

Wandi Cravings on Wheels: Wande’s Food Truck Project

Wande flipped through a notebook filled with scribbles: van suppliers, licensing forms, half-finished menu sketches. Just weeks earlier she had resolved that *Wandi Cravings*’ entry into the UK would take the form of a food truck — mobile, visible, and seemingly affordable. Yet now, surrounded by unanswered emails and mounting budget gaps, she felt the weight of the decision. Regulators required forms she barely understood, suppliers offered conflicting timelines and costs, and the diaspora community urged her to deliver authenticity with flair. Investors asked for milestones, her visa imposed a six-month horizon, and her Nigerian outlets still needed attention. Success, she realised, would not be judged by passion alone but by how well she balanced the divergent needs of those around her. How could she turn a bold idea into a structured, deliverable project?

Introduction

By early 2025, Wande had made her choice. Out of the multiple entry models she had considered—event catering, ghost kitchen, or a sit-down outlet—the food van seemed the most viable path for introducing *Wandi Cravings* to the UK market. A mobile unit promised flexibility, lower start-up costs, and a chance to test consumer appetite before committing to a permanent site. Yet making the decision was the easy part. Sitting at a small desk in her Leicester flat, half-covered with sticky notes, budget scribbles as shown in Table 1, and unanswered emails, Wande confronted the harder question: how to transform her vision into an actionable project plan. Unlike in Lagos, where instinct and informal networks carried her far, this new venture demanded a more structured approach..

Table 1: Wande’s Rough Budget Outline (Draft, January 2025)

| Item | Estimated Cost (£) | Notes / Gaps |
|--|---------------------|---|
| Purchase of used van | 12,000–18,000 | Range varied by age/condition; unclear whether kitchen equipment included |
| Vehicle conversion & kitchen equipment | 8,000–12,500 (est.) | Supplier quotes varied; unclear which items were essential for inspection |
| Food safety certification & licences | 500–1,200 | Uncertainty around whether street trading licence required separate fees |
| Branding & wrap design | 1,500–3,000 (est.) | Designer quote covered design only; fitting and printing unpriced |
| Initial stock (food and packaging) | 2,000 (estimated) | Dependent on final menu choices; no detailed breakdown yet |
| Staff wages (first 3 months) | Unknown | Unsure if staff were needed at launch or if she could operate solo |
| Marketing and promotion | 800 (estimated) | Assumed flyers, Instagram ads; not costed in detail |
| Insurance (vehicle + liability) | Unknown | No quotes yet; only anecdotal estimates from peers |
| Fuel and maintenance | Unknown | Highly dependent on van age and model |
| Contingency | Not included | No reserved buffer for delays, breakdowns, or overruns |

Source: Authors own work

Total (incomplete): approximately £16,800 – £23,500 plus multiple gaps

The food van idea sparked excitement, but its contours remained fuzzy. Was it enough to purchase a second-hand vehicle and park it near Leicester’s bustling city centre, or should she aim for festival slots, brand partnerships, and a break-even point within six months? Wande realised she was not just chasing another business dream; she was, whether she admitted it or not, managing a project. And with no prior training in project management, the path ahead felt overwhelming. How could she structure the work, prioritise competing demands, and keep momentum under pressure? The next six months would not only test her culinary creativity but also demand a new set of skills — the ability to execute with discipline, to impose order on uncertainty, and to carry *Wandi Cravings* into an environment where every decision would be scrutinised, costed, and timed.

Background: Wande’s Entrepreneurial Journey

Wande’s entrepreneurial story began long before she ever thought of a food van. Growing up in Lagos, she had always carried a restless ambition. As an undergraduate, when many of her peers focused only on lectures and exams, she experimented with side hustles — selling kerosene with her roommate, dabbling in phone trading, even planning small social events. Each venture sharpened her instincts: spotting opportunities quickly, learning to manage cash in fast-moving environments, and above all, discovering that she preferred the uncertainty of business to the rigidity of Nigeria’s formal job market. Her breakthrough came with food. What started as informal catering for friends and neighbours evolved into *Wandi Cravings*, a modest eatery in Ajah. The outlet quickly built a reputation for creative menus that fused Nigerian flavours with a playful, contemporary twist.

