community transport association

National Lottery Good Causes: Fund what matters to you

A Response from CTA

Sept 2026

www.ctauk.org

NATIONAL LOTTERY GOOD CAUSES: FUND WHAT MATTERS TO YOU – OPEN CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Summary

The Community Transport Association (CTA) response to the Department for Media, Culture and Sport's open call for evidence on the future of National Lottery Good Causes funding.

The Community Transport Association (CTA) recognises the National Lottery as a major funder and investor in the Community Transport sector**,** supporting essential community-led local transport initiatives and services across the UK. We welcome this ongoing support and partnership and believe that it can be further strengthened and enhanced.

This submission proposes a set of targeted, proportionate reforms to strengthen the effectiveness and transparency of National Lottery funding, including:

- introducing annual published evaluations of funding decisions;
- providing consistent, high-quality feedback to all applicants;
- increasing transparency through publication of success rates and funding outcomes;
- strengthening engagement through intermediary organisations and direct applicant support; and
- embedding a relationship-based aftercare model to improve delivery and long-term impact.

Introduction

The Community Transport Association (CTA) is a national charity leading the UK Community Transport movement and the national membership organisation for the sector in the UK, representing and supporting a network of over 1,600 member organisations across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Our members are predominantly local charities, community groups, and social enterprises delivering community-led transport solutions that address gaps in mainstream local transport provision and enable access to essential services. We welcome this ongoing partnership between the National Lottery and the sector and the outcomes it delivers.

Our vision is of a world where people can shape and create their own accessible and inclusive transport solutions and our mission is to achieve this through championing accessible and inclusive transport, connecting people and ideas, and by strengthening our members and raising standards.

We do this by contributing to the formation of public policy that affects our sector and their service users and showing how better outcomes are achieved for people and communities when they have access to community transport. We create partnerships with like-minded organisations across all sectors; manage a national programme of quality assured education and training; provide comprehensive advice and guidance to those delivering community transport; and we take every opportunity to champion the vital and indispensable work that our members do.

Empowering your communities to feel benefits

The current National Lottery funding model is highly valued across the community transport sector, directly assisting and empowering projects within local communities across all the regions and nations of the UK. Smaller grants provide accessible support that empowers and facilitates innovative community led transport services, while larger multi-year awards provide crucial stability within a sector otherwise restricted by short-term funding cycles. This includes support for core costs and capital investment, such as vehicles, which is particularly critical given the significantly higher costs of accessible minibuses, including specialist adaptations to meet passenger needs**,** and which is often unavailable from alternative funding sources

This investment has empowered the development, provision and sustainability of local community transport services that are often the only viable transport option available for people who would otherwise not be able to access any transport provision. Community transport is therefore essential transport infrastructure; an enabler of accessibility to essential public services and central to tackling social exclusion and transport poverty. Within local communities the sector empowers mobility and participation in community life, facilitating access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities and social networks; enabling the key outcomes of reducing isolation, enhancing well-being and directly reinforcing community cohesion, resilience and social inclusion.

National Lottery funding has facilitated both the development of existing services and the establishment of new community transport provision, directly supporting the development of skills, capacity building, volunteering opportunities, and confidence building within and across the communities, both rural and urban, that are served. Achieving these key outcomes highlights the importance and effectiveness of National Lottery funding in its support for community-led and locally derived transport solutions. Community transport organisations are grassroots enabled and embedded within their communities and our ideally placed to respond to ongoing local transport challenges and needs, ensuring that National Lottery funding delivers direct and visible benefits that are experienced nationwide daily.

Case Study:

Green Dragon (Preseli Rural Transport Association) in Pembrokeshire successfully applied for a three-year Wellbeing Connections Project under the National Lottery's People and Places Large Grant. The funding enabled the organisation to purchase additional vehicles, supported additional driver hours and contributed to Manager and Administrator time.

"The Lottery gave us constructive feedback on our first application after it failed to get through Stage 1, this was helpful as we knew then what they were looking for but more guidance or advice on this before we applied the first time would have saved a lot of time, saved a lot of hassle, and would have meant that we didn't have to redo the process.

The tools the Lottery encouraged us to use before we reapplied were useful. There was a Strengths Checker tool. It was a bit tedious to go through, but it made sense and helped us look at trustee skills and strengths and to talk to the Directors about the results.

