

National Lottery Good Causes: Fund what matters to you consultation

Empowering your communities to feel benefits

Question 2. You said you have some awareness of how the National Lottery good cause funding has impacted your organisation or sector. What is the most positive impact you have seen to your organisation or sector from the funding? [free text box]

The Museums Association (MA) strongly believes that National Lottery good cause funding, specifically through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), has had a significant and transformative impact on museums, most notably by supporting redevelopments and new-build projects. This has enabled the transformation of beloved local and national museums, making them more accessible and inclusive. For example, Poole Museum underwent a 7-year redevelopment of all three of its listed buildings, with accessibility at the forefront. This includes accessible toilets on each floor, level flooring throughout, access to seating, audio devices, Braille interpretation, and large-print guides. This funding also aligns with climate and sustainability priorities, as refurbishment projects have incorporated green measures such as solar panels, energy-efficient lighting, and improved insulation. Stourbridge Glass Museum received funding for its net zero project. They invested in new solar panels and battery storage to generate and store electricity on-site, installed voltage optimisers and LED lighting to reduce energy consumption, and replaced old gas radiators with air-source heat pumps.

Project grant funding for collections has enabled contemporary and diaspora-community acquisitions such as the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project by National Museums NI, supported by the NLHF. The project focused on contemporary collecting by working with a range of community groups who informed the collection process and donated artefacts. The Collecting Birmingham project by Birmingham Museums Trust also focused on widening their collections' representation of, and relationship with, underrepresented communities through open days, family workshops, in-depth roundtable discussions, and donations to the collection. Funding has also improved conservation skills, storage practices, and the digitisation of previously inaccessible collections.

NLHF and Arts Council England (ACE) lottery funding has also facilitated greater audience diversity and increased community engagement. Programmes have reached underrepresented groups, removed physical and social barriers to participation, and supported informal learning, youth-led programming, and wellbeing initiatives. The Kick the Dust programme is a strong example of increasing the diversity of audience participation. Kick the Dust focused on increasing youth engagement with heritage and involved young people at every stage of the programme, including deciding which projects would receive funding. The programme funded 12 youth-focused projects across the UK, ranging from training in heritage and museum skills to developing participatory methods and engaging with heritage through technology and creative media. This included the Hands on Heritage project at the National Museums Wales, which gave young people the opportunity to conserve museum objects, curate displays, and learn about marketing and digital activity, and the Norfolk Journeys project at Norfolk Museums Services, which provided heritage-focused work experience, volunteering opportunities, and creative projects.

Heritage good cause funding has also helped build pride in place and support social cohesion. Local communities have been actively involved through employment, volunteering, and informal participation, building new social networks and community buy-in. For instance, Birmingham Museums' Citizens' Jury, funded by the NLHF, comprising 28 randomly selected participants who reflected Birmingham's demographics, convened to discuss what Birmingham needs and wants from museums and what Birmingham Museums Trust can do to achieve it, producing a report on the role of museums and 20 recommendations. At the MA, we have continued to sustain this community engagement by working with the Citizens' Jury to produce [our annual conference](#), which is taking place in Birmingham this November.

Targeted programmes have also extended access for vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, who are often underserved by mainstream services. The Stories of Harrow, an 18-month community heritage project led by Headstone Manor & Museum in partnership with Harrow Giving and funded by the NLHF exemplifies this. Working with 16 community groups across the borough, the project supported communities in researching, preserving, and sharing their own heritage and Harrow's history. Participants co-produced oral histories, archives, and collections, which formed an exhibition and public programme on the untold stories of Harrow's communities.

NLHF funded traineeships have had a positive impact in helping to diversify the workforce by providing opportunities to people who face barriers to entering the museum and heritage workforce. For example, the NLHF funded project, Curating for Change, provided opportunities for disabled people, who are underrepresented in the museum workforce, to

gain curatorial roles in museums. This programme also increased the representation of disabled people's histories in exhibitions and events.

Funding what's important to you

Question 7. In the last financial year, the National Lottery raised £1.7bn for good causes. This is currently distributed as follows: Arts and Culture (20%), Sport (20%), Heritage (20%), Charitable activities including health, education and the environment (40%).

Considering this, what percentage of funding, if any, do you think each of these areas should receive? Your answers must add up to 100%.

