

## Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund Panel

### Example approaches and methods

Each section below describes one approach to participatory decision-making. If you want to bring them to life, we have also created fictional story snippets through the Bringing examples to life document, to fuel your imagination.

#### 1. Collective models (PGM)

In collective models, decision-making is shared among a group of people with a direct stake in the fund. Applicants, recipients, community members, or a combination. Rather than a separate panel assessing applications, the community itself deliberates and decides together.

Several variations exist:

- Open collective: all interested parties, including applicants, participate in decisions together, either in person or online
- Closed collective: a defined group of relevant organisations comes together to understand community needs and agree funding through consensus
- Rolling collective: grant recipients stay involved after receiving funding and participate in decisions about future awards, creating an ongoing loop of giving and receiving.

#### What it enables

Power sits with the people closest to the issues, not with a separate decision-making body. The boundaries between applicant and decision-maker blur or disappear. Can build strong trust and community ownership of the fund.

#### Good to know

Requires significant relationship-building and coordination to work well. Managing conflicts of interest, particularly in the open and rolling models, needs careful design. Not all communities will have the capacity to sustain this level of involvement.

#### Example

[National Lottery Community Fund Scotland](#) explores multiple collective models in practice across Scotland, including open, closed and rolling approaches to participatory grant-making.

#### 2. Community Panel (PGM)

Funding decisions are made by a specific community or panel of local people (eg people who live, work or learn in the Cairngorms). Each panel receives training and support before coming

together to read applications, discuss what matters most for the place, and then make informed final decisions.

### **What it enables**

Decisions are made by people with lived experience and a genuine stake in the outcome, rather than by professionals or institutions. The panel's composition matters as who is in the room shapes what gets funded.

### **Good to know**

Recruiting a panel that genuinely reflects the diversity of a community takes care and time. Panel members need real support to feel confident in the role, especially if they haven't been involved in grant-making before.

### **Example**

[Reaching New Scots Fund \(Scottish Refugee Council\)](#): volunteers with lived experience co-designed the fund, wrote the application form and criteria themselves, and jointly assessed all 84 applications alongside funding officers.

### 3. Criteria-based assessment

Organisations or individuals submit a written application setting out their project, budget and intended outcomes. Applications are assessed by staff or an appointed group against a set of criteria. Funding decisions communicated in writing.

#### **What it enables**

Well understood by most applicants and funders. Relatively straightforward to administer and produces a clear audit trail. Criteria can be designed to prioritise equity and reach, and the process is familiar to organisations who have applied for funding before.

#### **Good to know**

Tends to favour experienced applicants who know how to write funding bids. Written applications can be a significant barrier for informal groups, individuals, or communities with less experience of the funding system. Decision-making power sits with assessors rather than the community directly.

#### **Example**

[Cairngorms Climate Adaptation Fund](#): the Park Authority's existing grant fund uses a standard written application and staff assessment process, offering a direct point of comparison with the more participatory approaches on this board.

### 4. Deliberation (method)

A group comes together to learn, discuss, and reach funding decisions collectively. Participants hear from contributors, ask questions to applicants, and work through disagreements before arriving at a decision. This usually involves multiple sessions.

#### **What it enables**

The quality of the conversation matters as much as the outcome. People are expected to engage with each other's reasoning, not just express a preference. Can often produce decisions the group feels genuine ownership of.

#### **Good to know**

Takes more time and facilitation than other approaches. Too many criteria can create pressure and reduce the quality of discussion. Participants may need support to learn how to deliberate effectively, especially in early sessions.

#### **Example**

[Bristol Community Resilience Fund](#): 100 residents and voluntary sector representatives deliberated alongside 22 councillors to distribute a £4 million fund, with locally trained facilitators supporting structured discussion before any decisions were made.

Additional info:

<https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/what/public-deliberation>

## 5. Distributed dialogue (method)

This method gathers views and decisions through many small conversations happening across a community. Hosts run discussions using a shared set of questions, and the outputs are brought together to inform or make funding decisions.

### What it enables

Meets people where they are rather than asking them to come to a central venue. Can reach communities who would never engage with a formal panel or public vote, and works well in geographically spread areas like the Cairngorms.

### Good to know

Coordinating and synthesising many conversations is complex. The quality of the outputs depends heavily on how well the host network is briefed and supported. Harder to maintain consistency across conversations.

### Example

[YourPlace YourPoint \(Merkinch & South Kessock\)](#): nearly 500 young people participated in a listening phase across their community before principles were developed and projects funded, with ideas refined through dialogue rather than a central application process.

