

# NATIONAL TRAILS.UK

## **Invitation to Quote (ITQ) National Trails UK Audience Strategy Proposal**

### **Introduction and Project Overview**

National Trails UK (NTUK) is seeking proposals to carry out market research to identify who our key public audiences are and how to reach them.

National Trails UK is a charity that represents the 21 designated National Trails in the UK. We're currently undergoing a period of change from a primarily B2B charity to a public-facing organisation.

Our ambition is to grow a community of people who are engaged and passionate about the UK's National Trails. But first we need to know who our audiences are, segment them, and work out the best way to reach them. This research will then feed into the development of an updated communications strategy reflecting the wider audiences of the charity.

By way of background, as part of this public engagement programme to build a community around our National Trails, we are currently in the discovery phase to inform the development of a new public-facing website. This platform will bring together all 21 National Trails across England, Wales, and Scotland, supporting audience engagement, accessibility, and income generation for the National Trails and NTUK.

This market research work will be used to inform and feed into the ongoing development of this new website. In addition, any insight from the 'discovery phase' of the new website can be used to feed into this audience research.

### **About National Trails and National Trails UK (NTUK)**

The National Trails comprise 21 long-distance routes across England, Wales, and Scotland, covering over 5,000 miles and managed through partnerships, local authorities, and other organisations. A full list is available [here](#). 'National

Trails' is a marketing name used by the routes in England and Wales; in Scotland they are known as designated long-distance routes (LDRs).

In England and Wales, each National Trail is overseen by its own National Trails Partnership, and they receive funding from central government for annual repair and maintenance to keep the National Trails up to quality standards. This funding also includes a contribution for a National Trail Officer, who manages the repair and maintenance work. You can find out more about this in [The New Deal](#) and [the Welsh quality standards](#).

In Scotland, each local authority/ National Park with a designated LDR that passes through manages their own section. The exception to this is the West Highland Way; a new charity, the West Highland Way Trust, has been set up to coordinate fundraising and projects along the whole route.

National Trails UK, (NTUK), is a charity created by the National Trails themselves. We are the independent champion for the 21 designated long-distance routes in England, Wales and Scotland. We exist to strengthen them, advocate on their behalf, and inspire more people to use them. We do this while building our organisational resilience.

NTUK was created in 2021; Our chief executive Polly Martin joined as CEO and first member of staff in 2023. While the charity has been seed funded by DEFRA, the charity will become financially independent by 2028/29. The team is now 5 people in total, fully remote.

**Our Vision:** A network of high quality, nature-rich National Trails which are highly valued and used by everyone.

**Our Mission:** To strengthen the UK's National Trails so they can sustainably deliver more for people and nature, advocate on their behalf, and inspire more people to use them as a gateway to the great outdoors.

**Our pillars:** Strengthen, advocate, inspire and organisational resilience

### **Comms strategy**

Our strategy is to be a bold, inclusive and solutions focused voice for the National Trails. NTUK has previously created a [Communications strategy](#) but this was more geared around being a B2B charity. A key outcome of this piece of work will be information and insights that will feed into the development of an updated communications strategy that reflects our transition to a public facing charity. You can find the [current information on NTUK Audiences here](#), alongside our current key messages.

## **Context**

National Trails UK (NTUK) was originally established as a B2B charity for the National Trails network, with a primary focus on securing additional funding and advocating for the inclusion of National Trails within public policy and decision-making.

NTUK is now evolving into a more public-facing organisation in order to better deliver its long-term strategy: strengthening the National Trails, advocating on their behalf, inspiring more and different people to enjoy them, and building the long-term resilience of both the organisation and the wider trails network.

A key part of this transition is the development of a strong Public Engagement Programme that can build greater public awareness of, connection to and support for the National Trails. This shift is also critical to NTUK's future financial sustainability. Expanding areas such as corporate partnerships, membership and other income-generation opportunities will require NTUK to demonstrate an engaged and growing public community around the National Trails network.

At present the public facing marketing and promotion of the National Trails is fragmented. It is primarily delivered [through a website funded by Natural England](#). This website covers the National Trails in England and Wales and is managed by Natural England and delivered under contract. The new NTUK website currently in the discovery stage is intended to replace this provision and create a more audience-focused digital experience.

Natural England also manages the National Trails national social media channels across [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).