- 1. Arts and culture – 20%
- 2. Sport – 20%
- 3. Heritage – 20%
- 4. Charitable activities including health, education and the environment – 40%

Empowering communities to take decisions

Question 15. We are aiming to make good cause funding more participatory, inclusive and representative for communities across the UK.

How best do you think the National Lottery and the 12 National Lottery Distributor Bodies, who distribute lottery funding to grant recipients, could give your community more of a say over where good cause funding goes? [free text box]

We would recommend that the National Lottery and Distributor Bodies consider:

- **Deliberative citizen panels or juries**, recruited through a civic lottery selection process which represents the diverse demographics of the local community and includes people with no prior engagement with museums. The panels or juries should convene regularly to inform funding priorities, criteria and strategy at a regional or national level.
- **Embedding participation on an ongoing basis**, rather than as a one-off consultation exercise, so the community voice continues to shape decisions over time and sustainable relationships develop.
- **Transparent feedback structures** that show communities how their input has directly shaped outcomes, to build trust and sustained engagement.

The recommendations draw on participatory decision-making and community engagement initiatives in the museum and heritage sector. The National Gallery's NG Citizens initiative

is a citizens' assembly in which fifty participants were selected through a civic lottery to ensure the group reflects the country's diversity, including people who had not previously engaged with the gallery. Members were asked to consider the gallery's purpose, priorities and public value, drawing on evidence from a range of experts and perspectives. The selection process was run in partnership with Involve, a public participation charity, and the Sortition Foundation, which specialises in civic lotteries. The Assembly's recommendations fed into an ongoing Citizens' Panel, embedding public voice in the Gallery's decision-making over five years.

[Birmingham Museums' Citizens' Jury model](#), funded by the NLHF and the National Museums Scotland 2023 report, [Exchange: Community-led Collections Research Recommendations for more equitable participation](#), provides further evidence and practical recommendations on how community-centred deliberative structures can shape institutional priorities without being extractive or superficial. We believe similar models could guide decisions and strategic funding plans for national funding bodies.

Simplifying access to funding

Question 18. You said that you found the process of applying for National Lottery good cause funding somewhat difficult.

Could you tell us what was difficult about the process? [free text box]

There are significant barriers throughout the National Lottery funding application process. The requirement for formal governance structures, committees/boards, and comprehensive financial records can exclude community-led and volunteer-managed projects that may lack these formalities and grant-writing expertise. Even established organisations such as the MA face challenges at the pre-application stage, as contacts for pre-application discussions can be hard to find and the guidance received can be discouraging or inconsistent, often preventing us from applying before we have formally begun.

Arts Council England's requirement for match funding creates a significant barrier, making it difficult to commit to submitting applications when matched funds are hard to secure. Organisations, like the MA, operating across both arts and heritage face additional challenges. The overlapping yet narrow eligibility criteria of ACE and the Heritage Lottery Fund can create confusion and inefficiency, with applicants being redirected between funders rather than receiving clear guidance on which funder is appropriate.

Aside from the match-funding requirements, the criteria for what constitutes a successful

application are sometimes unclear. There is a lack of transparent guidance on assessment priorities, evaluation criteria, and how applications are shortlisted.

Question 24. Based on your or your organisation's experiences, what changes, if any, would you like to see made to the process of applying for National Lottery good cause funding? [free text box]

We would like greater transparency in the funding decision process and a simplified process. Applicants can struggle to understand why their bids succeed or fail, or how the criteria are weighted during evaluation. This lack of clarity makes it harder for organisations to prepare strong applications, learn from unsuccessful attempts, and trust that decisions are fair and consistent across funding rounds and assessors.

We would welcome:

- A simplification of the process
- The publication of clear, detailed guidance on how applications are scored or assessed, including any criterion weighting.
- Meaningful, individualised feedback for unsuccessful applicants, explaining the specific reasons for the decision.
- Greater consistency in the interpretation and application of the criteria across funding streams and panels.
- Clearer communication on what "success" looks like at each stage of the process, so organisations can better judge whether an application is appropriate before investing time in it.

Question 27. How do you think the National Lottery and the 12 National Lottery Distributor Bodies, who distribute lottery funding to grant recipients, could encourage more people that are eligible to apply for good cause funding? What more could they be doing? [free text box]

National Lottery and Distributor Bodies could encourage more applications by increasing transparency and improving direct communication. This includes publishing clearer, plain-language guidance on what the funding can cover and the decision making process. Proactive outreach would help reach smaller or less resourced organisations that may not have dedicated fundraising capacity. Collaborating with organisations such as Museum Development, ACE sector support organisations, sector representative bodies such as the

MA and other regional networks can help identify and support potential applicants. This approach would ensure that awareness of funding opportunities extends beyond those already well connected in the sector.