Additional info: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resource/distributed-dialogue>

## 6. Ideas challenge

Communities or organisations are invited to respond to a specific question or challenge and submit ideas. The strongest responses, judged against a set of criteria, receive funding. The challenge frame shapes what comes in.

Example challenge question: How might your community help people and nature thrive together in the Cairngorms?

### What it enables

The fund sets the direction rather than waiting to see what applicants bring. Can surface creative, unconventional ideas and attract people who might not think to apply through a traditional route. The pitching format can also be energising and community-building in itself.

### **Things to consider**

The framing of the challenge determines who feels it is relevant to them and who does not. Groups with less experience of pitching or presenting ideas may be disadvantaged even if their projects are strong.

### **Example**

[Civic Innovation / Democracy Day \(Community Foundation Northern Ireland\)](#): 30 community organisations pitched ideas at Stormont, with attendees discussing projects in a global café format before 14 groups shared £500,000 in funding and 18 months of design support.

## **7. Peer review**

Applicants review each other's applications - sometimes anonymously, sometimes in open dialogue. Each applicant is assigned a small number of other applications to read and assess, using a shared set of questions. Their reviews inform or determine the final funding decisions. The process can be run online or in person.

### **What it enables**

Brings people with direct experience of doing the work into the assessment process. Reduces the power imbalance between funder and applicant. Can surface insights that a panel of outside observers would miss, and builds connections across the applicant community.

### **Good to know**

Conflicts of interest need careful management as applicants are assessing their peers, sometimes in a small community where everyone knows each other. Anonymity can help but is not always possible. Reviewers need enough guidance to feel confident in the role.

### **Example**

[The Edge Fund \(UK\)](#) grantees join the co-op and participate in future funding decisions, scoring applications from their own communities.

## **8. Public Vote (PB)**

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a way for people to have a direct say in how local money is spent. Anyone in the community can vote on which projects get funded. Project ideas are submitted, eligible ones are put to a public vote - online, at events, or both - and the projects with the most votes receive funding. The community is both the applicant and the decision-maker.

### **What it enables**

Decisions are made by the widest possible group, not a selected panel. It might reach people who would never engage with a formal application process.

### **Good to know**

Without deliberation before voting, decisions can be made without discussion. Could favour well-connected or visible organisations over those with less of a public profile. Turnout can be uneven across communities.

### **Example**

[Just Transition Participatory Budgeting Fund](#): communities across Moray, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire voted on which projects received funding, with over 29,000 votes cast in the first two years across 181 projects.

Additional info: <https://pbscotland.scot/>

## **Mixed approaches**

A combination of two or more of the elements across this board, often used at different stages of the process. For example: a deliberative panel designs the criteria, a public vote selects the projects.

### **What it enables**

Can combine the strengths of different approaches and reduce their individual weaknesses. Allows different approaches to be used for different grant sizes.

### **Good to know**

More complex to design, communicate and administer. The joins between stages need careful thought. Participants and applicants need to understand how the different elements fit together.

## Other options

**There is another option but we would need to further explore the feasibility within the fixed constraints with the National Lottery if this is a route you are interested in.**

### Direct transfer

Funds go directly from the funder to an individual or group, without the need for a formal application, monitoring requirements or reporting. It aims to remove the barriers and bureaucracy that can prevent the most marginalised people from accessing support.

#### What it enables

Bypasses intermediaries entirely and gets money to people quickly. Treats recipients as experts on their own needs. Radically reduces the administrative burden on both the funder and the recipient. Can reach people who are excluded from every other funding route.

#### Good to know

Accountability and reporting are minimal by design, which may raise questions for funders about how public money is used. Requires a high degree of trust. Not suited to all types of project or all funding contexts. Worth considering as a model for small, informal or emergency funding.

**We have not included this option in the presentation today as the Panel have already said they do not want a geographical division.**

### Location micro-grants

A portion of the fund is delegated entirely to hyper-local decision-makers to distribute as small grants within their area (for example a community council, a village hall committee, a local development trust). No central application process, no panel assessment. The local body sets its own simple criteria, decides who gets funding, and reports back to the main fund annually.

#### What it enables

Gets money to people quickly with minimal bureaucracy. Trusts local structures to know what matters in their area. Reaches individuals and informal groups who would never navigate a formal application process. Works particularly well on a rolling basis with no fixed deadlines.

#### Good to know

The local body running the scheme needs to be representative and accountable. If it is not, the same groups might benefit repeatedly. Conflicts of interest need a clear process. Promotion matters as without active outreach, only those already connected to the local body will know the money exists.