



The Pilgrim Trust



All The Elements x The Pilgrim Trust

Working Together to Create Change on Diversity in UK Walking and Hiking

All the Elements were invited by The Pilgrim Trust to carry out research into what support is needed to enable grassroots organisations to tackle diversity in walking and hiking, and how funding bodies can support these goals.

This report is the result of that research and offers recommendations on approaches that could be taken forward to rethink funding in this area.

Executive Summary

Tasked with investigating how funders can best support community groups who aim to increase diversity in walking and hiking to expand, this report provides an overview of the nature of the groups operating in the UK, lays out the barriers they face to expansion and makes 5 recommendations for a way forward.

Key findings

- Groups have largely been started by an individual or small group alongside their existing employment.
- There is a desire between these groups to share best practice and work collaboratively.
- All groups want to expand so they can help more people but this is limited by a lack of funding for staffing and barriers to accessing appropriate outdoor training qualifications.
- The majority of groups aim to improve access for multiple aspects of diversity indicating that these groups understand the intersectional nature of the barriers to the outdoors.
- The biggest costs for these groups are staffing costs and travel/accommodation.
- Corporate sponsorship and grant funding are the most common funding sources but both of these avenues are difficult to navigate for a range of reasons.

Recommendations

1. Funders should provide funding which covers staff costs for an extended period of time and pair this with professional services support to enable groups to develop a long-term sustainable financial model.
2. Funding organisations should invest in central capacity building and signposting to develop and strengthen this emerging sector.
3. Funding needs to be paired with engagement with awarding bodies/outdoor qualifications to support those from minority backgrounds to be able to access training and qualifications that are run in an inclusive way.
4. Funding needs to encourage peer-to-peer support between community groups as they are well placed and eager to support one another.
5. Funding application and reporting processes need to be designed in a way which builds a relationship between the funder and the organisation, and is respectful of the time constraints and experience of group leaders.

All the Elements would be keen to explore how we could support in taking these recommendations forward in line with our aim to support individuals and groups in increasing diversity in the UK outdoors.

Approach

The research had two parts:

Part one - a survey of community groups and organisations working in the space

A scene setting survey was designed to capture information from community groups on what they found to be the biggest challenges to their development, growth and ability to create change, as well as details on their current funding streams. The information is used in this report but was also used to shape the roundtable discussion.

Part two - a roundtable with a select group of community group leaders

These leaders represented groups that were just starting out, as well as those who have been established for several years. Some were incorporated organisations and some were not. They were working across the diversity areas with representatives focused on underrepresented and under supported groups including those categorised by gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, limited financial means, and invisible and visible disabilities including mental health.

Findings

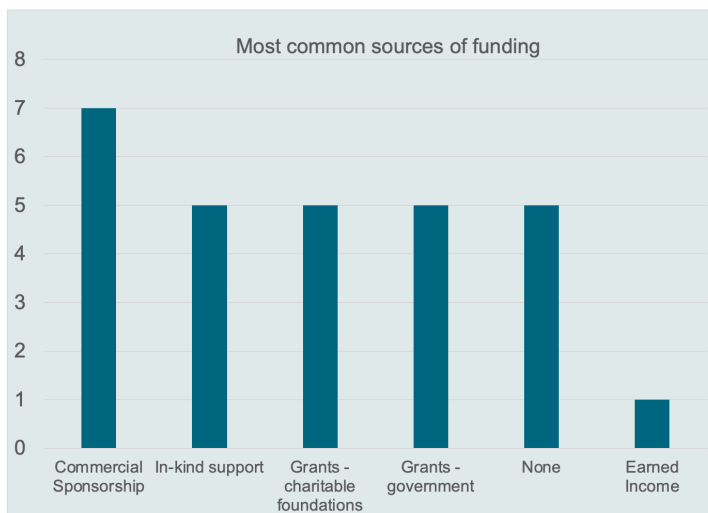
Who did we hear from?

The survey was designed to collect information on the size of groups and organisations within the sector. It asked questions about legal structure, core activities, area of operation, diversity sectors targeted, average number of participants and information on funding models. It also asked questions about barriers to expansion and what they needed to create more of an impact. Although the sample size was small (17), we had a spread across diversity areas, UK geographical areas and representatives through the different organisational structures - from informal community groups to a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO).

