

# Making money from Cookery activities and events



Advice & tips for  
community food  
projects wanting to  
diversify their  
revenue



REAL  
FARMING  
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Brighton & Hove  
**FOOD**  
Partnership

**COMMUNITY KITCHEN**

## Why we made this guide

The funding environment for the community and voluntary sector is increasingly competitive and groups are being encouraged to 'be more enterprising'. Shared learning from recent project work has highlighted the potential for food and farming projects to diversify their income via paid-for cooking and eating activities.

If you are a community food or farming project that is thinking about adding a paid or income generating activity to your current offer, then this guide is for you. It pulls together some top tips based on our experience at Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, plus 4 case studies of community and voluntary sector organisations who are making money from a food related event or activity. We have also summarised some tips and resources from a webinar on the same topic.

This guide doesn't look at sales of products, but instead focuses on experiences. There are pros and cons to adding these types of activity to your work, but we hope that this guide will help you consider if this approach is worth doing as part of your overall fundraising or income generating approach.

Whatever you decide to do you will need to check your public liability insurance covers events and activities. You should also review other public facing statements such as your complaints policy to make sure it is relevant for your new activities and audiences. Make sure to always follow the current food safety guidance and allergens law

If you are a charity you will also need to check out the trading rules that apply to you NCVO have a guide



This guide has been written by Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and produced as part of the Ready Healthy Eat Project.

This project is funded by the Big Lottery Community Fund and aims to improve the nutritional quality of food eaten by vulnerable groups experiencing food insecurity.

It is co-ordinated by the Real Farming Trust working with:

- [Brighton and Hove Food Partnership](#)
- [The Hornbeam](#), partner of [Organiclea](#) in London
- [The NOW Group](#) in Belfast
- Edinburgh [Cyrenians](#)



# Be clear – why you are doing this and what want to achieve

## For starters – put aside time to plan

**What are you hoping to achieve?** Be clear about your motivation and your aims, in terms of the money you want to raise and any other benefits. For example: *Within 2 years we want our programme of supper clubs to bring in £5,000 of unrestricted income. This will raise awareness of our work and provide our service users an opportunity to volunteer at the events.*

**Does the activity fit with your mission?** Extreme scenario, but it would be contradictory to the aims of an organisation focused on addiction recovery to host a casino night with freely available alcoholic drinks. Look for opportunities to support your mission eg some of your participants might benefit from work experience gained helping at the event.

**One-off event? Or ongoing income strategy?** A Crowdfund with some associated events might be a good approach to raise funds for a specific item (e.g. a building refit or new kit).

**How long are you prepared to give an idea to get it established?** If you are building up a social business element of your work, it will probably take at least 2 yrs before it is running smoothly.

**What happens elsewhere that you could replicate?** Get inspired by the case studies in this report, but also by doing research and visiting other relevant projects. Look at what hasn't worked as well as what has for example most community cafes don't make a profit (and many commercial cafes fail)

**Who will deliver it and do they have capacity?** It is very easy for people to say 'we could ....' If the person tasked with making this happen already works flat out full-time, where is the time coming from?

**Who do you need to engage with?** Make sure your staff, volunteers, participants, trustees understand what you are doing and why. Otherwise you could end up causing yourself more work further down the line fixing misunderstandings. Commercialising elements of a community organisation may make people in your group/ team feel uncomfortable – how are you going to listen to these concerns?

**Are you willing to shift your mindset?** You will probably be putting on an activity that the beneficiaries of your project can't afford to come on. You will need to get comfortable charging more than you are used to.

**How will you involve your beneficiaries?** That's not to say that your project beneficiaries won't be involved in the event or activity. Think of how you can talk to them about your plans and offer them opportunities to take part.

