and bring in more sign-ups.
3. **Ask young people what they think:** What would make sessions better, and where would they look for information?

Try this:

Take a few minutes to fill in the template above for your next project. Even a quick brainstorm can help you figure out who you're trying to reach, what to say, and how to get the word out.

Trying to get everything organised?

From funding applications to marketing and session planning, there's a lot to juggle - but we're here to help make it easier. If you'd like advice or just someone to bounce ideas off, get in touch with the Active Sussex team. We're always here to help: **activesussex.org/contact**