

Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund Panel

Post Session 7 – Survey Responses

Panel members were invited to share feedback on the draft fund process blueprint via a short survey. The survey asked three questions: what is working well in the blueprint, what could be improved, and what we still need to get right to ensure communities are genuinely in control of the fund.

This feedback will inform the shape of Session 8, the final blueprint document, and the operational plan to be created by the Park Authority.

The survey and document were open to comment from 10 to 16 June.

7 out of 17 members of the panel responded and others commented directly on the [draft process blueprint document](#). This summary draws on both.

Unedited and anonymised survey responses are [available to view](#).

Summary of your responses

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Survey

What's working well

There is broad confidence in the overall direction of the blueprint. Respondents pointed to the simplicity and accessibility of the application process as a particular strength – the tiered approach, with questions proportionate to grant size, was felt to work well for both experienced applicants and those new to funding. The explicit support available to applicants was also highlighted positively.

Several respondents expressed confidence in the EDI approach, with one noting that keeping the 10% in reserve is the right mechanism and that in practice EDI applications are likely to exceed the minimum threshold. The scoring system for projects was noted as a strength by one respondent.

One respondent reflected that the blueprint broadly reflects the majority view of the panel and that the fund has strong potential as a case study in participatory policymaking. On the other hand, one other expressed concern that the blueprint feels like a collection of ideas and called for a point-by-point vote.

What would you change

Community decision-making is the area where most respondents feel more work is needed. Several noted that the logistics of the community panel for medium and large grants remain vague and need to be fleshed out further before the Park Authority has enough to operationalise. There is no consensus yet on who should sit on the panel. One respondent suggested that the current session group would make a fair and informed panel; others disagreed.

Scoring and weighting was flagged as unclear by more than one respondent. The mechanics of how the points system works in practice needs to be more explicit.

Grant ranges attracted differing views. One respondent suggested significantly higher amounts (small up to £200k, medium £350k, large £450k). Another felt the pot sizes needed more thought about the practical impact of different amounts. The current ranges were not universally endorsed.

EDI was raised by two respondents. One felt 10% is sufficient and should not be revisited. Another would want a higher minimum (15–20%) and felt EDI needs further discussion.

Match funding and the profit question were not directly raised in survey responses but are reflected in direct comments made on the document by one respondent.

Ensuring communities are genuinely in control

Respondents flagged a few things that we still need to get right.

Transparency. The fund's decisions need to be visible to the whole community, not just those involved in the process. An interactive map showing where funding is going was suggested as one way to achieve this. Several respondents emphasised that people need to be able to see that decisions are fair and not directed towards those with existing relationships with the Park Authority.

Community involvement in decision-making. One respondent suggested a consultative community voice – not a public vote, but a mechanism for the wider community to share views on applications that the panel then takes into account. The principle that communities should be represented throughout, from design to decision-making, was echoed by more than one respondent.

Resolving outstanding issues. One respondent was clear that the group needs to work through every unresolved point, reach a decision, and commit to it. Several others noted that consensus still needs to be reached on key elements, particularly panel composition and community decision-making.

Legacy and scale. One respondent noted the importance of thinking beyond the two-year fund period and the £1m budget, asking what legacy this process leaves and whether it could attract future donors or replication elsewhere.

Comments on draft process blueprint

Structure and grant ranges

- Broad support for setting the medium grant upper limit at £50,000
- Concern that the document implies pre-allocated pots per grant size. Some respondents recall agreeing to keep allocation fluid, except for the EDI ringfence (**note**: this is the intention so we'll address in next draft)
- Match funding remains divided: one respondent insists on it for large grants; others support it only where it unlocks a project that couldn't otherwise proceed; one suggests a Cairngorms 2030 grant could itself act as match funding for another grant
- Concern that one applicant could apply across all three grant sizes simultaneously, potentially accessing 15.5% of the total fund
- A small grant could itself act as the match funding that unlocks another grant, provided it clearly meets at least one Cairngorms 2030 goal and delivers benefit to the Cairngorms community.

