



Invitation to Tender

Project Manager for Paths to Inclusion

Issue date	8/5/26
Clarification deadline	15/5/26
Tender deadline	29/5/26
Anticipated contract term	Approximately 11 months (exact start and end dates to be confirmed)
Tender contact	Rob Coates, Fundraising and Development Manager

1. Introduction and background

National Trails UK (NTUK) invites tenders from suitably qualified consultants, sole traders or organisations to provide project management services for Paths to Inclusion, a research and development project focused on improving the accessibility and inclusivity of information about National Trails.

Paths to Inclusion has been designed to address information barriers that prevent disabled people and people from minoritised ethnic communities from visiting and experiencing National Trails. The project will explore how NTUK can work with Trail managers, community partners and target audiences to co-design and test more inclusive content, information and communications approaches.

The National Trails are a network of 21 routes, totaling almost 6,000 miles through England, Wales and Scotland, connecting people with natural, built and cultural heritage. While the network attracts very high visitor numbers and reaches communities close to the routes, existing user demographics do not fully represent the varied backgrounds of the public. Paths to Inclusion is intended to help remove the information and confidence barriers that limit wider participation.

Using money raised by National Lottery players, the National Lottery Heritage Fund supports projects that connect people and communities with the UK's heritage. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to fund this key project, ensuring the National Trails are welcoming places for all.

2. Project purpose and objectives

Paths to Inclusion is envisaged as an eleven-month research and development programme. The appointed Project Manager will help NTUK establish the project infrastructure, manage commissioned work, support co-designed pilot activity and ensure that the programme produces clear learning for a future delivery phase. The objectives of the project are to:

- understand the information and communication needs of the project's target audiences;
- audit the current knowledge, systems and capacity within National Trails to meet those needs;
- test practical approaches through four co-designed pilot projects with community delivery partners and Trail managers;
- produce actionable recommendations for a future inclusive communications and marketing approach; and
- develop a scalable, shareable model that can inform future fundraising, implementation and sector learning.

The project is expected to work primarily across England and Wales while generating learning that can be shared with the wider National Trails family and the broader access, heritage and outdoor inclusion sectors.

3. Scope of the appointment

The successful tenderer will provide end-to-end project management for Paths to Inclusion. The Project Manager will not be expected to undertake all specialist research or evaluation

work personally, but will be responsible for planning, coordination, quality assurance, partner management, reporting and delivery oversight across the full programme.

3.1 Mobilisation and governance

- Prepare an inception plan covering milestones, dependencies, decision points, accessibility considerations, communications, risk management and reporting cycles.
- Support NTUK to establish the Project Advisory Panel, prepare meeting papers, maintain action logs and follow up decisions.
- Translate the approved funding scope into a live delivery plan and keep it updated throughout the contract.
- Ensure the project remains aligned with funder requirements, including inclusive practice, digital compliance and open dissemination commitments.

3.2 Management of commissioned work and partnerships

- Support the finalisation of tender documentation for the research contractor and the independent evaluator and assist with appointment and onboarding.
- Act as the day-to-day coordination point for NTUK, the research contractor, the evaluator, Trail managers and community delivery partners.
- Monitor performance, timelines, budgets and risks across all strands of work and escalate issues promptly.
- Ensure that contributors are appropriately acknowledged, reimbursed where relevant, and supported with reasonable adjustments that enable participation.

3.3 Research and pilot delivery

The Project Manager will work with NTUK and appointed specialists to steer an initial research phase and then coordinate four co-designed pilot projects. The pilot structure is shown below and should be treated as the current working assumption pending final confirmation by NTUK.

Audience focus	Proposed Trail / location	Delivery partner	Pilot purpose
People of Black heritage	Cotswold Way	Black Trail Runners	Co-curate and test inclusive access and heritage information for the target audience.
People of South and Southeast Asian heritage	Pembrokeshire Coast Path	South and Southeast Asians Outdoors UK	Co-curate and test inclusive access and heritage information for the target audience.
Physically disabled people	Pennine Bridleway at Parsley Hay, Peak District	Experience Community	Co-curate and test inclusive access and heritage information for the target audience.

People with sensory disabilities	Location to be confirmed	Open Country	Co-curate and test inclusive access and heritage information for the target audience.
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The Project Manager will be expected to coordinate these pilots in a way that recognises shared barriers across audiences while avoiding over-generalisation. Findings from one group should not automatically be treated as applicable to all audiences without evidence.

3.4 Monitoring, reporting and future planning

- Provide regular written progress updates to NTUK and the Project Advisory Panel, including budget tracking, risks, actions and decisions required.
- Prepare or coordinate reporting inputs required by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and any related internal reporting.
- Coordinate the consolidation of research findings, pilot learning and evaluation evidence into a clear closure and handover package.
- Support NTUK to identify the implications for a future delivery phase, including possible funding, sponsorship and income-generation opportunities.

3.5 Inclusion, accessibility and compliance expectations

- Use co-design and lived-experience-led practice throughout the project rather than relying on assumptions about audience needs.
- Ensure information, meetings and engagement methods are as accessible as reasonably possible for participants and partners.
- Work with NTUK to ensure that digital outputs are capable of being maintained at an appropriate accessibility standard and disseminated openly in line with funder requirements.
- Apply a respectful, collaborative approach that strengthens relationships between NTUK, National Trail teams and community organisations.

