

Finding a Premises

One of the key steps to setting up a Shed, is finding somewhere to meet and make friendships, use and store tools and resources, and make numerous cups of tea! What you need will depend on what activities you'd like to do in your Shed, how many Sheddors you're likely to have, and also what is going to be available to you locally.

A good starting point is to write up a 'wish-list' of what you'd like for your Shed. Once you've drawn up that list, as a management group, decide what are essentials, and then be prepared to compromise on the nice and luxuries on the list!

The premises your Shed needs depends on what you want to do. Whilst almost all Sheds aim for a workshop, it is worth noting that not every group has done so. For example, one group has a tool store from which it sets out each time to undertake improvements to its town, whilst another found its members were more interested in learning to use computers and so needed an office. Of course the needs of the Shed will change as new members join.

The normal route to using property- renting - usually has requirements to pay rent over a fixed period and to meet the tenant's obligations which can involve repairs to the building. Before granting a tenancy, landlords need to satisfy themselves that prospective tenants can meet the terms of the tenancy agreement and will ask you for your track record, financial position and plans, details of responsible people etc. If you are at an early stage this might only be possible if you are willing to and able to find an organisation to guarantee your obligations. This may be right for your group but it will involve some loss of control and needs careful consideration and advice. (NB. 'owner' or 'landlord' are used here for whoever controls use of a property.)

If, for whatever reason, a tenancy does not suit your group you will be looking for a property that is not available for letting, is not 'on the market', not publicised and therefore not easy to find. Sub-market property can exist for several reasons including that the building could be in poor condition, its location (e.g. in a redevelopment zone), or where the owner is looking for a 'temporary' solution. Space may also be for hire rather than rent. Alternatively, you may be looking for a space where you can build a Shed premise.

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Searching for a Shed Premises

The search process can be very frustrating and take a long time, on average just over a year, although there have been examples of quick solutions that have enabled the founders to at least make a start while the group develops. These have included one group who chose to use an unwanted double-garage and others who have hired a room. The Greenwich Men in Sheds used a room in a community centre for several years despite it only measuring 12' x 16'. Six people could work in that space.

Whilst searching it is essential that the group continues to meet, discuss and take actions to keep the group together and open. Like many others, the Shed at Halesworth became a strong group through getting to know each other and sharing ideas every Saturday morning in a local bar (before its opening hours) until it found an old printing works. Fundamental issues can be worked through during this time as well as property ideas such as what the group wants to achieve, who for and who can act on behalf of the group. The number of people can stay small but if it does it will not benefit from networking as much and will risk making decisions that suit fewer people.

Improving your chances

As you start your search it is also worth taking some actions that build your group's profile. A building owner will need to have confidence in the group. They will want to know who you are, whether you have both a clear objective and a developed plan of how to achieve it, and to believe you can successfully implement your plan. Will you be seen as a rag-bag of hopeful individuals with a 'bright idea' or a well-informed, organised and cohesive group? Actions which can increase confidence in you as a group include: being knowledgeable about Sheds and their management issues; adopting a constitution; developing some initial draft policies; opening a bank account; devising a financing plan which includes contributions from members and has started to raise money; having a publicity plan, being offered help from the local community and the support of responsible citizens; and having undertaken some activity together. These actions build your credibility and increase your chance of success. Don't forget, you can [contact UKMSA](#) for information and support, and members have unlimited access to our [resource library](#) on our website to support you to be informed about Sheds.

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The key to success

To get an agreement you will need to find how yours and the owners interests coincide. Here's what a Shed might offer an owner:

Cutting the owner's costs

An owner of a disused building can still face costs of security, maintenance, insurance, business rates and possibly demolition. Once a building is occupied the security risk reduces as does its decline. The new user will most likely be paying the insurance. It is good practice to discuss with the owner who has responsibility to insure elements of the building and Shed.

Both local authorities and private owners can be short of the resources needed to improve a property and some Sheds have obtained use of a building in exchange for repairs and renovation. Amongst the best results with a publicly-owned building was the Shed that obtained a run-down cricket pavilion which had been the source of many complaints. The Shed took on the renovation and with the help of the local community made a great community asset of it. The Shed in Maldon got the use of a disused mortuary that needed some work doing to it and even got a £25,000 Council grant to help with the costs.

A privately owned building in Norwich was a three -story inner-city warehouse that had become run-down with the owner not interested or able to make the repairs. The local Shed got an agreement to use it and with many hours work not only created a large space for themselves but also for other users such as a blacksmith, a farmer's market and a charity's offices. Apart from the renovation benefits the owners' savings on rates would have been considerable. However as the new user was a registered charity the charge was automatically reduced by 80%. In a few cases Sheds have successfully appealed for the remaining 20% to be waived or have got that percentage donated by the owner. Even if you're not a registered charity, you may still be able to get discretionary relief as a non-profit or voluntary organisation. Contact your local council to find out.

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The rent agreed for such premises can be nominal. Some help with renovation costs might also come from charitable sources. On our website we have guides on both [income generation and fundraising](#), and help with [becoming a registered charity](#).