Community

- The community definition wording needs tightening. One respondent suggests "as long as those groups regularly engage with the park" rather than "including those who regularly engage with the park"
- A question about whether applicants need to meet all three bullet points in the community definition, or just one
- "It" in the beneficial connection wording should read "the National Park Community" to avoid ambiguity.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

- Two respondents want to raise the minimum EDI threshold above 10%. Suggestions of 15% and 15–20% given the expanded definition used in the Cairngorms context (**note**: this view was supported by a group of panel members that gathered to discuss EDI at the end of Session 7)
- A concern that monitoring EDI outcomes could be onerous, particularly for grants awarded late in the fund period, where the PA may need to monitor for up to 18 months after the fund closes
- A suggestion that EDI should have its own separate scoring track: within the ringfence it is a must-do override; outside it, overall community benefit should take precedence
- EDI outside the ringfence should not be weighted more heavily than any other criterion

- Practical concern that almost every project could claim some EDI benefit, making monitoring heavy-handed
- A question about whether the 10% commitment refers to number of grants or total money spent (**note**: it will be the total money spent, so a minimum of £100,000)

Assessment and eligibility

- Broad support for the hard yes/no criteria as a gateway before weighted scoring
- Several questions about how the points system works in practice. The mechanics need to be made explicit before the fund launches
- Suggestions for the scoring system include: a binary score for EDI (0 or 1); extra points for projects covering multiple themes; geography scored on a scale from 1 (larger communities) to 5 (highly dispersed or very small communities)
- One respondent is nervous about minus scores and asks what basis would justify them
- A question about whether the rolling small grants model assumes a fixed number of slots per panel meeting
- Concern that individuals and informal groups applying for large grants present risks that may be too high for the PA to manage at the £50,000 to £100,000 level
- A question about whether the community definition wording could admit groups with no meaningful connection to the park, and whether eligibility criteria are clear enough to prevent this
- The scoring system is identified as a priority remaining task before the fund launches.

Community decision-making

- Clear emerging consensus that the PA should make decisions on small grants using the panel's agreed criteria. This should be simple and time efficient, without requiring a community panel for every round
- One respondent proposes a paired model for small grants: one PA rep and one community member reviewing applications on a rolling basis
- One concern that PA staff deciding small grants would replicate existing practice unless the criteria and process are clearly community-designed
- One respondent noted that the current panel feels about right in size - much smaller and it could not reflect the park's geography and EDI; much larger and it would become unwieldy.

- Conflict of interest needs to be addressed. How will the CNPA and panel handle situations where panel members have a connection to an applicant?
- **On panel refresh:** views differ. Some support keeping the same people for continuity; others suggest the option to resign after one year; a partial refresh is preferred over a full one to retain accumulated knowledge. At least one current panel member should be retained to help any new panel understand the original intent
 - A suggestion that people who applied for the current panel but weren't selected could be a starting point for recruiting the next panel
 - One respondent suggests 50% new members as a target for any panel refresh
 - Outreach for panel recruitment should not actively target existing community bodies, but if someone from a community body is selected through the open process, that is acceptable.
- **On voting:** two respondents favour two-thirds majority in the absence of consensus; one suggests consensus as the ideal with two-thirds as the fallback
- Strong opposition to a public vote. Concerns include popularity contest risk, geographical bias, applicants mobilising supporters, and lack of sufficient public information to vote meaningfully
- Questions about the public showcase format. Could applicants submit video rather than attend in person, and if so how would panel questions work?

Reporting

- A concern about whether the PA has the resource to monitor large grant outcomes for up to 18 months after the fund period closes
- A portal to simplify record-keeping and reporting for applicants and recipients is suggested (**note:** also supported in Session 7)
- One respondent notes that once a grant is awarded, funded projects should not be required to be publicly promoted or distributed. The fund sets the guidelines and lets projects progress.

Awareness and outreach

- Outreach flagged as critical to the success of both the fund and panel recruitment
- One respondent notes that many communities within the National Park are poorly served by existing community bodies due to low density and

remote locations. This has implications for how the fund reaches people and how the panel is recruited

- One respondent notes they only heard about this panel through a community contact, not direct communication. That raises concern about who else in remote and rural communities may have been missed.