It can be frustrating to have a great idea for outreach ministry but not know how to move from idea to implementation at your church. You know that to have success with addressing a need, you'll need volunteers and funding. You might even need to set up a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, right?

Not so fast! Not every great idea requires a separate nonprofit organization, and there's a lot of research you should do before you even begin thinking about creating a new organization! If you want to take your idea and move it to implementation, the following efforts will facilitate your success and support your responsible use of the community's limited dollars, staff capacity, and available volunteer hours.

Research Existing Services

Start your process by identifying what other entities—parochial, secular, publicly funded, privately funded, local, regional—are doing to address needs that overlap with your idea.

You may not find anyone doing your specific idea; that does not necessarily mean you should proceed alone. If an organization provides a related service, even just tangentially related, approach them with your idea. Pursuing the concept collaboratively may help leverage staff, volunteer capacity, and limited dollars more efficiently. It may be that the existing program already has a strong relationship with the community you as seeking to serve.

If you find no existing related programs or if related efforts are not able to partner, then you can proceed to discerning the feasibility of implementing this idea on your own.

Confirm Support for Your Idea

Discerning whether this is the right idea at the right time is invaluable when you steward other people's resources and time. There are three key audiences with whom you should consult regarding your idea and initial thoughts on its design parameters:

- Clergy and lay leaders in your parish or diocese: Without their support, the idea is not a pragmatic use of your time for implementation at your church.

- Community in need: The intended recipients need to validate that your idea serves their needs and your prospective program allows for accessible use. Any further design and implementation work without without community buy-in will be a waste of time, treasure, and political capital for your next idea.

- Local partners and potential investors in the community: Without their support, the idea will not have the capacity and investment to succeed.

After careful discussions with the three above constituencies demonstrate that your idea has merit, make sure you incorporate their feedback and refine your idea. In particular, the input of the intended community served should be

utilized. This would be a great opportunity to assess your idea's [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)](#) with the knowledge you have gained.

Build a Case for Fundraising

With a strong community assessment in place, you are now ready to create a formal written proposal and potential budget for your idea. This will help you to discern if your effort is something that your church might be able to take on as a program or if you really do need to consider starting a separate nonprofit.

It's time to meet with your budget team and start having honest conversations with potential partners and sponsors about their intended level of support for startup costs and ongoing operations. A formal commitment of staff capacity and dollars from your parish and any project partners is necessary so you have an idea of what your fundraising goal will need to be.

Pilot Implementation

When feasible, a pilot stage allows for real-time feedback from program participants, volunteers, and staff about what is working and what needs to be addressed or improved before a more comprehensive rollout. The input from pilot program participants is significant because what they need and what works best for them must always be the driving force behind all design and implementation plan adjustments.

Once you have done all of the above and need additional dollars for a one-time scale-up of efforts or to implement that initial pilot project, pursuing grant dollars may be worthwhile. You may be eligible to [apply for an ECF grant](#) or [a grant opportunity from the larger Episcopal community](#).

- Episcopal Community Foundation for Middle and North Georgia

  Following Christ's example and the tradition of The Episcopal Church, we partner with Episcopal communities in the Diocese of Atlanta by providing funding, leadership, and resources to enable Episcopalians to lift up people facing poverty and oppression and to achieve significant, long-lasting change in our communities.

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