**Are you ready to take a "hard head big heart" approach?** That is a 'business head' that knows it is ok to ask people to pay for a high quality experience, a willingness to negotiate and to examine what things really cost to run to check for a profit. You are doing this for a good reason and will do it in a way that is not exploitative bringing your big heart (values) to the process



**"We started the event business alongside making our bottled soups because we realised that people are willing to pay more for something on a plate than something in jar."**

## Some ideas that have worked for other groups

- **Rent out your premises** - if you have a venue that isn't used all the time this is a fantastic opportunity to bring in some money.
- **Host private parties** - get people to pay for the types of events you run for your beneficiaries eg wellbeing / cook and eat. Or pitch to local businesses your offer as a team building / away day opportunity.
- **Run paid for cookery classes** - a chance to learn a skill like fermenting or to cook a new cuisine (especially if the chef is from that culture) are popular options.
- **Host supper clubs** - a chance to have food made by your beneficiaries.
- **Put on a shared meal** - you can vary ticket prices to reach different groups or go pay as you feel.
- **Offer event catering** other community organisations or businesses looking to show social impact will prefer a social minded option.
- **Make products to sell** (jams / juices etc) but even better get people to make them with you.
- **Join up with a speaker / a band / show a film / get involved with crafting or art projects.**
- **Host an outdoor meal** or Plot to Plate experience.
- Offer people a chance to **meet new people** by creating friendly / social eating spaces.
- **'Pop-up'** in a local cafe / restaurant / micro-brewery. A chance to run an activity if you don't have your own premises



**“The way I think is that if we can sell a ticket to raise some funds we don’t have to apply for a pot of funding or have any reports to write”**

**Project Leader Cyrenians  
Cook School**

## Pros and cons of earning income via events and activities

### Pros

- New audiences reached
- Connections can result in other types of help
- Unrestricted income (use it how you want where as grant income often comes with constraints)
- If you find something that works, once established it can provide ongoing income without the jeopardy of funding bids
- Community building - a chance to put on events that people enjoy coming to
- Opportunity for your beneficiaries / people in the local community to meet and learn about each other
- There is more profit margin in activities than in food sales

### Cons

- Time and effort to get a programme going
- Not a quick fix (time spent putting in a funding application might result in more instant money)
- Might be out of the 'comfort zone' of your current team
- You will need to invest in some new systems. Eg an event booking system such as Eventbrite, software to build costing spreadsheets, or setting up terms and conditions for people hiring a space.



**“Go for the simplest idea, start small and learn as you go”**

**Manager Brighton & Hove Food Partnership**

### What do you have going for you?

**The best ideas build on the foundation of what your current team already does.**

For example, if you support a group of refugees to cook together, then work with them to create a supper-club or big communal meal showcasing their delicious cuisine.

Or if you have a venue, start by thinking about the times of day or week it isn't currently used – what could you do there, or could someone else hire it?

### Where are you based?

How affluent is the wider community locally? Are there businesses that would want to do corporate away days with you?

### Could someone involved in your group help you reach more people?

Members of faith organisation, education institution or community centre often have great networks at their fingertips.

### What skills or experience do you already have in your team that you could use?

What jobs did people have before? Is there someone who can mentor the person who is responsible for being more commercial in their approach?

### Who else is already offering similar in your area?

Look around at the commercial, community or voluntary sector. Do you have a new offer or is there someone you could collaborate with?

### What is unique about you?

You might be competing with private business but you can probably offer an experience (for example a shared cook and eat experience) they cannot.

# Ten top tips – marketing

**Who is your customer?** Write a pen portrait of them. Where they go / what they do/ who they listen to - use this to plan promotion. The people with money to spend might not be in your existing networks plan how to reach them.

**Don't leave it too late** People live busy lives. Schedule in promotion ideally 10 weeks ahead but at least 8 weeks – better to be sold out and running a wait list than chasing last minute bookings.

**Get active on social media** Post about it on any social channels you have. Ask people to comment and share too, this engagement is what works with the algorithm. Paying to boost adverts on socials can be worth it. On social media a rule of thumb is 75% content (recipes, stories, reels that share the impact of work) and 25% talking about the things you are selling.

**Time it well** Be mindful of school and religious holidays and other big events happening in your area, both for when the activity is run and when promotion will be happening.

**Encourage word of mouth** We are more likely to try an new experience if someone known recommends it to us. Get people involved in your group talking to their friends, family, choir, faith group – everyone!

Ask them to post about it on their group chats. You can create sample text they can copy and paste to make this easier for them.