Of the organisations and groups that responded, 41% were informal community groups and 35% were community interest companies. One was a CIO, one was part of a larger group and one was a limited liability company. The longest running organisation was started in 2006, but 58% of the organisations were started in 2020 or 2021. There was a fairly even geographical mix across the UK with most groups operating in multiple areas. Membership numbers varied from double figures to 18,000. 47% of respondents also offer other activities in addition to walking and hiking.

The diversity areas that the groups and organisations influenced included; ethnicity and race, religion, limited financial means, LGBTQIA+, gender equity, hidden or visible disabilities, mental health, age, body type and entry level fitness. Highlighting the increasing importance of intersectionality, 65% of respondents focused their work on more than one diversity area.

From the survey respondents, we discovered that just under two thirds of participants said that their income did not cover their organisation costs. Over 40% of respondents said that their participants / beneficiaries did not contribute to the costs of their activities. The other 60% mostly collected support from participants in the form of pay-per-activity fees and/or voluntary donation. Interestingly, of those who received other financial support (70% of respondents), over half said that they received commercial support from brands or in-kind support, such as kit donations. Only 25% said they received grants from charitable foundations.

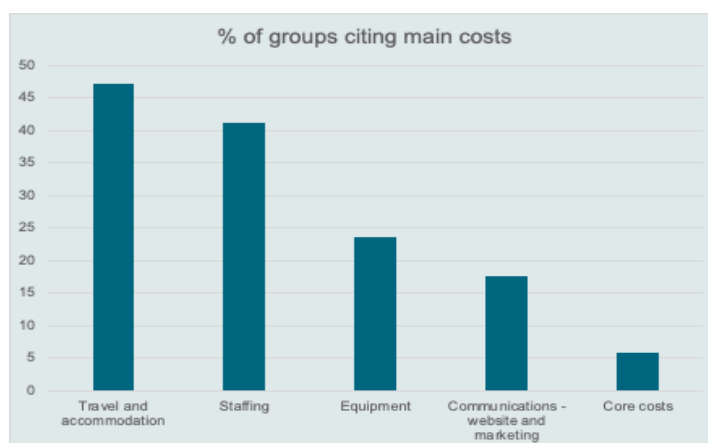


There are limitations to this data, as it was a small number of respondents, but it did give us some interesting patterns to discuss further at the roundtable event.

Half of the 8 attendees to the roundtable event were representatives of informal community groups, 3 represented community interest companies and 1 represented a CIO. All the diversity areas mentioned above were represented and 75% of roundtable representatives stated they targeted more than one diversity area. All had also completed the survey prior to the event.

What are the barriers to growth and development?

In the survey, we asked what the main current costs were to the organisations and groups. This was an open question as we didn't want to influence the responses. 47% highlighted travel costs, 41% said staff and training costs, and 24% said equipment. Other mentioned costs were website, food for participants, and marketing and communications.



Staffing costs

In the survey, we asked to what extent different variables were barriers to expansion for groups. They scored on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 (1 was 'not at all a barrier' and 5 was a 'major barrier'). The barrier that was considered to be the most influential on expansion was inability to pay team members for their time with an average influence of 4. Currently, 53% of our groups have paid staff and 77% have volunteers.



We expanded on this topic in the roundtable. Many of the representatives shared the same experience of being an individual setting up and developing an organisation, and this had an impact on growth both at the early stages and as an ongoing organisation. Most participants either were currently running their project as a side project around other work or had previously done so. This was shown to be much easier to manage for those with established freelance careers, rather than alongside a full time role.

“If I was able to double myself, I’d be able to more than double the impact of the community”

As this point was developed, it was emphasised that they all reached a point where they needed to either dedicate more time to the project or hire additional team members to enable growth. At least one group representative said that they were holding back from promotion of their work and outreach because they knew they didn’t have the capacity to scale. The groups who utilised volunteers were grateful for their support, but found that it was difficult to find reliable volunteer support over the long term. For one group, they needed more capacity than other groups because they had to support their participants with disabilities often on a ratio of 1 to 1.

From an administrative point of view, the need for extra help was both due to a requirement for more time spent on the project, but also to bring in specialists to help develop particular areas. Examples given were bringing in a business development manager, fundraising support or activity leaders. Anecdotally, overcoming the barriers to bring in these members of the team had made a large impact on the ability to create more change and work more effectively.