When we finally got through the Lottery process it felt like a milestone for Green Dragon. Having the grant was brilliant, the funding helped us to get newer minibuses and passengers told us they preferred these vehicles as they were less bumpy going down rural roads, they were warmer, and the vehicles were easier to get in and out of. The funding helped us to start new services in areas where there hadn't been services previously, that was worth its weight in gold. People had more opportunities to get to the places and spaces they needed to, and we could put on additional shopping trips and build in time for passengers to go for a coffee after doing their weekly shop, as the social aspect is as important as anything else.

Besides the benefits for passengers, there were clear benefits for the staff we employ too, and all our staff members are drawn from the local community. Having job security for three years and continuity for staff is really good because we have set times when we knew 'this is Lottery funded work time' and we can spend the time delivering the services and even have extra time to go out networking, so people know about us. We could step off the funding treadmill for a bit. You have to be out there talking to people as you never know what conversations will be useful.

Our experience of the Lottery has been positive although more communication generally would be welcomed, although we appreciate how busy staff must be. It would be good to have an in-person meeting or visit before they make a funding decision so that they can see what we are doing on the ground. If the Grant Managers were able to phone funded organisations from time to time for a check-in and chat, that would be valued by organisations.

I would encourage more people to apply, just make it clear regarding the processes involved in applying and the information you need to gather. We would go to the Lottery again, if we had a good enough project because we've learnt so much from going through the application process. Now, if someone tells me they have bought a Lottery ticket I tell them, "You've helped fund us, thank you! Our organisation and others like us are what you've helped fund." People need to know about the community organisations like ours that are delivering services every day to help local people."

Operator's ask for the Lottery:

"It would be good if they could come and see what we do and spend time listening to passengers about the difference the service has made for them. We do provide a report each year for them and email it in, and I know capacity is an issue for everyone, but a recommendation would be for the Lottery to visit funded projects at least once during the grant term so that we can build a relationship with them and show what's been achieved with the funding."

Empowering communities to take decisions

While National Lottery funding delivers significant local benefits decision-making can feel remote and disconnected from the communities most affected by transport inequalities and its associated social exclusion. Therefore, strengthening the application process with more effective participatory and locally informed approaches would improve targeting of resources and ensure funding decisions reflect lived experience.

Despite opportunities being made available for engagement, the decision-making process can be perceived across the sector as being as too distant and remote. From a distinct community transport sector perspective there is therefore a need for the process to be genuinely seen as being more inclusive, collaborative, participatory and informed by local and regional transport considerations. Greater collaboration and incorporation within the application process by a trusted intermediary organisation, such as the Community Transport Association (CTA), would enhance the overall effectiveness of funding decisions by drawing on specialist sector experience and local knowledge. Such collaboration should be embedded within the application process to enhance the effectiveness of funding decisions by drawing on specialist sector expertise and local knowledge. In practice, this could include structured signposting and guidance for applicants, input into application design and criteria, and a formal role in supporting pre-application engagement and feedback.

Adopting such collaborative partnerships would enable and ensure a strong delivery model, together with an improved targeting of resources based upon distinct specialised sector knowledge and expertise. Inclusivity, increased community participation, and accessibility would be key outcomes. An excellent example and precedent can be found in the 'Power of Civil Society' pilot project, a partnership between the National Lottery and the Lloyds Bank Foundation.[1]

More visible community engagement by Lottery officers, alongside clearer and more consistent communication channels, would seek to build confidence, improve understanding and encourage greater participation across the community transport sector.

Transparency is central to empowerment. The introduction of annual, publicly accessible evaluations of both successful and unsuccessful applications, alongside more open and visible publication of successful application rates, assessment criteria, and funding outcomes, would undoubtedly increase trust and strengthen overall accountability and public confidence in the National Lottery.

[1] Lloyds Bank Foundation, *Investing in the Power of Civil Society:* https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/development/investing-in-the-power-of-civil-society/

Case study:

Devon Accessible Services (DAS) is involved in a successful collaborative Reaching Communities bid of almost £500,000 for a North Devon Community Transport Partnership. DAS is a key partner in this five-year project, working alongside community transport and voluntary sector organisations to strengthen volunteer-led transport and improve access to essential services. The partnership takes a collaborative approach to supporting volunteer recruitment, sharing good practice and helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of community car schemes across the area.

"One way to empower communities to take decisions is to work collaboratively with a range of local groups and organisations to help strengthen the partners and support them to develop. After all they are rooted in their area and know the local context, and sharing learning across a partnership can also make life a bit easier for all concerned.