**At the event itself, tell the people there to spread the word about future events – get your participants involved in promotion.**

## Print some posters for your window

If you have a window that people pass or you live somewhere with communal areas put up posters. It might seem old fashioned, but it's effective.

## Ask for reviews

Get people who have been to your activity, event or catering business to give you quotes or reviews on google (so long as it is 5 star!)

## Make it easy to book and pay

If it is hard, people will lose interest. Use a booking platform like Eventbrite or Simpletix. These systems send automated messages, gather dietary requirements, and more.

Use a QR code on your printed promo materials, posters and leaflets, that links directly to your booking page.

## Get permission to contact people after the event

Offer them something as well as hearing about future events, like sharing the recipe from a cookery event evening. This will make it worth their while to agree to share their contact details.



**“There are two types of customers – those who care about your social mission and those who are just looking to come and do a cookery class. Don’t be so busy enthusing about your social mission that you forget to promote the activity as a high-quality fun thing to do.”**

Community Kitchen Manager

# Top tips from the case study interviews

## My top tip for someone else .....

**If you don't ask you don't get** Negotiate with venues, suppliers and companies. Many can't afford to donate you the things you need, but may offer a 10-15% discount. Thank them as it is probably their profit margin they are giving you.

**Pay-it-forward** You could offer a pay-it-forward option alongside your ticket sales, to build up a fund to pay for people who can't afford to come. But only give away places on this basis when you have the funds to pay for the full price of the place!

**Perfect your cancellation policy** Have one and publish it clearly as part of booking. Manage expectations, for example "we will accept transfers but don't offer refunds". Some people assume that because you are a community organisation you can be more lenient, when under normal circumstances (for example show tickets) they would not expect a refund.

**Maximise efficiency** Document everything you do the first time you do it, including how long it takes. Review this to see what you need to change or automate to save time. There are lots of tech tools that can help.

If you are delivering a programme over a year, make a note of when your bookings come in. Next year, you can look at your notes and be prepared for the upcoming seasonal trends.

**FAQs** Think about the things people might ask, such as access, dietaries, children allowed or not. Put all this in the booking info. Also save these as auto-text replies for email, or as an FAQ page on your website. You want to minimise your time spent answering repeat questions.

**Aim for pre-booking** if you offer a choice of dishes get people to pick in advance to reduce waste.

**Practice your nice 'No'** Good people in good organisations are going to ask you to do things 'just for them', for free or reduced cost. Prepare for how you will explain why not.

## Gain social enterprise skills

There are organisations that provide training or learning programmes, some of which also offer grants to get your idea going. For example:

- [School for Social Entrepreneurs](#)
- [Postcode Innovation Trust](#)
- [UnLtd](#)

[LEAP](#) offers funding and mentoring to small agroecological businesses which are producing good food for their local communities.

