

Hints & Tips: Setting up a Repair Café in Northern Ireland

1. Introduction: Join the Movement

Starting a repair café in your local area can be a great way to tackle waste and build community. You will be joining a growing global movement that is flourishing here in Northern Ireland. Currently, there are 12 established Repair Café groups across Northern Ireland, including locations in Belfast, Carryduff, and Foyle. You are not doing this alone; there is a supportive network ready to help you get up and running.

2. The Power of the Network

Don't reinvent the wheel. Leverage the existing expertise available to you through the network:

- **NIRN Circular Resources Library:** As a full member of the Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN), you can access the Circular Resources Library exchange. This is a vital tool designed to support new and existing groups:
 - **Kickstart Your Initiative:** It provides new organisations with valuable insights and resources to "kickstart" their reuse and repair initiatives, serving as an ideal entry point to the NIRN community.
 - **Grow & Innovate:** Access to a diverse range of resources helps you enhance your operational capabilities. Exposure to ideas from other members stimulates innovation and encourages the adoption of effective repair methods.
 - **Connect:** The library promotes a greater understanding of the importance of reuse and repair, helping you influence positive change across your community.
- **Repair Café Northern Ireland:** This network links community repair organizations across the region. They provide support to help new groups get started and actively work to keep the movement connected through "Network Weavers" who facilitate support between cafes.
- **Restarters Expertise:** Drawing on the philosophy of *The Restart Project*, many cafes now focus on data and impact. For example, the NI network tracks its collective impact, having already fixed over **7 tonnes** of items. Using tools like a "Fixometer" can help you demonstrate the environmental value of your event.

3. Leveraging Local Skills

Finding volunteers with repair skills is often the biggest concern for new organisers, but the skills are likely already present in your community.

- **Men's Sheds Partnership:** Men's Sheds are an excellent example of where repair skills are already present and being used by members. Many Sheds, such as the **Tully Meadow Men's Shed** in County Tyrone, have successfully launched Repair Café initiatives. Collaborating with a local Men's Shed can provide you with a ready-made "Core Team" of fixers and a venue equipped with the right tools.

- **Dedicated Community Hubs :** You can also look to established groups for inspiration. [Repair & Share Foyle](#), a member of the NIRN network, is a prime example of how to leverage diverse community skills. By recruiting "Fixers, Menders, and Makers" from the wider public, they have expanded beyond monthly events to launch a "Fixing Factory" and "Library of Things" in Derry/Londonderry.

4. Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Experience a Repair Café for yourself!

To understand what a repair café looks and feels like, you should visit one in person .

- **Atmosphere:** They are environmental and social spaces with a welcoming atmosphere where people sit together, drink coffee, and watch their item being fixed .

Step 2: Where will your Repair Café take place?

Repair Cafés can be held in various locations depending on what works best for your community .

- **Pop-up vs. Static:** Some cafes move around 'host venues' (community centres, libraries, church halls) each month, while others are held in dedicated spaces .
- **Accessibility:** Ensure the venue is accessible and has electricity (sockets) for testing electrical repairs and good lighting for fixers.

Step 3: Grow your team of volunteers

You need a core team to help with organizing, promoting, and ensuring the event runs smoothly .

- **Diversity of Skills:** It is helpful to have a diverse group . You need "fixers" (electrical, sewing, mechanical), but you also need "hosts" to welcome people, manage the queue, and serve tea and cake.
- **Safety First:** Ensure you have a clear agreement or "house rules" that visitors sign. This clarifies that repairs are performed by volunteers and helps manage liability.

Step 4: What type of things will you repair?

It is common to offer repairs on clothing, bicycles, small furniture, and small household electricals like toasters, lamps, and kettles .

- **The "Carry-in" Rule:** The general rule of thumb is that one person must be able to carry the item into the Repair Café space .
- **Managing Expectations:** Not everything is easily repaired . If spare parts are required or an item is "end of life," volunteers can signpost visitors to professional repair services or safe disposal options .

Important Note: Electrical Safety & PAT Testing

If you plan to fix electrical appliances, most insurers and venue owners (like community centres) will require you to demonstrate that the items are safe to use after repair.

- **Insurance Requirement:** While PAT (Portable Appliance Testing) is not always a strict legal obligation for every individual, it is widely considered the standard method to prove you are meeting safety requirements. Many insurance policies explicitly demand it.
- **Get Training:** You don't need to be a fully qualified electrician to do this, but you do need to be a "competent person." You can send a volunteer on a short training course (e.g., City & Guilds 2377-77).
- **Equipment:** You should budget for a PAT Tester. Simple "pass/fail" testers are available for around £250–£300.

Step 5: Event Day Considerations

- **Risk Assessment:** Perform a risk assessment for each event and ensure you have insurance coverage .
- **Refreshments:** Offer tea, coffee, and cake to volunteers and visitors . This encourages conversation about waste and repair while people wait .

Step 6: Promoting your event

- Let people know when and where it is happening
- The type of items which fixers will be able to fix
- Push across social media and local outlets plus word of mouth
- Capture the event by taking pictures so you can promote (ensuring you put signs up saying you will be taking pictures)
- Record the type and number of items fixed (so you can promote how much you have saved from waste and also equivalent in CO2 savings) via [Restarters](#)

5. Funding Available

You generally need little or no funding to start a Repair Café. It is a volunteer-led project where fixers often bring their own repair tools with them, or tools are donated by the community .

However, you will likely need a small budget to cover specific startup and running costs.

- **What you will need funding for:**
 - **Public Liability Insurance:** This is the most critical cost to protect your volunteers and the venue.
 - **A "Fixer's Box of Spares":** Small consumable items like fuses, glue, patches, and bulbs .
 - **Volunteer Costs:** Refreshments (tea, coffee, buns) to keep your team fueled.
 - **Venue Costs:** If you cannot secure a free community hall.
 - **Stationery & Promotion:** Printing flyers, sign-in sheets, and signage.

- **Where to find funding:**

- **NIRN Member Funding Bulletin:** As a member of the Northern Ireland Resources Network, you will receive frequent updates on funding opportunities via the member bulletin. This is often the best place to find grants specifically tailored for circular economy and community repair projects.
- **Local Authority Grants:** Most councils in Northern Ireland offer "Community Development Grants" or "Micro-Grants" (often £300–£500) that are perfect for covering insurance and startup equipment.
- **Visitor Donations:** Most Repair Cafés are free but have a donation jar. Visitors are often generous, and these small contributions are usually sufficient to cover ongoing costs like venue hire and tea/coffee .
- **Local Fundraising:** Simple local activities, like a bake sale or a raffle at your launch event, can easily raise the funds needed for your first year's insurance.
- **National Lottery** offer funding to charities and community groups across Northern Ireland