

Formulating a Project

First steps

- Identify a 'real-world' sustainability issue or area of interest. Work out how the campus can be used as a test bed, decide on the central focus of a project and identify what the desired outputs/outcomes are.
- Identify key stakeholders at the earliest possible stage and how the project will be interdisciplinary collaboration. Consider and discuss the practicalities of a collaboration, what working together would mean for all parties, time commitments and how the outputs/outcomes would benefit them.
- A Leeds Living Lab project should meet as many as possible (ideally all) of the *key principles* outlined below.
- Assess the project's potential as both a learning opportunity (research and/or teaching) and as something that can result in useful solutions for stakeholders. Consider who the beneficiaries of the project will be.
- Make sure that existing data you will need is available and/or that new data can be generated within the specified timeframe.
- Consider what funding you might need and identify sources available to you.
- It might be more difficult identifying stakeholders who are willing or able to collaborate on a project due to time commitments or different working approaches (for instance, in the case of attending focus groups or workshops). It can be useful to have a backup plan.
- Contact the Sustainability Service to make us aware that your project is taking place and for more information or advice.

Consider how your proposal can include each of these principles:

1. Does it align with the key aims and themes of the University's Strategic Plan and underpin delivery of the Sustainability Strategy? Will it also support the University's Global Challenges?
2. Is it about people, processes and infrastructure, drawing on the cultural and social sciences as well as the STEM subjects?
3. Does it integrate sustainability-related research, student education and University operations?
4. Will the project identify, test and embed transformational solutions to 'real world' sustainability challenges whilst being scalable, replicable and transferable to our cities and regions?
5. Will it drive experimental learning, enhanced participation and opportunities for outreach and engagement through co-creation and co-implemented campus-based solutions?
6. Is it interdisciplinary and delivered in partnership with internal and external stakeholders for mutual benefit, to increase impact and to enhance shared knowledge and action?
7. Will it build knowledge and capacity by playing a leading role in the global debate and development of sustainable living labs?

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Stakeholders:

The Living Lab project is a great way to increase stakeholder engagement, co-creation, collaboration and participation. The Sustainability Service can help to identify and engage potential stakeholders if you are not already in contact with them.

Academic staff and students - consider whether it is possible to work directly with operational staff to help identify sustainability improvements to the University. These may benefit the environment, community, staff, students etc.

Operational and professional staff - identify if there are researchers that will be available to collaborate to bring about sustainability improvements and/or solve operational challenges.

Outputs/Outcomes

Leeds Living Lab projects bring together students, academic and operational teams to research and test sustainable solutions, enhance the curriculum and solve real world challenges using the University as a test bed. Academic staff and students are often looking for an interesting problem or question to research, whilst operational colleagues tend to be looking for a practical solution or innovation to resolve specific challenges.

Properly planned Living Lab projects will always deliver valuable outputs but cannot guarantee a solution to a specific operational problem e.g. the research may demonstrate that the challenge is more complex than initially thought, so therefore lead to further research or recommendations for alternative approaches.

All parties should discuss their desired outputs/outcomes early on and come to an understanding of what the project can realistically accomplish.

Remember: consider how the project addresses the University's Strategic Plan and Sustainability Strategy as well as the University's Global Challenges.

University Services and operational teams - reflect on your work, processes and procedures. What challenges do you face? What environmental or social/community impacts do you have? Where could researchers help to identify and develop new solutions or innovative working practices? The list may well be long but remember that to engage academic collaboration the project will need to be interesting and important e.g. is it relevant and scalable to other organisations? If you are unsure then if a project meets these requirements a good place to start can be with an early conversation with an academic colleague.

Academic staff and students - research questions may well arise from gaps in the literature, evolution of previous projects or indeed your general interest areas. However, it is key to review industry reports and discuss your project ideas with operational practitioners to ensure that is relevant and can offer a needed solution to a known challenge. Think carefully about how the outputs/outcomes will be scalable, transferrable and replicable.

(This has been adapted from the University of Edinburgh Living Lab and Edinburgh Living Lab toolkit prepared by Liz Cooper, Catherine Magill and Ewan Klein)

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Beneficiaries

Highlight who the beneficiaries are from the outset. Consider whether there are learning opportunities for research and/or teaching. Can your project be a learning opportunity as well as a valuable solution for stakeholders? What is the mutual benefit of the project to all stakeholders?

Timescales

Consider the timescales you are going to work to and identify proposed start and end dates. It is useful to discuss this with key stakeholders as different parties will often operate on different timescales. It can be sensible to agree on timescales and deadlines with all stakeholders and put this in writing in a project plan.

Operational staff may work on a shorter-term basis with clearly defined targets and strict project deadlines and are therefore keen for solutions within a short time frame. Depending on the project, academic staff might be working within longer timescales – sometimes over several years – because of funding. Students carrying out Living Lab projects will usually only be working on these for a few months or even just a few weeks depending on whether this is coursework or their final dissertation.

Data

Identify where there is an opportunity to gather or analyse data that supports delivery of the University's Sustainability Strategy. Highlight any known data requirements for the project early, including exactly what type of data is needed, whether the data is available and/or what data can actually be collected. There is separate guidance on this [here](#).

Funding

Consider proposed funding arrangements and try to clearly establish these early on. Identify appropriate funding sources and speak to the Sustainability Service about any funding already identified/secured. Where possible we aim to help those applying for external funding to demonstrate research impact through the principals of interdisciplinary Living Lab projects.

The Living Lab can financially support some projects, including match funding, seed funding or small grants, so it is worth considering whether this could help make the project happen. The amount of funding is dependent on the scale of the project, its outcomes, and other sources of funding available. Please highlight any funding needs at the earliest possible stage.

Collaboration

Collaboration is at the core of the Living Lab, so think carefully about how the project could integrate relationships between research, student education and University operations. Remember, researchers and different stakeholders are coming together to tackle real world challenges in a Living Lab project. It is important that clear communication as different parties have different approaches. Mutually agree on what can realistically be achieved with the project. Highlight the priorities and constraints for each stakeholder.

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Interdisciplinary

Projects based in real-life settings offer the chance to collaborate with researchers from different disciplines. It might be worth considering whether multiple researchers could concurrently investigate various aspects of an issue to provide solutions and recommendations based on their different skills, perspectives and specialisms. Successful interdisciplinary collaboration requires the researchers involved to be aware and understanding of each other's approaches, methodologies and evaluation criteria.

Sharing your research

It is helpful to consider at an early stage how findings and recommendations will be shared with relevant stakeholders as well as the Sustainability Service.

Applying

Please fill in the Application Form which can be found on the Living Lab homepage. If you would like to get involved with an existing project, or to discuss projects prior to application, contact the Sustainability Service at sustainability@leeds.ac.uk