

Information from Presentation to Oxford University Expedition Society

Project Cordillera

Project Cordillera is a social enterprise that provides sustainable mountain adventures in the Andes of Peru.

By partnering with the highest quality providers and local NGOs, we create meaningful adventures that contribute to people and the planet.

Please feel free to get in touch if you would like any advice on planning an expedition to South America.

<http://www.projectcordillera.org/>

Information from a previous Research Expedition participant

Here are the key things I learnt about doing an expedition:

Go for whatever you really want to do, no matter how big or crazy it might initially seem. Any expedition will take a huge amount of time and effort, so it might as well be put towards your dream trip. Plus it's possible to narrow things down and make them more manageable once you've come up with the initial idea. I knew I wanted to go to South America to study the effects of climate change, which was pretty broad, but once I'd got a localised area and a specific focus on water use it was much more manageable.

Do things as far in advance as you possibly can. I wasn't very good at this at the time - I was constantly up against deadlines - but now I know it for the future! You have to have so much sorted before you even begin to look for grants (which takes an age) so it's worth making a start on the planning and organisation a good year in advance of the trip.

Getting a good team together is pretty crucial. It's not possible to do everything by yourself so it's important to have team members who will pull their weight. Also you're going to be together for a long time, probably in stressful situations at points, so you need to know that you'll get along. Naturally there will be times when you irritate each other but so long as you can let things blow over and keep cooperating that's fine! I was really lucky that my team members were fantastic. They worked extremely hard and we all got on as a group. I had never met them before I advertised the expedition, but after interviewing all the applicants I chose people based on enthusiasm and specific interest in the area and that seemed to work for me! We all had different skills too, which complemented each other really well.

On the expedition itself, I would recommend taking every opportunity possible to immerse yourself in the place and the culture. Living in a homestay was definitely a highlight of the trip for me, and was much more rewarding than staying in a hotel. I tried my hardest with my limited Spanish and although my poor attempts raised a lot of laughs (goodness knows what I said on some occasions) it was definitely worth the effort and I think all of us on the expedition made some really good friends.

Lastly, I learnt that challenges will come up again and again but if you push through them you will be rewarded. Several times before the expedition, in the planning period, I wasn't

even sure if it would be able to go ahead. At one point I was on the verge of calling the whole thing off. I found though that no matter how hard the difficult points are, the good parts outweigh the tough parts a hundred to one. Getting the funding and organising everything wasn't easy, but when we were eating guinea pig with our host family, stargazing under the most amazingly bright night sky or perching on a ridge between two vast glaciated valleys there was no question that the hard work had been worth it.

Information on fundraising

The key to fundraising and gaining support for your expedition is focus and contact. Those seeking funding need to think hard about what the funder is looking for. This means putting in the time to research and to get to know their aims and objectives, before reaching out.

You need to be adaptive to the variety of different needs that people are going to have in order to want to support you. Usually, this requires an expedition idea that follows these principles:

- Its unique, new and different. It should be creative, exciting and unusual. At the end of the day, adventure and exploration is about thinking outside the box and not only "not following the crowd" but activity driving in another direction
- It has a purpose - No one is going to sponsor your holiday! You need to be able to show, with a degree of evidence that your expedition contributes in some way to making a better world. The world of adventure has changed, and making an impact through what you're doing is becoming increasingly important. This will only become more the case
- It has the right people for the job - You need to demonstrate that you and your team are the right people to make this expedition happen successfully, and meet the different objectives you're setting yourselves
- It is communicable - You must demonstrate how you're going to tell the world about what you're doing. If you can demonstrate a strong grasp of new media, digital technology, photography, film-making, etc. you're on to something. When it comes to expeditions and why someone will want to fund you, story-telling is everything

Funding for expeditions can and should be broken down. Think:

- Trusts, foundations and awards
- Companies, corporate and sponsorship
- Family, friends and colleagues
- In kind (i.e. support through the donations of equipment, expertise and resources other than cash)
- Commercial fundraising (i.e. selling cakes, washing cars, setting up raffles/lotteries/bingo, etc.)

Each of these needs to be approached differently. Within each area, every organisation needs to be understood differently too. Again, do the research, find out who the key people, and exactly what they're looking for. One keyword in an email, conversation or application could make all the difference.

Apply for everything you can find. It's more than likely that many will come to nothing. Do not get disheartened. Learn as much possible about improving your pitch for the next application or meeting.

Talk to everyone. You'll be surprised where funding can come from. Use any connection you might have and attempt wherever possible to talk to people directly. The phone call is always better than the email. The face-to-face meeting is always better than the phone call. Be passionate and engaging, listening to all the feedback you can and developing your idea (with the contribution of others) over time.

Some funding bodies include:

- RGS has a bunch of really good awards/funding:
<http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Fieldwork+and+Expeditions/Fieldwork+Expeditions.htm>
- Winston Churchill Memorial Fund: <http://www.wcmt.org.uk/>
- NatGeo

But think about specialist organisations too. In climbing and the mountain arena, for instance, you can also find funding at:

- Alpine Club
- Mountain Everest Foundation
- Jonathan Conville Memorial Trust
- Plas y Brenin
- BMC / American Alpine Club
- Tim Ward Wilson Memorial Trust

But there are also specialist funding bodies in almost all interest areas, academic subjects, geographically-focused groups, etc, etc.