One of the things that helped our partnership application was having the Chief Executive Officer of AgeWell North Devon leading the partnership bid as she has been involved in many

Lottery bids and understood the bid process and all aspects of partnership working. We were dealing with a varied range of groups, some much smaller and some larger, gathering statistics, organising meetings and helping the organisations work as a partnership. It's a year of astonishingly hard work preparing for a large Lottery bid, and it takes up a massive amount of time, doing all this preparatory work together with no money essentially, although you hope there will be a successful outcome.

If the groups had known in advance all the work they had to do, they wouldn't have done it, but they do recognise that they are now in a stronger position. A lot of it was about governance as policies needed to be in place. Organisations upped their game, and the Lottery's focus on compliance is a huge plus. For some organisations, it helped trustees realise the responsibilities of applying for funding of this scale, and organisations really upgraded their policies and practices. As a result of the work the partners have done, we are now sharing the policy sets with the wider sector, so the learning is being passed on.

The Lottery supported DAS to provide partnership support and it's good that this element has been recognised. It has stimulated Community Transport across North Devon and Torridge. If we're talking about empowering communities to take decisions, then providing financial support for collaboration and shared learning is a necessity, not a 'nice to have'. It could be useful to have some Lottery grants available to help establish a partnership in the early stages, before they go on to apply for a large grant, as collaboration is the way forward but there's very little assistance at this preliminary formation stage.

Having the expertise of the CEO of AgeWell North Devon to guide us through the process was essential, as my last experience of preparing a Lottery bid was 18 years ago, and it was a painful process. That time we didn't get past stage one, and it's fair to say I'd shied away from applying again. Some partnerships may not feel able to apply to the Lottery because they'd find the process daunting. The Lottery may be missing out on great ideas simply because not everyone has the support of someone who can guide them through the process and keep a partnership on track. You need confidence to go through the process, and when it's a partnership bid you find out what people's limits are. This last year has been a steep learning curve. We've seen many positives along the way. One part-time coordinator of a scheme had not taken a holiday in years as she felt solely responsible for keeping the service running. We've started to address succession planning, and I couldn't get hold of her yesterday because she was on holiday. That's a real success story!"

Operator's asks for the Lottery:

"More support to help develop and fund partnership working, recognising the time and commitment this takes from all partners, and the pressures on capacity it can place, especially when we're all working at capacity to begin with."

"Groups now must prepare so many monitoring reports for different funders and it can take a significant amount of capacity to do this. With the Lottery grant, our reporting timetable doesn't match the usual quarterly reporting timing. This is due to the date we started the grant, but it can cause issues for organisations. My request to the Lottery is to enable simplified reporting."

Simplifying access to funding

National Lottery funding is highly valued by community transport organisations as it can support core costs, and smaller grants are relatively straightforward to access and quick to administer. However, for larger grants the application process should be further modified to reduce barriers and to promote accessibility.

Decision time disparity in timescales between smaller and larger grants are a significant issue for the community transport sector. For example, an Awards for All application (up to £20,000) has a typical timeframe of 3 to 4 months, in comparison with larger grants which can take up to 10 months. This discrepancy creates operational challenges especially in terms of planning and the management of resources. The introduction of a six-month decision timeline for medium grants up to £300,000 would be a proportionate and constructive adjustment, whilst keeping a longer timeframe for larger grants.

Inconsistencies in application requirements and grant thresholds across the four nations of the UK also need to be addressed; for example, in England and Wales Transport Options Appraisals are required as part of certain applications, however it is unclear if equivalent requirements apply in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The recent increase in grant thresholds in Wales is welcome and reflects rising operational costs across the sector, however standardisation of these bands across all the nations of the UK needs to be introduced to reduce complexity and to enable consistency and clarity.

Simplifying access to National Lottery good causes funding requires a strengthening of ongoing support for applicants throughout the application process, with a focus on reducing timescales and improving consistency and clarity. For example; in terms of evidencing community engagement and support, community transport organisations are often unsure about the level and amount of detail required, especially regarding larger funding bids. Due to this kind of ongoing challenge, the application process should

be strengthened through the provision of consistent, high-quality feedback and guidance for all applicants, to identify strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.

