



Draft: LOTI Guide to Sourcing Digital Devices

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Introduction

About LOTI

The London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) is a fast-moving city innovation unit, based at London Councils. We specialise in helping boroughs work together to bring the best of digital and data innovation to improve public services and outcomes for Londoners. Read all about our activities at: <https://loti.london>.

About this guide

The purpose of this guide is to bring to light some of the methods and approaches deployed by boroughs and their partners for sourcing digital devices during the pandemic. It is intended to be a practical tool for anyone looking to source digital devices externally. The approaches described here are by no means an exhaustive list of all the different methods used to source digital devices. It can be read alongside LOTI's [guide to upcycling old devices](#).

Why are we doing this?

Our [digital inclusion research](#) revealed that meeting the scale of need for devices is one of six barriers to achieving digital inclusion in London. Tackling this issue is likely to require a blend of approaches. Identifying ways for boroughs to maximise the number of devices available to people who need them is one of several areas that LOTI is exploring as part of the [Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme \(DIIP\)](#).

Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme (DIIP)

[DIIP](#) is a two-year programme running between June 2021 and May 2023, led by LOTI and funded by the GLA. The programme aims to support the delivery of London's Digital Access for All Mission, which aims to ensure that "Every Londoner has access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the device or support they need to be online by 2025".

What is covered in this document

There are several approaches that organisations can use to source digital devices, both internally (e.g. donations from staff) and externally (e.g. from partners and others). This guide will cover the external methods: crowdfunding and crowdsourcing. It will not cover the internal methods including:

- **Staff amnesty:** crowdsourcing of digital devices from within an organisation, i.e. from staff.
- **Upcycling of retired devices:** The process of adapting (e.g. by data wiping, refurbishing and upgrading) a used device, resulting in a higher specification

or an improved functional state. LOTI has created a [practical guide](#) that describes that process in detail.

Acknowledgements

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Sourcing digital devices

Definitions

In this document we use the terms listed below to mean the following:

Digital devices: Computing devices including desktop computers, laptops (or Chromebooks), tablets, and smartphones.

Crowdfunding: The process of raising funds, via a digital platform, for the purposes of financing specific services or developing products.

Crowdsourcing: The process of sourcing new and / or used digital devices using local or national campaigns lobbying citizens, local or corporate businesses to donate devices.

Summary of recommendations:

1. **Mandate:** Secure buy-in from at least one senior manager or member who can advocate for the project and help get internal commitment.
2. **Resource:** Create at least one role, even if for a fixed term, who has sole responsibility for managing all aspects of the project.
3. **Communications:** Reach the right potential donors by direct messaging via existing internal and external channels / partnerships.
4. **Message:** Create fresh, and energising content to engage the right people and maximise donations.
5. **Distributing donations (whether funding or devices):** Develop clear processes and guidelines on what's required to donate and how to access donations.

Crowdfunding and Crowdsourcing Digital Devices

Crowdfunding and crowdsourcing devices are two common methods used by boroughs, to source digital devices for residents who need to get online. This guide seeks to provide guidance on the main considerations and questions your organisation will need to think about and plan for when undertaking either of those activities.

Summary of Pros and Cons of each approach

Crowdfunding

Pros:

- Simpler to set up and manage by councils themselves.
- Can be a good way of supplementing existing funding or financing one-off projects.
- Avoids issues relating to the refurbishment of donated devices

Cons:

- Can be politically controversial with residents. Citizens may have negative views on councils seeking to fund what, in their eyes, are core council services funded by the taxpayer.

Crowdsourcing

Pros

- A great way to tackle device poverty, and may help build a sense of community.

Cons

- Involves more complex processes and logistics operations. Councils tend to use external providers to support / deliver the scheme.
- Donated devices could vary in quality making it more expensive to refurbish them.
- Donated devices could have varying levels of functionality which may not be suitable for the intended beneficiaries.

1. Initiating a crowdfunding or crowdsourcing devices campaign

Whether you're planning to undertake crowdfunding or crowdsourcing devices, you'll need to consider the following key questions, before initiating any activities:

Approvals

- Do you need senior leadership and / cabinet member approval?
- Do you need a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) from your organisation to front / drive the campaign?