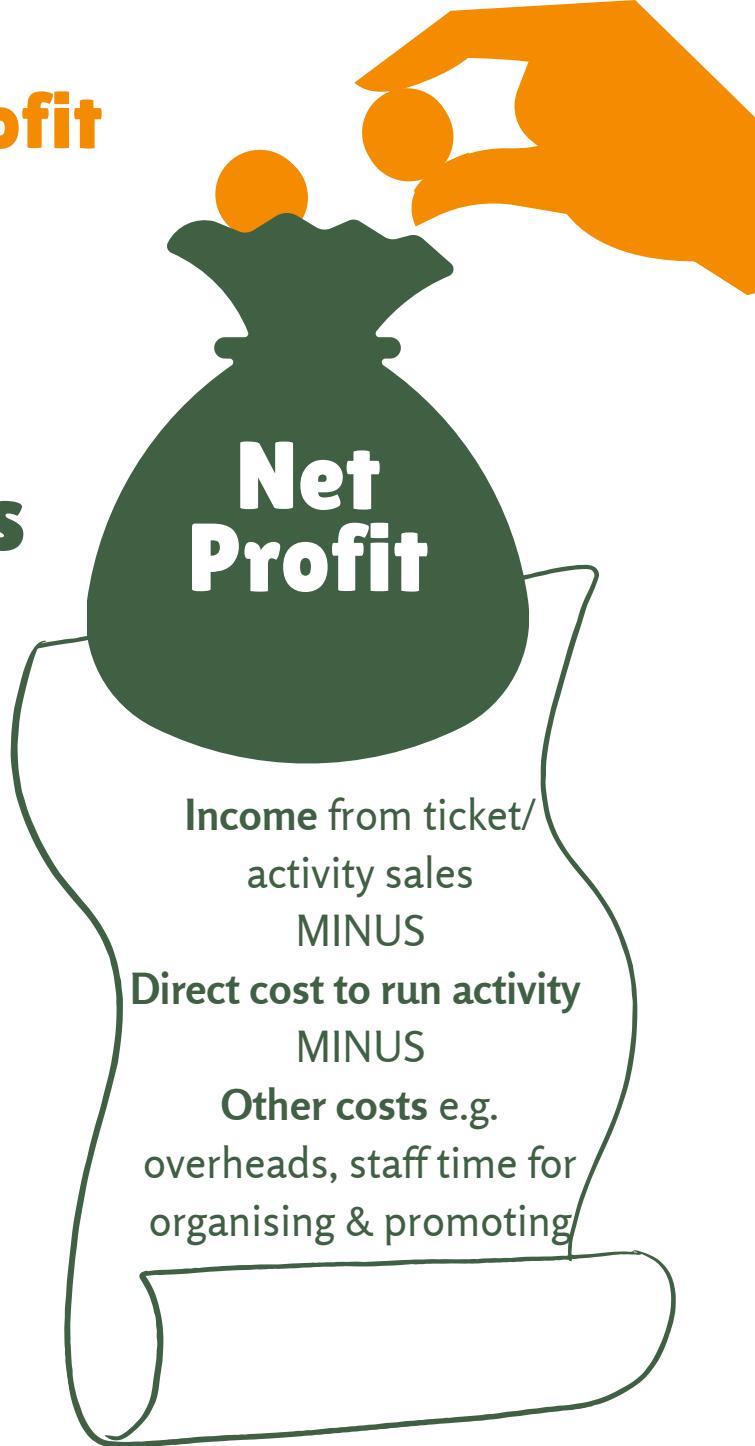
Look for sources of info - for example this [toolkit](#) by the Real Farming Trust covers all the practicalities of making meals.



# Pricing & profit



**vs**



Eg

Ticket Sales 30 people @ £35 = £1050

Chef (set up and on night) = £250

Ingredients = 30 people x £8 = £240

Napkins / candles = £10

Volunteer travel = £30

Hire of venue = £100

**TOTAL = £630**

Activity profit = £420

But take into account  
Staff time 3 days @ £150 = £450

This would be a loss of £30  
..... you need to put up your ticket price  
and/or sell more tickets

**Play around with different numbers of customers and ticket prices – you might find a higher price with less people is more profitable**

# Do a budget – look at pricing, know your break even point

## Write a budget and be honest about costs

**Write a budget.** If it is not your strength get a more financially minded person to help. Most ideas probably won't stack up in practice.

Check you have included enough **budget to cover the staff time** it uses to put on. Most of our case studies said this took them time to learn. The things with the least staff effort = most profit.

And then ask yourself - **will this actually make money** without disrupting our work too much

If you don't know what things cost **do some research.** Talk to someone who runs a cafe (or similar). They will have different skills to you eg how to calculate profit per meal / staffing needed.

If you are including **donated** time, venues, food etc make sure you know how much that is worth.

