

Community cookery schools are a space for everyone to experience the benefits of cooking and eating together - regardless of economic status, confidence or ability. This factsheet explains some considerations to make when trying to set one up, based on the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership's experience of running a successful community cookery school as a social enterprise.

Setting up a community cookery school



FINDING A VENUE

Ideally, your school will be somewhere visible, as this helps you promote what you do as well as making it more attractive for people looking to hire the venue. As a *community project*, it's important you make your venue accessible - this means, ideally, on a ground floor, with door frames wide enough for wheelchair access. You'll need at least one height adjustable hob, and also need to consider things such as soundproofing and lighting levels.

Having a table where people can sit down to chop is essential - people can use this for assisted chopping, but also to eat together after their session! Make sure you have space for ingredients, but also somewhere to wash and dry aprons and tea towels.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

A community cookery school offers courses to those with limited access to kitchens and cooking skills - including people with learning disabilities, physical and mental health issues and those on low incomes.

Using a social enterprise model, community courses are subsidised through venue hire for businesses and private parties, and masterclasses and commercial classes that are held by professional chefs and charged at a commercial rate. For masterclasses, chefs donate their time and occasionally also the ingredients, so they operate as a fundraiser.

WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are an essential part of a community cookery school. They help with washing up and tidying during classes, greeting people, making hot beverages, and communicating with participants to ensure a friendly and supportive learning environment.

Managing volunteers takes extra capacity, so think about how you build that into your job roles - you'll need to organise volunteer inductions and interviews, as well as handle applications and enquiries. Consider using software like RotaCentral, which manages volunteers booking on for shifts and creates rotas. Thank your volunteers by giving them discounts to classes, feeding them, and holding trips and celebrations to make sure that they feel valued.

PRICING YOUR CLASSES

Conduct market research – how much do other cookery schools in the area charge? Who is your initial customer base? If your initial audience is largely groups and people that have worked with you before as a community food organisation, you may find that they cannot afford standard commercial cookery school prices. If so, do you want to charge slightly less, whilst at the same time working on expanding your reach to new audiences?

Think about offering discounts for people who bring a friend along. For private hires of the space, offer add-ons, such as a corkage charge for alcohol, or the chance to have a paid worker on hand to help with tidying.

Pay-it-forward or sliding scale models give you the option to offer bursary places for people who otherwise couldn't afford commercially priced courses. Masterclasses, where chefs donate their time and sometimes also ingredients should be marketed as fundraisers, as you'll find that people may be willing to donate more.



PROMOTION

Chefs and restaurants' social media are great places to promote your work. Identify which audiences are on which social media platforms - there are many 'foodies' on Instagram, whilst Facebook events can be a great way to gain traction. Doing features such as 'meet the volunteers', where you feature pictures + stories from your volunteers, are very popular.

Email newsletters are a valuable form of promotion. Listing your kitchen and its events on TripAdvisor (and getting good reviews!) , as well as on your city's official tourist website helps bring in a lot of visitors who find out about the events via Google. Having case studies and stories that promote the work of the kitchen and provide a feel-good element also incentivise people to book.

For community classes, advertise your courses with partner organisations working with vulnerable people across the city. Don't forget posters, too - large posters in your window can provide a lot of traction and interest, as well as mentioning upcoming classes when you're hosting lessons.

WORKING WITH CHEFS

Add a feature on your website introducing who your chefs are, and build up hype for them on social media. Getting them to share your work on social media will help build your following.

Pay a set hourly price for all chefs for their classes. Put time into building up good relationships, especially as many chefs will donate their time for masterclasses. Set a price limit per person per head for ingredients for each class - if a class is £60, cap it at £10. Chefs may source the ingredients themselves, using caterers options which are cheaper.

FUNDING THE KITCHEN

Commercial courses, masterclasses, and venue hire help provide *some* funding for running costs, however they won't cover everything. You will still need to look into grant funding to cover staff costs, rent, amenities, repairs, maintenance, marketing, and insurance. Community classes will often be funded by external partners and organisations, meaning profits raised from commercial courses will be reinvested back into general kitchen running costs.

Crowdfunders are a useful way to raise money for specific causes, such as buying equipment (like a commercial dishwasher) for your kitchen, or raising funds to offer bursary classes on your commercial courses. Hiring out the venue is a particularly effective way to raise money, as you do not need to pay for food or chef costs.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Invest in a commercial dishwasher! Try using a crowdfunder to fundraise for it.
- Buy lots of tupperwares, as people need to take home their food. Encourage them to bring their own, too.
- Don't try and pack too much into a class! Everyone learns at different paces, so try to accommodate for the slowest.
- For evening courses, allow people to bring their own alcohol along if they want. You're creating a pleasant experience for people as much as you're giving them cooking skills.
- Community courses provide people friendship as well as cooking skills - don't forget to give plenty of time for tea breaks!