4. Deliverables and outputs

The table below sets out the minimum outputs expected from the appointment. Tenderers may propose refinements where these improve deliverability or value, but the overall scope should remain consistent with the brief.

Deliverable	Indicative timing	Purpose / content
Inception pack	Within 4 weeks of contract start	Detailed project plan, milestone schedule, governance map, risk register, stakeholder map and accessibility approach.
Commissioning support	Early stage	Finalised briefs, appointment support and onboarding plans for research and evaluation specialists.

Project reporting	Monthly and at key decision points	Highlight reports, budget monitoring, risk updates, action logs and papers for the Advisory Panel and NTUK.
Pilot coordination plans	Before pilot delivery begins	Delivery plans for each pilot setting out roles, timings, dependencies, access considerations and monitoring arrangements.
Funder reporting inputs	As required	Accurate and timely narrative and financial inputs for National Lottery Heritage Fund reporting.
Project closure and handover pack	End of contract	Consolidated learning, unresolved issues, recommendations for next phase, and organised handover of files, contacts and decision history.

5. Contract management and working arrangements

The Project Manager will report to Rob Coates of NTUK, and will work closely with the Project Advisory Panel established for Paths to Inclusion.

The stakeholder infrastructure will consist of an Advisory Panel, a research contractor, an independent evaluator, four Trail management teams and four community delivery partners. The successful tenderer should be comfortable operating in this multi-partner environment and maintaining momentum across organisations with different capacities and working cultures.

The appointment is expected to run for approximately eleven months, with an anticipated resource need of 2 days per week on average. The role is expected to be delivered on a remote basis with travel to pilot activity in England and Wales as considered necessary.

6. Required experience and expertise

NTUK is seeking a contractor with credible experience of managing complex, collaborative and inclusion-focused projects. Tenders should demonstrate the following as a minimum.

- A strong track record of project management in research, development, heritage, countryside access, public engagement or related programmes.
- Experience of working with disabled people and/or people from minoritised ethnic communities using participatory, co-design or lived-experience-led approaches.
- Experience of coordinating multiple partners and managing commissioned consultants, briefs, timelines, risks and budgets.
- Confidence in producing clear written reports, decision papers, schedules and funder-facing updates.
- Excellent facilitation and relationship-management skills, including the ability to work constructively with charities, community groups, public bodies and site-based teams.
- Capacity to travel within England and Wales when required.

The following would be advantageous:

- knowledge of National Trails, protected landscapes, countryside access or outdoor inclusion work;
- experience of National Lottery Heritage Fund or other publicly funded heritage programmes;
- familiarity with accessibility, digital inclusion, open licensing or WCAG-aligned content requirements; and
- experience of evaluation frameworks, theories of change or impact reporting.

7. Tender submission requirements

Tenderers should be asked to submit the following information.

- A short method statement explaining understanding of the brief, proposed approach, sequencing, risk management and how inclusion and accessibility will be embedded.
- A proposed work plan or mobilisation plan for the first twelve weeks of the commission.
- Relevant experience and up to three case studies for comparable projects.
- Curriculum vitae
- A pricing schedule setting out total fixed fee, indicative day rates, assumed days or hours, and treatment of travel, expenses and VAT.
- Details of any proposed subcontractors or consortium arrangements, including the lead contractor.
- Two referees or examples of recent clients willing to provide references.
- A declaration of any actual or potential conflicts of interest and confirmation of appropriate insurance cover.
- Any accessibility requirements for the tender process or interview stage.

Submission route: rob@nationaltrails.uk

Submission deadline: 29/5/26.

Clarification questions should be sent to rob@nationaltrails.uk by 15/5/26.

8. Evaluation criteria

Criterion	Weighting
Understanding of the brief and the project context	20%
Relevant experience and track record	25%
Quality and credibility of methodology, work plan and risk management	20%
Approach to inclusion, accessibility and co-creation	20%
Value for money	15%

9. Indicative procurement timetable

Stage	Date
Issue of invitation to tender	8/5/26
Deadline for clarification questions	15/5/26
Responses to clarification questions issued	20/5/26
Tender submission deadline	29/5/26
Evaluation and shortlisting	1/6/26-4/6/26
Notification of award	5/6/26
Contract start / mobilisation meeting	c. 15/6/26

NTUK reserves the right to amend this timetable and will notify tenderers if any dates change.

10. Contract terms and additional notes

- NTUK is not bound to accept the lowest-priced or any tender and reserves the right not to award.
- Tenderers are responsible for their own costs of preparing and submitting a response.
- NTUK may request clarification or invite selected tenderers to interview or presentation before making an award.
- The successful tenderer will be required to enter into a services agreement and comply with relevant obligations relating to confidentiality, data protection, equality, safeguarding and health and safety.
- Tenderers should identify any third-party intellectual property restrictions in their submission. NTUK should expect project reports and materials funded through this commission to be capable of open publication under the Open Government Licence or another open licence consistent with funder requirements, unless expressly agreed otherwise.
- Conflicts of interest, whether actual, potential or perceived, must be declared at tender stage.
- If tenderers consider that any information supplied by NTUK is incomplete or ambiguous, they should raise this through the clarification process before submitting their tender.