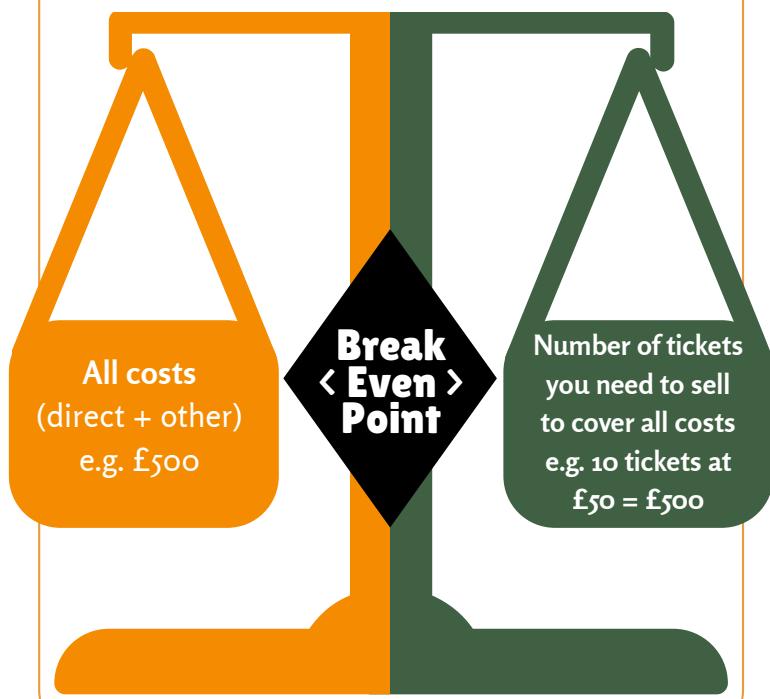
Are you sure that this activity is sustainable if it relies on donations? A chef may give their time once but it might be worth paying them if you want ongoing events.

**Gift Vouchers** The Community Kitchen uses the Square Gift cards which integrates with our booking system Simpletix, before that we used Eventbrite and GiftUpApp

### Breaking even

In the example below, once you sell more than 10 tickets you are making a profit. A total of 30 tickets sold means £1,000 profit.

If you don't manage to sell 10 tickets you will be making a loss, so you should cancel or postpone the event.



**"If you are hiring out your space, regular booking are brilliant as they are lower effort per booking - most of the work happens in the first session"**

Community Kitchen Manager

# CASE STUDY:

## EVENT CATERING



### Sussex Surplus CIC

A community food project based in East Brighton that uses surplus food to serve a weekly meal, run a community fridge and produce long-life soups. They provide inclusive employment to young people who are neurodiverse.

#### The Model

Inspired by a visit to another project, Sussex Surplus launched their event catering in 2022, starting small with a handful of events. Their community cook had previous event experience they could draw on. They built the business and in 2024 they catered 52 events, doubling revenue from the previous year.

Their customers include organisations in the public, voluntary and community sector, and companies looking to improve their CSR through procurement. They also have 3 weddings booked for 2025!

They have grown their reach through word of mouth, social media and making sure that local venues know about them as a recommended caterer for their hirers. The events are a great way to introduce people to our organisation and its work.

Most of the food is surplus, except for things like oil and spices. People involved in prep and on the day delivery are all paid.

They charge depends on the event. A key variable is whether they need the food to be served or not as this alters the amount of staff time. They have a template spreadsheet for building quotes.

They aim for a 15% profit margin, with income from the event catering used to support their community offer.

#### Top Tips

- **Take on the right sized events.** 30-60 portions is their preferred size. It's usually not cost effective to feed less than 12 people. Similarly, over 150 people get complicated logistically.
- **Get to know local venues** that host meetings and public events. Knowing the staff who work there, the layout of the buildings, opening hours, their existing kitchenware & serving equipment helps with smooth logistics.
- **Be clear** about what the person making the booking needs to do in terms of an agreement, such as confirming numbers, letting you in on the day, relaying dietary requirements etc.
- **Figure out your key offers and focus on them.** Sussex Surplus have 3 main offers.
  - **Simple & cheap:** Soup & bread or basic one pot.
  - **Hearty & midrange:** One pot with carbohydrate and veg side.
  - **Elaborate & Exciting:** Buffet.
- Whilst people are supporting the cause, they want you to **provide a good experience of working with you and tasty food.**
- Make sure you **put info about your project on display**, or do an quick spoken intro before serving the food.

## CASE STUDY:

### SYRIAN QUISINE SUPPER CLUB

Cyrenians



## Edinburgh Cyrenians

A charity working with homeless and vulnerably housed people. They run a community cook school offering food education courses that help take the mystery out of meal prepping, planning and budgeting, helping create lifelong skills and friendships.