In 2023, Wande left Nigeria temporarily to pursue postgraduate study in the UK. Leicester, with its bustling multicultural mix and vibrant Nigerian diaspora, became both a place of study and reflection. Immersed in new food cultures — from Indian street snacks to gourmet burger vans parked outside football stadiums — she began to see her own cuisine through fresh eyes. The UK’s street food movement appeared dynamic, accessible, and receptive to global flavours. For Wande, the food van was not just a cheaper way into the market; it was also a strategic entry point. It allowed her to test demand among diaspora communities nostalgic for home cooking, while also introducing Nigerian street food to wider UK audiences curious about “authentic but modern” global dishes. Crucially, it reduced the risks associated with a permanent outlet and gave her flexibility to move with the rhythms of festivals, campuses, and city events. By the time she reached her decision in early 2025, the food van represented more than a business model. It was the culmination of her entrepreneurial journey so far: a chance to combine the resourcefulness of Lagos hustle with the discipline demanded by a UK market, to extend her brand across borders, and to prove that *Wandi Cravings* could thrive in an entirely new environment.

Defining the Project

When Wande told friends she was “launching a food van,” the words sounded decisive, almost triumphant. Yet the more she repeated the phrase, the less certain she became about how it

would be implemented. Her notebook shown in Figure 1 bore the signs of this confusion. One page listed second-hand vans for sale, another sketched menus with peppered gizzard wraps and plantain fries, while a third carried a rough calendar of Leicester festivals she might try. None of it connected. There was no logical sequence, no start and finish, no clear definition of “done.” The outcomes were equally unclear. Was her goal simply to test whether Nigerian street food could resonate with UK customers, or to build a sustainable income stream after her studies? For diaspora families, success might mean a nostalgic taste of home; for local students, it might be novelty and price. Juggling these possible outcomes left her struggling to articulate a central objective.

Figure 1: Wande’s “To-Do” List (scribbled in notebook, February 2025)

- | To Do List |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buy a van (but check MOT first?)• Speak to council about food licence (need Level 2 hygiene course??)• Menu – jollof, gizzard wrap, puff-puff, drinks? Keep it simple first?• Design logo (ask cousin in Lagos? Or pay local designer?)• Branding wrap for van – how much??• Find out about insurance (vehicle, public liability)• Talk to supplier re: plantain and spices – can they deliver in Leicester?• Apply for street trading licence – where exactly do I apply?• Festival applications – deadline March? Check fees!• Staff? Maybe hire part-time student? Or start alone?• Create Instagram page – photos?? Need professional pictures?• Buy packaging (boxes, cups, napkins – eco-friendly?)• Sort out payment system – card machine? Cash float?• Parking/storage for van – where will it stay overnight?• Vehicle conversion – who does this? Compare two quotes!• Do I need a business bank account now?• Budget spreadsheet – finish it properly!• Fuel cost?? No idea yet.• Plan launch day – invite diaspora community, maybe Nigerian students’ association?• Contingency – what if van not ready by summer? |

Source: Authors own work

Success criteria added another layer of fog. Should she measure progress by the number of meals sold, the ability to cover her running costs, or the strength of her online following? Would “success” mean being accepted into Leicester’s summer festival circuit, or simply trading steadily on weekends without loss? Each interpretation implied different trade-offs and different priorities. This lack of clarity unsettled her. Her previous ventures offered immediate, visible feedback — a luxury she no longer had. In Leicester, progress seemed harder to measure and far more formalised. She found herself caught in loops of uncertainty — redrawing lists, shifting goals, second-guessing what should come first. For the first time, Wande was forced to confront an uncomfortable realisation: without defining what her project really was, she risked drifting in circles, never knowing if she was closer to launch or still stuck at the start.

Time and Resource Pressures

Wande knew that money was tight. Her savings from Nigeria, carefully transferred to the UK after completing her studies, would barely stretch to the cost of a van, kitchen refit, and the first few months of operating expenses. There was no cushion, no family wealth to fall back on, no investors lined up with cheques in hand. Every pound would need to work twice as hard. These financial limits shaped not only what she could do, but when she could do it. Compounding this was time. Her visa gave her only a limited window of flexibility. Within six months, she would need to demonstrate either a viable pathway to sustained business activity or explore other options. The idea of drifting without direction was not an option; the visa clock ticked in the background, silent but insistent. These compounded pressures shaped every decision she made thereafter, often forcing trade-offs with no ideal solution.