Resources

- Do you have the right resources to conduct the campaign and manage the allocation of funds and / or devices?
- Can your (or a partner) organisation match any funds raised?

Beneficiaries

- Do you have a clear outcome in mind and who the beneficiaries will be?
- Do you have a clear view of the scale of need (e.g. the target fund or volumes of devices needed)?
- What projects will be funded with the funds raised?
- Do you have minimum requirements for devices (in terms of their technical specification)?

Partnerships

- Can other strategic partners support with the delivery of or raise awareness of the campaign?
- Are there other examples from organisations you work with of where crowdfunding or crowdsourcing have been successful and if so, what can you learn from them?
- If you intend to purchase large volumes of devices with the funds raised, then explore whether [LGfL offers bulk buying of devices at reduced cost](#).

Common pain points

- Getting buy-in from senior management and members might be difficult.
- Crowdfunding can be politically controversial. Citizens may have negative views on councils seeking to fund what, in their eyes, are core council services funded by the taxpayer.
- Identifying local needs (named individuals for example) can be difficult due to limited or low quality data boroughs may have.
- Crowdsourcing “...is almost like launching a new service.” (direct quote from one of the interviewees). It is more resource intensive and harder to manage.

- Funds raised via crowdsourcing may not be sufficient in meeting the identified need.

Recommendations

- Secure buy-in from at least one senior manager or member who can advocate for the project and help get internal commitment. Looking for public sector examples where crowdfunding or crowdsourcing have successfully been used to fund services and improve outcomes in the public sector might help.
- Head up any controversial perceptions from citizens by clearly articulating the need for this type of approach and secure the support of members for this narrative.
- Work with other departments within your organisation that hold data about local residents (e.g. free school meal data) as well as schools, local and community organisations to identify who could benefit from either a digital device or other support.
- Consider using your council's existing partnerships with businesses and other organisations to help deliver some or all aspects of the crowdsourcing campaign and logistics.
- Seek potential match funding either within your organisation or externally from partners.

2. Selecting a crowdfunding platform

The crowdfunding platform ecosystem is rapidly becoming rich and diverse given the increased popularity of crowdfunding as a way of financing projects in the public, private and third sectors. You can read more about this in [this article](#).

To help you understand the terminology used by platform providers, we have included definitions of commonly used terms below.

Definition of terms

All or nothing: the crowdfunding organisation sets a fundraising goal and keeps nothing unless the goal is achieved.

Keep it all: the crowdfunding organisation sets a fundraising goal and keeps the entire amount raised regardless of whether or not they meet their goal.

Donations based crowdfunding: a way to source money for a project by asking a large number of contributors to individually donate a small amount to it.

Rewards based crowdfunding: a product or service is offered in return for the money pledged to the project.

[Rocket Fund](#)

- Donations based crowdfunding platform.
- Projects must benefit UK schools / colleges / pre-schools / educational institutions / PTAs e.g. providing devices for schools to distribute to their students.
- Runs a keep-it-all funding model.
- Projects with a £50k or above target will attract platform fees of 5% + VAT and project owners will be charged transaction fees of 2.4% + 20p (per pledge) + VAT on UK/EU cards / 3.25% + 25p (per pledge) + VAT on non-EEA cards.
- Projects owners of crowdfunders with smaller targets will be charged transaction fees of 1.9% + 23p + VAT on UK/EU cards / 3.25% + 25p + VAT on non-EEA cards should their target be met

[Spacehive](#)

- A civic crowdfunding platform, however councils have used Spacehive for their own projects.
- A donations and rewards-based platform.
- Runs an all-or-nothing funding model.
- Charges fees of 5% of the amount raised.

[Crowdfunder](#)

- Donations and community shares based crowdfunding platform
- Open to a broad range of projects.
- Allow all-or-nothing and keep-it-all funding.
- Charge fees of 5% of the amount raised.

[CrowdPatch](#) (currently closed as they restructure their offer)

- A donations and rewards based crowdfunding platform.
- Allows people to raise money for worthy projects, while also helping people meet people who live in the same community or have common interests.
- Runs a keep-it-all funding model.
- Charges no commision on the amount raised.