### The Model

In 2018, inspired by a Syrian refugee meal project in London, Sue had an idea for supper clubs as a self-sustaining enterprise celebrating Syrian food. At a food hygiene course they ran for Edinburgh City Council the Cyrenians, connected with two Syrian refugees who were interested in working with them.

Initially held at their Cook School, the growing popularity led them to hire Coffee Saints at the Grassmarket Community Project. Each 6-8 week event now attracts 50 attendees, who pay £38 for a meal. A £750 budget covers food, venue, and chef costs. Whilst they are often able to use Fareshare food donations they don't assume this and budget to cover all food costs.

Each event features an introduction highlighting the work supported. Five volunteers assist, including a food writer who provides valuable social media promotion. Recently, they expanded to include other cuisines, piloting a Singaporean supper club. The project aims to foster community by encouraging people to connect over shared meals, regardless of prior acquaintance.

*"This has brought in so many people to learn about us. It works because it speaks to what we are trying to achieve overall. We believe it should be a natural thing to sit down and share a meal with people, if you know them already or not. By the end of the meal you'll have eaten well and know more about each other."*

### Top Tips

- **These things take longer to get going than you think they are going to!** But now we have the systems in place things run smoothly. Events for the whole year go on the website so it is not a last minute dash and people book in advance because they know they sell out
- **Our new venue is a win-win.** It means we can sell more tickets, but we are also spreading the love to more than one organisation. Us making bookings for a year ahead is good for them too as they know what income to expect.
- **Invite journalists, bloggers and food writers** to come for a meal – they will do the publicity for you!
- **Start small** – the chefs might be very good cooks but are not used to cooking for 50 people. Build their confidence with them.
- **Do your costings and check your budgets** – for example Halal Meat price varies considerably across the city. Bulk buy things you are going to use each time eg rice.
- **People who come on their own for a first time might be a bit nervous** – we always introduce them to some of our regulars to help them settle in.

# CASE STUDY: FARM & FEAST SUPPER CLUBS



## Laurelbank Farm

A 7-acre regenerative, organic farm in County Down, Northern Ireland. They aim to reconnect people to the land, and nourish and empower people through farming and feasting activities run on their thriving site

### The Model

Laurelbank Farm primarily sells its produce through a CSA (a year-round veg box scheme). In addition they have a small farm shop, run grow-your-own courses and host on-farm supper clubs.

Since 2017 Laurelbank have hosted on farm supper clubs because **growing and feasting go hand-in-hand**. [Most recent supper club info](#)

Partnering with chef leads the supper clubs showcasing the farm produce. A key part of the offer is being onsite including elements of being outdoors eg a course served under an ancient sycamore tree.

Promotion via mailing list (700 ppl) and Instagram/Facebook. They primarily rely on word-of-mouth. Audience includes CSA-members, farm enthusiasts, and those seeking distinctive food experiences.

Tickets are priced at £62.50, with a capacity of 32. Running events over two consecutive nights maximises planning and delivery efforts. Costs cover booking fees, ingredients, styling, and freelance event staff. Aim to achieve a 30% profit margin after all expenses, including overheads.

*These events bring people to the farm, inspiring positive change and contributing to improving our food system bit by bit every day.*

### Top Tips

- **Cook what you genuinely love and know**
- **Start small** – build up your confidence and your audience at the same time.
- **Don't try to be a restaurant** – a supper club is a different experience – we want everyone to sit together and get to know each other.
- **Tell a story** – Get up and tell people about the food, dishes or ingredients that mean something to you. Food tastes better when people know the story behind it.
- **Get organised** – Plan the menu so it's achievable – a mix of things that need done at the last minute and things that can be done well in advance.
  - Cost up your menus, write a detailed ingredients / shopping list and test your recipes in advance
  - Write a detailed prep list for the kitchen and for everything else that needs to be done and can write notes on them as you go so you have a record for next time
- **Print out your recipes** (with allergens highlighted) so you have them to hand if people ask

## CASE STUDY:

### COOKERY CLASSES

Brighton & Hove



## The Community Kitchen

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) runs a social enterprise cookery school where everyone can cook, learn new skills and enjoy food together. Opened in 2018 it is purpose built, accessible and located on a busy central Brighton street

### The Model

The Community Kitchen is a base for a programme of low/no cost cookery classes for people living on low incomes, with health issues or other life challenges. Recognising grants alone wouldn't cover the kitchen's running costs, BHFP established it as a social enterprise.