Her constraints crystallised around three realities: limited capital, limited time, and divided attention. In theory, this called for ruthless prioritisation, but in practice, Wande often found herself paralysed. Should she spend early funds on securing a reliable van, even if it left little for branding or marketing? Should she commit to Leicester festivals months in advance, without knowing if she would even be ready to trade? Should she invest in staff from the start, or try to run lean as a one-woman operation? Each decision felt like a trade-off with no safety net. If she overspent, the money would run out. If she delayed too long, the visa window might close. If she neglected her Nigerian outlet, years of work could unravel. For the first time in her entrepreneurial journey, Wande felt boxed in by finite resources and hard deadlines. The hustle-and-improvise style that had carried her in Lagos was harder to sustain in an environment that demanded structure, foresight, and careful balancing. The challenge now was not just to dream big, but to plan realistically — carving out a project scope and schedule that acknowledged her constraints rather than ignored them.

Stakeholder Complexity

In Lagos, Wande’s world had been smaller. Suppliers were a phone call away, customers were neighbours or friends-of-friends, and regulators appeared only occasionally, often placated with patience — or persuasion. In Leicester, the network was far wider, more formal, and far less forgiving. Suddenly, *Wandi Cravings* was not just about her food; it was about navigating a web of stakeholders, each with their own interests, demands, and power. The UK regulators came first. To trade legally, she needed food safety certification, council inspections, and a street trading licence. Each step had its own form, fee, and waiting period. A single missed detail could delay her start by weeks. Then there were the vehicle suppliers as shown in Table 2. One garage promised a cheaper second-hand van, but with a three-month delivery timeline. Another could customise a kitchen in weeks, but at nearly double the price. Their pitches conflicted, leaving Wande unsure whether to prioritise speed, cost, or reliability.

Table 2: Wande’s Notes from Supplier Meeting (March 2025)

| Supplier | Offer |
|--|---|
| Supplier A – Van Solutions Ltd. (Nottingham) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Quoted £12,000 for second-hand catering van (2014 model, MOT valid 10 months).Kitchen equipment already installed but basic (grill + fryer, no rice cooker). |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready for pickup in 4 weeks. • Minor bodywork rust – “cosmetic only.” • Warranty: 3 months parts & labour. |
| Supplier B – Food Trucks UK (Leicester) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Van (2016 model) available immediately: £16,500. • Custom refit package (rice cooker, warmer, extractor fan): +£8,000. • Total: £24,500. • Warranty: 1 year on parts, 6 months labour. • “Safer to invest in a newer van – less risk of breakdown.” |
| Supplier C – Independent Mechanic (recommended by friend) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can source older van (~2010) for £7,000–£8,500. • Kitchen conversion extra: £5,000 (minimum). • Timeline: “depends on parts – maybe 3 months.” • No formal warranty, “but I’ll look after it if anything goes wrong.” |

Source: Authors own work

Wande’s notes in margin:

- Which option is better long term?
- Cheaper now vs reliable later??
- If I wait 3 months, will festival season be over??
- Do I need rice cooker + extractor for inspection?
- What about insurance – does van age affect premium??

Designers and branding consultants added yet another voice. One urged her to invest heavily in a bold, professional look — colourful wraps, sleek logos, Instagram-ready photos — to stand out in Leicester’s crowded food scene. Another suggested keeping it simple until cash began to flow. Wande knew branding mattered, but how much could she afford up front? The question of staff lingered too. Friends encouraged her to recruit early, warning that long shifts alone in a cramped van would be unsustainable. Yet wages would strain her limited budget, and finding staff familiar with Nigerian cuisine might not be easy. Meanwhile, event organisers dangled opportunities. A summer festival slot promised huge exposure but required hefty deposits months in advance. Smaller markets seemed more affordable but carried uncertain footfall. Each invitation felt like both an opportunity and a gamble. Finally, there was the diaspora community — Leicester’s Nigerians, Ghanaians, and West Africans who had warmly

embraced her food in Ajah. They carried high hopes, urging her to represent their culture with pride, authenticity, and flair. But their expectations sometimes clashed with what local British customers might want: dishes less spicy, portions differently priced, menus simplified for first-timers. Wande felt herself tugged in all directions. Every stakeholder offered advice, set conditions, or demanded decisions. Each mattered, but collectively they formed a web of competing pressures she struggled to navigate. She could see clearly that unless she found a way to map, prioritise, and manage these voices, her food van project risked stalling before it even began.