“I’m **terrified** of not being able to **pay my staff** every month”

The experience of the participants was that it was difficult to receive funding to cover core costs like staff pay, either because the funding available was project focused or, where core funding was available, they found that their applications were unsuccessful. There were comments about the anxiety caused by the lack of certainty of being able to continue to pay existing staff and how this caused hesitation in taking on new team members.

It was also raised that the desire to make walks or activities accessible and affordable, led to not wanting to ask for financial contributions from participants. This led to more time being given for free by group leaders in the absence of the availability of other funding.

Outdoor-specific training

The next most significant barrier was lack of outdoor-specific qualifications with an average score of 3.8. Interestingly, when we discussed this at the roundtable the main challenge around outdoor qualifications was not the cost of training.

First, it was raised that it was often difficult to find the information on outdoor qualifications and to then understand exactly how they worked. Second, the training itself was seen as inaccessible. This was for a number of different reasons. One was the experiences of women in outdoor training with examples given of unwelcoming training experiences of individuals. Further feedback had been received from potential leaders around their own apprehension of being welcomed on training courses. This led to a discussion around the importance of safe spaces for training and how providing accessible training - from the information about the training to the curation of safe spaces for different groups - was vital to increase representation and availability of outdoor leaders.

“I had quite a **bad experience** - it was **sexism** from a group of guys that I was doing my **assessment** with”

For one group in particular, the challenge was around the suitability of the qualifications available. Due to the specific requirements of outdoor qualifications, it is often impossible for individuals with particular disabilities to qualify. An example given was being able to load and unload a van of equipment being part of the assessment criteria. The point was raised that there should be tailored qualifications available for those from underrepresented groups who would like to develop as leaders.

A result of all of these points is an obvious lack of diversity in trained outdoor professionals, which has led to challenges in appropriate staffing and representative team members for most of our groups.

Every respondent said that they would like to grow their organisation in the next 3-5 years, which highlights the importance of breaking down these barriers to allow expansion.

Lack of experience

With a barrier score of 3.4 out of 5, 'limited experience in funding applications / fundraising' was highlighted as a challenge to growth. The conversation in the roundtable around this subject naturally turned to the sharing of advice among participants, which raised the importance of receiving support from those who had already gone through the process of learning how to do this better.

“When you **start something, you **don't know** what you are getting into - you just do it because you have this **passion** for **helping people**”**

This was not also limited to advice on funding applications, other big questions for groups included whether they should incorporate as a community interest company and how to best engage trained female group leaders in their work. As most of the informal groups are being led by one individual, receiving advice like this can prevent atrophy in action or delays on moving work forward. It can also provide a much needed support network - the participants of this roundtable group specifically asked to be connected after the session so they could continue their conversations and work on future collaborations.

One of the more established groups also raised the point of finding appropriate directors and trustees who can support you with the skills and experience that you might not have within your organisation.

The structure of funding applications

We asked all survey respondents 'What one thing would help you develop your group?'. The results were mixed, but 31% replied to say 'More accessible funding opportunities'. This was followed by 18% who echoed the results seen in the barriers above by choosing 'Outdoor training, ie Mountain Leader, Instructor Training, Group Management and First Aid'.

In the roundtable, we explored the topic of 'accessible funding' by delving into experiences of applying for funding and what being accessible really meant.

We started with the application process. The representatives were critical of the existing processes that they had experienced. They had found that often the criteria of what the funding bodies were looking to fund was not clear, so they didn't know if it was a waste of

time completing the applications in the first place. One group in particular struggled with requirements to show impact on large segments of the population because their organisation serves an underrepresented group who are a minority. Application criteria did not take into consideration that the impact they have on the minority is high. There was also concern that some funding bodies may only have funding for one organisation working in a particular diversity space, so it fostered unhealthy competition between groups working on the same issues.

The practical challenges that dissuaded them from applying or make the process uncomfortable included long and complicated forms, and lots of questions in an initial application that require writing answers from scratch. One of our participants had experience of funding bodies not reading completed applications in full and asking questions that were covered in the paperwork - this was understandably off putting. Another participant raised the power dynamic between the funder and the community groups, and how the set up with complex application processes was dehumanising and felt like being required to beg for support.