Income is generated from venue hire, evening/weekend cookery classes, and group activities as well as grants and donations. Income is split approx 40% grants/donations, 60% commercial.

Kitchen hire is on a sliding scale with cheaper hire for small community groups and concession rates / pay it forward options for classes

Weekly evening/weekend classes priced at £60-£70 pp cover diverse cuisines are sold as individual places booked via Simpletix links on our website. **In 2024-25, 1336 places were sold on 104 classes.**

The Community Kitchen pays the leaders and buys ingredients in line with a sourcing policy. *“Our chefs need to make a living, and we want to be part of a sustainable local food economy”* Fundraising ‘Masterclasses’ where chefs donate their time provide local restaurants a way of supporting.

Every class is supported by 2-3 volunteers that help the lesson run smoothly (they prep, clear up and help make people feel welcome).

### Top Tips

- **A quality offer.** Everyone who comes into the kitchen (paid for or community class) gets a high-quality experience. Don't get complacent make sure it is a spotless environment with reliable equipment, ample supplies, and a friendly welcome – it all contributes to the overall feel.
- **Location matters.** Being in the heart of Brighton means there is both a more affluent customer base and people who need the community offer. Plus, our large window onto a busy street allows passers-by a chance to look in.
- **Encourage repeat bookings.** We operate a loyalty card scheme. You earn a complimentary class after attending five paid sessions. We have gained a loyal following of people, but they like to come to new things so we introduce new cuisines/ get chefs to vary their offer.
- **Use video clips** so people can see the space they are hiring / coming to
- **Work out profit margin by both course and across quarters.** Different classes mean varying profit levels due to factors like ingredient costs eg baking more expensive than vegan Indian. Identify if specific classes aren't financially viable.
- **Tell the story of why you are doing this** – we start each class with a short intro covering what community activity has taken place that week



## More ideas and source of support

As part of this work we held a [webinar](#). [Recording here](#)

During this session participants shared some of their own ideas

### Ideas for smaller groups

If you are looking for some 'starting small' ideas:

- **Plot to plate** shared meal using produce from a local allotment site
- **Soup and Stomp** - a family friendly half term activity. Sell tickets for a guided walk around your local area and back to a community venue for a cup of soup.
- **Apple pressing / juice making.** You can buy an apple press for appox £100. People donate their spare fruit and you sell cups of juice at school/community events (juice gets more £ than an apple).
- Or get inspired by Brighton Permaculture Trust and offer a [Juicing Service](#)
- **Plant sales** - if you are good at growing things from seed, raise plants to sell to people in spring

### Pop up events in local cafes or restaurants

Approach local cafes/restaurants to run a 'pop up' event in their premises.

- Either bring in your own chef or ask to use one of their team
- If the restaurant is regularly closed one day a week ask if you can use instead
- Sell tickets in advance. Offer a set menu

Other locations that have worked well to collaborate with are small scale food processors eg micro-breweries or coffee roasters or music/ arts venues

### Made in Hackney

Made In Hackney are the oldest vegan community cookery school in the UK. Their website has a wealth of information and inspiration <https://madeinhackney.org/>



**Global Plant Kitchens** is their international mentoring scheme and online training course to build a movement of plant-based community kitchens. This free online programme supports people across the globe to create their own plant-based community cookery schools.

Sign up to [Global Plant Kitchens for FREE resources](#) which cover everything from refining your idea, finding a team, marketing, and applying for funding.

### Healthy Start retailers

Do you run a cafe, shop or veg box scheme that sells milk, fresh/frozen/tinned fruit and veg and/or beans and pulses? Look into registering to accept Healthy Start Vouchers. The prepaid card can be used in most retailers that sell the eligible healthy food items and accept Mastercard®

If your area runs the **Rose Voucher** scheme this tops up payments even further <https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/>

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