[Hubbub](#)

- A rewards-based crowdfunding platform.
- Allow all-or-nothing and keep-it-all funding.
- Charges no commision on the amount raised.

[JustGiving Crowdfunding](#)

- A donations based crowdfunding platform.
- Runs an all-or-nothing funding model.
- Charges fees of 5% of the amount raised.

As each platform is likely to cater for a specific set of causes and / or sectors and have functionality that meets the needs of its target audience, it's important you carefully consider your requirements and see which meets your needs best. Below are some things to look out for. For more details please explore the advice and guidance provided by the Fundraising Regulator [here](#).

Costs:

- Is the platform free to use?
- If not, does your budget allow for set up and / or ongoing (monthly for example) fees for using the platform?

Donations:

- Can you keep what you raise?
- What are the rules regarding interest fees (accumulated whilst donations are in a holding account)?

Functionality:

- Is the platform itself managed by a charity, not-for-profit, or private entity?
- Can organisations use it to raise money?
- Is the platform relevant and appropriate to your campaign / cause?
- Can you easily contact and get support from their service support team?

Other:

- Are there clear complaints processes in place and are the timescales for dealing with complaints reasonable?
- What is the refund policy and are there any charges in cases where refunds need to be made?
- Does the platform provider clearly outline how they comply with relevant fundraising legislation including data protection?

3. Resources

Running a successful crowdfunding or crowdsourcing campaign is best delivered by a multidisciplinary team. Having sufficient resources for the entire duration of the project will ensure that the campaign is consistent, reaches the target audience and most importantly builds and maintains momentum and energy.

The types of skills you may need

- A Senior Responsible officer (SRO) or equivalent will ensure internal buy-in as well as advocacy with external partners.
- Project Manager and or project officer(s) - for coordinating overall delivery.

- A communications manager, and content designer - for crafting carefully thought through and consistent messages.
- A corporate or community engagement / partnership lead - for identifying and helping make direct and warm links with prospective organisations.

For crowdsourcing, you may also need:

- Logistics support for collecting and distributing devices.
- Device upcycling service providers. If not undertaken in-house, then device refurbishing / upcycling service providers can help ensure that any donated devices are fit for purpose. LOTI has created a useful [list of 40 upcycling service providers](#) that may be able to help.

Where to find the relevant resources?

How many resources you'll need for any crowdfunding or crowdsourcing campaign will depend on the scale and length of your campaign. Having at least one dedicated person, even if for a fixed term, with overall responsibility / ownership is useful for making sure things happen when they need to and for ensuring consistency.

If no one team within your organisation has all the relevant skills and isn't able to lead, then it may be helpful to consider partnership working with organisations with either a direct link or aligned with your campaign, such as:

- Other council departments such as comms, community engagement etc.
- VCS or other local community based organisations
- Private sector organisations
- Volunteers

Common pain points

- Lack of dedicated resources for managing the campaign.
- Lack of resources and or / funding for managing the logistics of crowdsourcing, i.e. device collection, refurbishment / upcycling and distribution.

Recommendations

- Create at least one role, even if for a fixed term, who has sole responsibility for managing all aspects of the project.
- Make use of existing council / business / VCS partnerships and leverage opportunities from social value clauses from either existing or upcoming contracts to:
 - Supplement project delivery capacity and
 - Fund and deliver the logistics involved in both crowdfunding and crowdsourcing, but particularly relevant to crowdsourcing.

4. Communications and running a successful campaign

The following elements are vital for ensuring a successful comms campaign.

Overall delivery

- Do you have a campaign launch date in mind?
- Are there other relevant dates / milestones linked to the cause?
- Do you have sufficient lead time, taking into account the need for putting in place a team?
- Do you have the resource required to run all the elements of your campaign?
- Do you have a clear timeline of activities with flexibility to adapt if needed?

Messaging

- Are you clear about who the beneficiaries are and what the outcomes of your campaign are?
- Do you have a clear and compelling set of messages that highlight the need (statistics might help to draw attention) and which the target audience can relate to?
- Do you have access to the tools and skills to create graphics, compelling videos, case studies and other types of engaging content that can attract audiences attention to the issue?
- Are there important local celebrities or other important and well known public figures that can be engaged to help with promoting and sharing the messages?
- Do you have a pipeline and timeline of consistent messages?