“Complicated forms make it feel like the chances of getting the funding are going to be slim”

They overwhelmingly preferred two-stage applications, where the first stage is a short information gathering - either a quick form that requires information on the organisation and project or a call with a funder. They believed this saved time on both sides, because funders were not receiving long applications for projects that they were not interested in funding and groups were not wasting time on applications for pots of money that they would never receive. If they then made it through to the second stage of applications, they felt better about completing the required information because they knew it was a project that the funder wanted to know more about.

Application processes that were entirely call based or at least partly call based were preferred, because they took less time and also allowed them to build a relationship with the funder. The idea of building a relationship with the funder or funding body was expanded in the discussion around reporting requirements.

Reporting requirements

Similarly to applications, form-based reporting was not seen as an effective use of time or a useful tool in measuring impact. Although there was wide recognition that it was important to have some type of reporting, it was felt that forms were problematic for a number of reasons.

“If we’re reporting back on a past project, it means that we’re not looking forward to the future”

The first reason was that they were time consuming and took focus away from the next project, which with the staffing challenges faced by the groups was a significant barrier. Secondly, they were seen as 'dry' and tended to focus on numbers and 'pretty words' rather than the experiences that were created and the qualitative impact on the individuals reached. Thirdly, it was raised that you tend to write what you think the funder wants to hear in order to meet the structured requirements. This was especially true when a project had evolved into something different that was originally envisioned in order to better meet the needs of the community.

“I’m all for calls - it is a great way to build a relationship, as well as make it a bit more human”

In contrast, representatives who had experienced reporting through calls with the funder felt like they had more of an opportunity to share the positive impact they had created. One representative had experienced reporting where a filmmaker had visited for a day and captured not only the facts required, but also the 'real feeling' of the impact on stakeholders. They were very positive about this as a reporting method.

“A lot of it you can’t read and put down on paper, you’ve got to see it and feel it”

Another leader had a question mark about the suitability of filming for all groups, because it could be voyeuristic, but agreed that the value of sharing personal stories through testimonials and experiences would give a more accurate representation of impact.

Underpinning this discussion was the impression that individuals managing the funding do not understand the work of the organisations and community groups. This could be exacerbated by lack of diverse representation within the teams managing funding.

An aside: the relevance of commercial and in-kind funding

The survey showed that over half of respondents (53%) received commercial sponsorship or in-kind donations, such as outdoor kit, or both. 23% received charitable grants and 23% received grants from local or national government.

When discussed at the roundtable, it seemed that the prevalence of commercial funding was due to a number of factors. They included that the groups needed the kit that the companies were providing, that the companies had approached groups to work with them and that it increased 'exposure' for the groups to be aligned with brands. However, it was raised that although 'exposure' has benefits, through outdoor brands you are only able to reach people who are already in the outdoor sector. Therefore, it is important to ensure that you raise funding that allows you to do outreach to the groups that you want to support who are not

already engaged in the outdoors. One representative specifically mentioned that they found grant funding useful because it allowed them to centre their community in their work. It was generally agreed that diversified funding sources are important for organisation and group growth.

Recommendations

The information from the survey and roundtable has provided insights into the challenges faced for groups and organisations supporting diversity in walking and hiking. There are a number of recommendations that can be made for funders to be able to better support groups working within this space.

What should be funded?

Funding directly to organisations

It is clear that the major barrier to growth for most of the organisations we heard from is being unable to cover core costs, and more specifically staff time. As many of the organisations have been started and run by individuals who are also working full or part time, being able to increase capacity directly depends on being able to bring in more people to do the work. This is also important in terms of increasing the knowledge base of the organisation: it is just as important to be able to pay someone to help with development or marketing, as it is to be able to pay someone to manage volunteers and run events.

Funding resources

It was raised at a number of points through the roundtable that the newer groups often didn't know where to go for information on funding. Finding out who was offering appropriate funding, how to apply and what was expected in return was difficult. Supporting the creation of a guide to funding available within the outdoor sector would give grassroots groups a clearer path to financial support. This could include static information on broader funds and a 'live' area where funding opportunities that are open for applications are listed. An important factor to many of our groups was that there was a match between their values and the values of the funder - a platform like this could have space for funders to share their core values and other work that they are doing. This could be part of an existing central resource, for example the All The Elements website.