Enabling the owner to achieve social gains

The benefits of Sheds to their users are clear and some private owners have responded without other motivation. There can also be benefits to the local community where the owner lives, which might influence them. Some examples have included a rural barn which had become too small for modern agricultural machinery and a village Shed that was given the use of a spare building in a builder's yard.

Public authorities are also interested in achieving social gains and have helped find disused property. Most new Sheds start by approaching their local authority but find that they are one of several 'good causes' that are seeking help with premises. Other issues can arise, for example when two properties in Fulham were identified, even though they had been unused for years, people working for the Council soon declared their long-intended use for it. Local councillors have been instrumental in getting property released but their involvement can also lead to stalemate as their efforts become blocked by other councillors of a different party. Getting people of different parties to offer support might prevent this. Housing Associations have also acted in support of their tenants.

Environmental and health gains

Sheds mostly engage a cohort of people not being catered for and by enabling older men in particular to be more active, integrated and socially engaged there are public health gains. (Older men are a specific target group of Public Health England). Whilst this alone may not have yet led to a new Shed accessing a property it can be a factor in a decision. The environmental aspects of Sheds in repair and reuse of materials enabled the Repair Shed to access property owned by another environmental charity. Environmental activities undertaken by Sheds such as the repair of the bank of the River Test in Hampshire will strengthen this claim. These approaches are most likely to work where you can show the owner that letting your Shed use their property helps achieve their objectives.

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Other benefits

The reason why some owners have welcomed a Shed into their premises have not been easily predicted and illustrate the need to network widely. In some of these cases the owners have approached UKMSA to see if they could help a Shed get started. Examples include a Further Education college who offered space in order to meet Government expectations of greater community involvement. A property development company offering to build and equip a workshop for a Shed in order (we assumed) to help them win a tender for a large contract. A retirement village seeking to incorporate a Shed on its perimeter to help integrate its members with others living in the community. A museum that saw an advantage in involving Sheddors who might help maintain exhibits. A community centre needing to increase its footfall and income to safeguard its local authority support. Local authorities and property companies that have offered free use of vacant shops in order to prevent an area feeling 'run-down'. A private company acting within its corporate responsibility policy. A fire brigade seeking to utilise spare capacity.

Tips on Searching

The above examples show that there can be many different points at which the interests of property owners and Sheds can coincide and they underline the need for Shed members to network widely in their community and with imagination. When looking for an empty property check with your local authority to see if they publish their records which they need to have to apply rating correctly. Some Sheds have carefully surveyed each street looking for hidden potential whilst also getting leads by talking to anyone working in the property field. Land use has been granted for building on church property and even in the grounds of a residential house!

Underused property

Whilst looking also enquire about underused property. This will be occupied and its underuse may therefore not be visible. Underused space has been found for example in an environmental project and a project run for individuals with learning disabilities. Getting access to such places may depend on the owner or occupier seeing that allowing you in will enhance their work.

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The Right to Occupy a Premises

There are a variety of options for Sheds to secure the rights to use a premises. These include:

Verbal agreements are more likely to be between parties who know and trust each other but continuity will depend on maintaining goodwill and good communication, along with continuity of Shed management committee and building ownership. It may cost nothing and be quick to implement, however a written agreement is better as it reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings.

Hiring can also get you off to a quick start – use of the room may be immediately available. Payment can be by the hour and will save additional expenditure on utilities, maintenance and repair, rates, property insurance, funding a deposit, legal and surveying fees etc. You can choose to hire for whole days or less and can match your usage to your resources. You will need storage for tools and materials and you will probably need to clear the room when you have done. If you are fortunate you may be able to use 'free' space outside the room you hired such as a garden. Hiring does not offer any right to continuity. Getting started like this can help build the group whilst it seeks an alternative space. That said the first community Shed, Camden Town Shed, is still happily in its hired space after 7 years.

Leases, licenses and tenancies-at-will can all be used for short -term occupation. The differences can be very technical but a tenancy-at-will is outside the Landlord and Tenants Act (1954) and therefore is unlikely to create security of tenure beyond the agreed period. It is also shorter and cheaper to create than a lease and can have quite variable terms. If your Shed is in a position to consider these undertakings, you will need to take legal advice

An agreement to occupy land has enabled some Sheds to build their own temporary premises or to bring in say, a Portakabin or shipping container. Some Sheds are looking to emulate others in Australia and buy/build a premises, however this can be a time consuming process and isn't easy for Sheds which aren't yet established in communities.

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In your dreams! Community Asset Transfer has been achieved by well-established Sheds, particularly in Scotland, and has resulted in the ownership of a building passing from a public body to a Shed. A voluntary organisation would need to achieve a very high level of credibility for a transfer to happen.

In Summary

The search for a property can be the activity that binds prospective Shed members together or drive them apart. The need to get something going on the ground has to be balanced against the potential of finding a more suitable place. Compromise and patience and hard work will be needed but networking widely can be rewarding in itself as the knowledge of your own area increases and other organisations become aware of yourselves. It can be viewed as detective work, a hunt that leads to a great result. UKMSA may be approached by an owner and it will be approaching other organisations that hold property e.g. the British Legion, local authorities, to encourage them to work with any local Shed.