Uncertainty and Risk

No matter how many lists she scribbled, Wande could not escape the nagging sense that so much lay beyond her control. Launching a food van in Leicester was exciting, but it was also unpredictable in ways that felt both familiar and entirely new. Licensing and regulation were the first unknowns. She had submitted paperwork for food safety certification and was reading through street trading licence requirements, but council processes could be slow and opaque. A missing form or delayed inspection might set her back weeks. Regulation in the UK felt more rigid and unforgiving, with little room for the informal workarounds she once relied on. The thought of investing in a van only to be told she could not trade on schedule unsettled her. Then there was the weather — the eternal risk for outdoor businesses in the UK. A sunny day could bring long queues at markets and festivals; a rainy Saturday might leave her with wasted stock and empty sales. Planning around Leicester’s famously changeable skies felt like building on shifting ground.

Consumer uptake was equally uncertain. She believed in the appeal of Nigerian street food, but would British students and local families buy peppered gizzard wraps or jollof rice boxes as readily as they bought fish and chips? Would they return after the first taste, or would curiosity fade quickly? Diaspora communities might support her launch, but sustaining demand required reaching a broader base. On top of this, cost inflation loomed. Prices of second-hand vehicles were climbing. Food suppliers warned her that global shipping disruptions might push up the cost of imported spices and rice. Even branding quotes varied wildly, leaving her anxious about committing before she knew her financial runway. She realised uncertainty was no longer something to react to, but something she had to plan for. Wande knew she could not eliminate these risks, but she needed to think differently about how to manage them. Should she build buffers into her budget and timeline, even if it meant a slower launch? Should she create contingency plans — a backup trading site if festivals fell through, a pared-down menu if costs spiked? Or should she simply push ahead, trusting her hustle to carry her through as it had in Lagos? For the first time, Wande realised that uncertainty was not a side-issue; it was central to her project. The challenge was no longer just about cooking or branding. It was about learning how to anticipate, mitigate, and adapt — skills she had never formally studied but now urgently needed.

Execution Dilemma

By spring, the gap between Wande’s ambition and her ability to organise it had grown into a pressing dilemma. She had the food, the name, and the drive — but she lacked the framework to pull everything together. Her notebook had become a battlefield of competing priorities. One page screamed “*buy van now before prices rise,*” another reminded her to “*check health and safety requirements,*” while scraps of paper tucked in the margins listed menus, staff leads, and festival dates. Nothing connected; nothing flowed in sequence. Each day began with energy

but often ended with frustration, as she jumped between tasks without knowing which truly mattered most. Structuring the work felt impossible. Should she start with regulatory compliance before investing in branding, or push ahead with menu testing to generate buzz while still chasing approvals? Each path seemed logical in isolation, yet overwhelming when combined.

Prioritising tasks was no easier. Everything felt urgent: securing a vehicle, designing the wrap, finalising suppliers, setting up social media. Yet she sensed that doing everything at once risked doing nothing well. Without a clear sense of hierarchy, she found herself trapped in cycles of indecision. Even if she made progress, she had no system to monitor it. Unlike in Lagos, where success was visible in queues and cash at day's end, here milestones were invisible. How could she track whether she was moving closer to launch, or drifting sideways in busywork? And then there were the people around her — stakeholders with strong, sometimes conflicting voices. A designer urged urgency on branding, a council officer emphasised compliance, a friend suggested staffing early, while the diaspora community wanted authenticity above all. Keeping these actors aligned and informed felt like yet another job she had no training for.

Wande recognised the irony: she had chosen the food van for its apparent simplicity, yet it had evolved into a complex project requiring skills she had never acquired. While her informal skills remained an asset, coordinating interdependent tasks, setting priorities, and tracking execution required a discipline she had never formally learned. As she stared at her growing lists, Wande admitted the truth to herself: she was no longer just chasing a dream — she was managing a project without knowing how to be a project manager.