Funding outdoor training provision

The challenges of accessing outdoor training centred around the lack of easily-accessible information and the lack of targeted training for underrepresented and undersupported

groups. There is work that could be done here in collaboration with governing bodies and training providers to produce guides to training and career paths in the outdoor sector. This could again be hosted on a central resource to enable easy access for those wanting to progress their training or the training of their volunteers and team.

In addition, and highlighted as more important by our groups, was the provision of dedicated training tailored to the groups. By funding the development of new training models, funders could create a longer-term impact that would not only help groups scale, but change the landscape of representation in outdoor careers.

The revised training should be adapted to participants' needs, including upskilling of outdoor course instructors in the curation of safe spaces and any other specific requirements to meet the needs of different groups. New training should include the possibility of awarding more relevant tailored qualifications, for example for disabled participants running their own groups.

Funding peer-to-peer learning

The power of learning from each other was not just stated as important by the roundtable group, but was demonstrated in the short time they spent together. There was a willing and open sharing of knowledge between participants. Running more group sessions on targeted topics, such as fundraising, would allow more of a free-flow of knowledge between actors in the sector and would help new groups to learn from the previous development of established organisations. More experienced organisations attending should be paid for their participation, which then provides them with an additional source of income. Content could be created post events to share the learnings with the broader community and build a bank of knowledge that can be freely accessed to aid development.

The roundtable group, recognising the sharing dynamic in the event, suggested that funding mentorship programmes would also be of benefit to community groups. A funding model that paid a more experienced community group leader to mentor a less experienced leader would benefit two community groups working in the space.

For funders looking to create a bigger impact, there is a larger piece of work that could be done here in developing a programme that community group leaders work through – almost like a start-up accelerator for outdoor community groups. Ideally funders would pay participants to take part so they could focus their energy on developing their group for a certain period of time, but a free training series supported by mentorship would be a less capital intensive version.

How can we improve the application process?

Build a relationship between funder and applicant

A major concern for some of the community groups was whether funders (both commercial or grant providers) had values that matched their own. It was important to them that they

didn't undermine the aims of their organisation by working with funders that might not be doing the deeper level of work required to create institutional change.

Currently it is quite difficult to find this information, so provision of more information during the promotion of available funds would be helpful in community groups and organisations making informed decisions. It follows that it is also more likely that they will also be funded by bodies that match their values too, so it makes sense on a broader funding level to also do this. As mentioned above, this could be included in a platform sharing funding opportunities or it could be included in a third-party matchmaking process between funders and community groups and organisations (see below).

Rethinking forms

The key message from this research was that long application forms were off putting, especially if they were the first and only contact with the funder. Introducing a two-step process for applications with a short form - (focused on key, easy-to-answer questions, such as 'What is your organisation?' and 'What do you need funding for?') - or telephone call before being invited to submit a longer application would make the process more accessible and welcoming. It also gives the groups an indicator as to whether the funder is genuinely interested in their project before they invest too much of their (limited) time on selling it to them. If forms can be switched for calls, this is preferential. A recommendation would be that if the funding organisation is managing applications themselves that groups are assigned a specific contact for the whole process, as building a relationship with the funding provider is something that groups wanted to do.

For reporting requirements, replacing forms with more innovative and 'human' reporting methods could benefit both organisation and funder. Calls can ensure that funders get exactly the information they need, while also getting more of a 'feel' of the impact of the organisation on its stakeholders. Sending someone to visit the community groups to see their work in practice gives the opportunity to see the true benefit of the work, beyond the figures, and also opens up storytelling potential for sharing impact.

Depending on the structure of the funding body or funding provider, there is a benefit in using a third-party middle organisation for the application and reporting processes. Not only can this middle organisation manage an on-going relationship with the community group, but they can also help with matching community groups with appropriate funding and funders on an on-going basis. This may help prevent the situation where community groups are concerned about losing funding for their staff members at the end of a project, and would also help with matching values.

By engaging community groups in the conversation, it is clear that the barriers to diversifying walking and hiking in the UK transcend specific diversity areas. Fundamental but simple changes to what is funded and how funding can be accessed, would make it possible to overcome barriers for a broad range of organisations and groups, facilitating large-scale change in this area.

Thank you to all the community groups who gave their time to take part in this research project and to The Pilgrim Trust for funding this important work. If you would like any further information on this work, please do not hesitate to contact the All The Elements team on hello@alltheelements.co.