Question 28. We've just about finished. Do you have anything else that you would like to tell us as part of this call for evidence?

- 1. Yes - [free text box]

Question 7 (reasoning) – National Lottery funding continues to have a transformational impact on arts, heritage and culture in the UK. It is vital that funding percentages remain the same, as National Lottery funding is integral to the sector's funding landscape, and any reduction would further undermine the sector's already precarious financial position. The sector also delivers charitable activities through creative public programming and projects that include health, education, and environmental objectives.

Question 12 (reasoning) - Linking the amount of funding an area receives to the number of lottery tickets sold there would risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than addressing need. Ticket sales are likely to correlate with population density, disposable income, and local economic conditions, meaning better-off, more populated areas would attract more funding regardless of need. This would work against, rather than towards, a fair and needs-based distribution of funding across the UK.

The museum, arts, culture and heritage sector across the UK is facing ongoing and intensifying financial pressure. The Covid-19 pandemic led to significant drops in self-generated income and visitor numbers, from which many organisations have not fully recovered. This has been compounded by sharply rising energy costs, which disproportionately affect museums and heritage sites given the specialist environmental conditions many collections and historic buildings require. Additionally, staffing issues, including recruitment and retention challenges, and the loss of skilled and specialist roles due to budget cuts, have further reduced the sector's capacity to deliver for communities. 58% of respondents to the MA's most recent member survey said their museum, or the museum they work with, was planning cuts in services in 2025/26. Overall, these pressures mean many organisations are operating with little to no financial stability, making them highly dependent on external funding, including National Lottery support.

We would urge the National Lottery and its Distributor Bodies to develop a long-term sector strategy that aligns with the museum strategy in development in England, the museum

strategy in Scotland, the Museum Policy in Northern Ireland and the new culture policy which is in development in Wales, rather than relying mainly on project-specific or short-term grant cycles. A longer-term approach would allow organisations to plan with greater confidence, invest in core capacity and staffing, and build genuine resilience rather than surviving from one funding round to the next. The Museum Futures programme (by Museums Galleries Scotland, the Scottish Government, and The National Lottery Heritage Fund) exemplifies strategic, sector-wide support that complements direct grant funding. It has provided museums in Scotland with vital support in the face of significant financial challenges through peer networks and capacity building, driving innovation and building resilience across the sector. We would welcome its principles being reflected more broadly in how the National Lottery approaches capacity building alongside grant funding.

While project grants support innovative and creative projects, the short-term funding cycle feeds into one-off projects and inconsistent availability of community engagement activities, which makes it difficult for museums to embed them into long-term engagement. At the MA, we attempt to address this through our Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund, which includes core grants for museums embedding inclusive and participatory practices across their collections work. Vestry House Museum was awarded funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund for their 'Heritage in the Marking' co-curation project to bring new perspectives to the collections that focus on underrepresented communities within new permanent displays. Partners include local community groups like GB Carnival and Red Light Busking, as well as a community advisory panel.

Without project funding, museums would not be able to pilot and learn from creative projects or trial partnerships with organisations outside the museum sector that have strong connections with the community groups museums may struggle to reach. In the long term, it could also mean that community engagement becomes monotonous, which can lead the community to disengage. For this reason, it is important to find a balance between project grants that test new ideas and core grants that support the implementation of long-term strategic change.

We also advocate for greater strategic coordination among funding distributors operating in this space. This would reduce duplication, address coverage gaps, and ensure that both national and local organisations receive support proportionate to need rather than to their capacity to navigate multiple, disconnected funding streams. Access to culture and heritage should be shaped by community need, not simply by existing capacity to apply.

It is also important for the NLHF to fund holistic and inclusive collections work and recognise that back of house activities support public engagement and deliver public

benefit. The [NLHF Museum Collections, Storage, Access and Resilience report](#) highlights core challenges facing collections and back of house work. These include storage spaces at maximum capacity and poor storage conditions, which increase the risk of damage to collections, as well as gaps in inventory/cataloguing and restrictive public access to stored collections that impact public engagement and learning opportunities.