Ongoing feedback should be introduced as part of a new pre-submission collaborative process, allowing the discussion of ideas and feedback before committing time and resources, which in turn would enable a reduction in unsuccessful applications. This process could also incorporate a mechanism for unsuccessful bids, offering comprehensive feedback and encouragement on submitting a revised bid. At present discouragement is frequent after rejection with only limited feedback available.

Case study:

The Seiriol Alliance Good Turn Scheme on Ynys Môn provides a volunteer car scheme providing helping people in Beaumaris and surrounding areas get to health appointments and social, leisure and wellbeing activities. The scheme works closely with Canolfan Beaumaris, a community-run Leisure Centre and not-for-profit organisation led by a group of committed volunteers. The Good Turn Scheme's transport provision enables people to participate in a wide range of activities at Canolfan Beaumaris, including the National Exercise Referral Scheme activities held at the centre.

"Our first application to the Lottery was for £500,000 as part of a £1.5million Canolfan Beaumaris project. We had done a lot of community consultation, and the Lottery congratulated us on this aspect of our application but still turned us down because they did not think we would secure the remainder of the funding we needed. We had a funding plan and other funders lined up, but it was a Catch 22 situation because as soon as the other funders heard that the Lottery bid was unsuccessful, they got cold feet. This does show how influential it can be having, or not having, support from the Lottery. It would be good to understand more about the Lottery's approach towards bids where there may be multiple funders due to the size of the project so that everyone involved is clear about what needs to be in place at different stages of the grant process.

Our second application was four years later. It took us some time to recover from the first attempt as we were a bit bruised. We decided to apply for a much smaller amount, £75,000, for a different project, in the hope that a smaller bid would be less complicated and have more chance of succeeding. That was unsuccessful too. Overall, the time spent on both bids was significant, and for smaller community organisations which are dependent on volunteers, this can have a big impact on our capacity, taking time away from other activities. Anything the Lottery can do to simplify the grant process would be welcomed.

I can't help feeling that, when the Lottery are being asked for a lot of money, they should consider doing a pre-decision site visit. Otherwise, the grant committee is relying very heavily on information from the Lottery's area representative, who may or may not have visited an organisation.

I said at the time, 'I'm not applying again', but a few more years have passed and I may try once more. I am a bit reluctant to apply as the past two attempts have failed, but I appreciate that it is a very competitive process and I should keep trying. The Lottery representative was very helpful both times, and I would feel comfortable contacting them to chat about another idea when I'm ready to apply."

Operator's asks for the Lottery:

"It would be nice if each area had a pot of local money from the Lottery to administer with a grant committee made up of people that understand the local situation. It may simplify the process for groups that might not otherwise apply and could make people feel they have more of a chance getting a grant, helping to improve fairness for all applicants."

"Please keep the large grant timescale to a minimum. The medium grant timescale is fine, but when the large grant process takes too long, organisational costs go up considerably. Or if the timescale remains the same as it is now, perhaps the Lottery could build in an element towards contingency costs to help cover increases in building costs, electric vehicle purchase costs, insurance costs and so on."

Recommendations

This submission therefore highlights how targeted, proportionate reforms, summarised below, which are focused on empowering communities, simplifying access, and enhancing transparency and accountability can build on existing strengths to deliver improved outcomes, increased value for money, and greater public confidence.

- Establish a recognised evaluation and monitoring framework: including an annual published evaluation, incorporating an overview of both successful and unsuccessful applications. This would assist transparency and improve applicant and public confidence in the overall application process. This would also assist in identifying and removing structural barriers to access by improving fairness, equality, efficiency and value for money. This would additionally facilitate the objective of improving transparency through the publication of success rates,

assessment criteria, and funding outcomes: strengthening openness and clarity throughout the application process and increasing public accountability and confidence in the National Lottery as an institution and the good causes that it supports and empowers.

- Introduce a consistent, proactive, quality feedback process: for both successful and unsuccessful applicants. Enabling the identification of strengths, challenges and weaknesses, and in so doing developing capacity building and a shared evidence base.

- Adopt a more proactive engagement model: including the use of trusted sector intermediaries, such as the Community Transport Association, within the application process, together with an increase in direct interaction between Lottery officers and applicants. This would assist in the practicalities of an application, such as compiling evidence of community support.

- Develop a relationship-based "aftercare" model: supporting project delivery, assisting rejected applicants, enhancing risk management and facilitating long-term key outcomes.

Further Information

For further information on this response, or the work of CTA, please contact: **policy@ctauk.org**.