For crowdsourcing

- Create a clear message for beneficiaries that outlines the types of devices they can expect and any support that will be available, including signposting to other local or council provision such as training.

Comms channels

Reaching the right people is as important as the message itself, so investing time in identifying potential donors as well as warm links to the donors is a vital part of the process. Here's a list of the most commonly used channels, starting with what LOTI's research found to be most fruitful in securing donations.

- Targeted emails to existing borough partners
- Other council channels such as the newsletter and or magazine publications

- Social media promotions by local celebrities or valued and well-known members of the community
- Social media (council and relevant community groups):
 - LinkedIn
 - Twitter
 - Established and relevant influencers

For crowdsourcing

- Given that most if not all potential beneficiaries may be either fully or partially digitally excluded, consider using existing channels of communication that can help reach those who can most benefit from a device. For example schools, libraries, community hubs, VCS organisations etc. who can signpost residents to this scheme.

Common pain points

- Using social media channels as a method for reaching the right people doesn't always lead to a successful outcome.
- Campaign fatigue could lead to low donations.
- A time bound campaign might have limitations to what can be raised at any one time.

Recommendations

- Reach the right people by direct messaging via existing internal and external channels / partnerships.
- Create fresh and energising content to engage the right people and drive momentum.
- Evaluate other options for running a campaign that ensure maximum funds can be raised, for example, using sprints or pausing and restarting.

5. Managing the raised funds or donated devices

You've done the hard work to secure donations whether of monetary value or digital devices and now you need to distribute them to those most in need in your communities.

For crowdfunding, you could consider grant making - giving grants to a range of local and / or community organisations serving different needs. Similarly, for crowdsourcing, you could consider either partnering with VCS or other community based organisations to refurbish/upcycle donated devices and distribute them to their beneficiaries.

Process for distributing your raised funds via grant making

- Set clear funding eligibility criteria for the types of projects your organisation will be looking to fund, well in advance.
- Publicise the criteria as well as the process in advance.
- Establish a small but representative panel that can quickly evaluate and decide on successful projects, so that funding can be released quickly and effectively.
- Set up an easy to follow application process for grant distributions.
- You may also set up an expression of interest grant form where local VCS can provide a quick outline of the type of support they can provide locally if funding were available.

Process for distributing sourced devices

- Set clear eligibility criteria for residents including thresholds for savings. Assessing applications can be done either on a first come first serve basis or you could prioritise applications based on a pre-identified need, for example, recipients of free school meals.
- Publicise the eligibility criteria for residents as well as the application process in advance, using existing community connections such as libraries, schools, VCS and community based organisations etc.
- Set up an easy to follow application process. If using online applications, ensure that support from libraries, adult education centres or drop in sessions are available.
- Explore whether a single or multiple collection and drop off point for donated devices will work in your context. You may prefer to opt for a single collection / drop off point in cases of limited resources.

Common pain points

- Potential complaints from residents about eligibility criteria for applying to the scheme.
- Improper vetting of particularly small local and community organisations that apply for grants, may leave your organisation vulnerable to scams or fraud.
- Crowdsourcing devices without outlining minimum criteria / requirements can lead to:
 - A varied quality of stock, which may not always meet the needs of your intended beneficiaries.
 - Additional costs for recycling devices which are not fit for purpose or too expensive to refurbish / upcycle.
 - Fewer devices being donated.
- Lack of access to wifi / data may lead to limited or disuse of devices.

Recommendations

- Avoid or reduce complaints from residents by publishing the reasons for opting for the eligibility criteria that you have, from the start.
- Reduce the risk of fraud by working with legal and finance colleagues within your organisation to develop key funding criteria and required supporting documentation, all vital for vetting organisations applying for grants.
- Develop a set of minimum criteria for devices, in partnership with ICT service colleagues, before initiating the campaign. This will help maximise the reusability of donated devices.
- Ensure some form of data / connectivity (or signposting to free wifi spots locally) is provided alongside the device. Social value contributions might be one option that can help achieve this.

Other useful resources:

[Nesta: Crowdfunding](#)

[RSA: Could crowdfunding work for the public sector](#)