Alongside these national channels, individual National Trails undertake their own marketing and communications activity. However the quality, consistency and reach of this activity varies significantly across the network. Many trails lack the internal capacity and resource to deliver sustained marketing and audience engagement activity themselves, resulting in an inconsistent public offer and varying levels of accessible, inclusive and audience-focused information.

Some Trails have developed stronger individual brands and digital presences, particularly the [South West Coast Path](#) which operates its own website and social channels. Others are represented through partner or host organization platforms, such as the South Downs Way on the [South Downs National Park website](#) and socials, or the Thames Path on the [Visit Thames](#) website. In

Scotland, the designated long-distance routes are part of the [Scotland's Great Trails group](#).

The current [NTUK website](#) was developed primarily as an organisational website for the charity's members and also to demonstrate NTUK's work and impact to its initial funders and stakeholders. It provides information about NTUK, links to resources, news updates and a growing collection of blogs related to trails and access issues. However, it was not designed to function as a public facing promotional platform for the National Trails network and therefore does not currently provide the level of inspirational, practical and audience-focused content needed to support wider public engagement.

In addition to the website, NTUK, as a primarily B2B charity, has an active LinkedIn channel with just over 2K followers. The website has a [news/blogs](#) section, that aims to deliver content for our existing audiences as identified in the existing comms strategy. We also have a newsletter that is sent out 6 times a year to a mainly B2B audience, i.e. trail members and wider protected landscape family.

As part of its transition to becoming a public facing organisation, NTUK is developing a new website and establishing national social media channels designed to build an engaged public community around the National Trails. The ambition is to create a more consistent, compelling, and audience-led public presence that inspires people to discover, value and support the National Trails network, while encouraging them to begin a longer-term supporter journey with the organisation.

To ensure this work is effective, NTUK is seeking market research, audience segmentation and insights, and strategic support to inform the wider communications approach required to support NTUK's transition to a successful public-facing organisation.

Full background documents can be found on this [googledrive](#).

## **Risks and challenges**

There are several risks associated with delivering NTUK's wider Public Engagement Programme and the audience research work intended to inform it. These risks are heightened by the scale of organisational change involved, the complexity of the National Trails landscape, and the need to develop multiple interdependent workstreams simultaneously.

NTUK is transitioning from a primarily B2B, membership-focused organisation into a more public-facing charity. Successfully making this shift requires a significantly stronger understanding of public audiences — including who they are, what motivates them, the barriers they face, how they engage with nature and recreation, and the most effective channels and messages for reaching them. Without robust audience insight, there is a risk that future communications, campaigns, content and digital platforms fail to connect with priority audiences or support long-term engagement and supporter growth. There is also a possible tension between the audiences that our potential corporate members would be interested in, and NTUK's ambition to inspire more users including from underrepresented groups to feel welcome on our National Trails.

The market research and audience insight work is therefore critical, as it will underpin several major areas of development simultaneously, including the new website, social media channels, communications strategy, content and channel planning, audience segmentation, supporter journeys and future income-generation activity. Delays or gaps in insight could create misalignment across these areas and result in decisions being made without a sufficiently evidence-led understanding of audience needs and behaviours.

There are also operational risks linked to capacity and delivery. The programme is being developed within a relatively small organisation with limited internal resource, while multiple interconnected projects — including audience research, communications strategy, content development, website discovery and public engagement planning — are progressing in parallel. This increases the risk of stretched capacity, competing priorities and dependency between workstreams.

There is also a need for the research to clarify the relationship between the national charity and individual trails. While there is a consistent desire across the National Trails for more joined-up marketing and communications to promote the National Trails, as noted above, different National Trails already undertake some work in this area and NTUK does not want to be seen / to actually take away opportunities from individual trails. There is also a public perception angle to this: many people feel strongly about a specific trail, but may not recognise the role of National Trails UK. It's hoped the research will explore brand awareness and understanding of what NTUK can credibly own at a national level and how to link the national brand with local trail experiences.

Ultimately, the success of NTUK's transition to a public-facing organisation will depend on its ability to develop a clear, insight-led and audience-centred engagement strategy which in turn allows it to attract funding including from corporate partners. Ensuring that the market research work provides robust, practical and actionable insight that captures motivations, barriers, awareness, emotional connection and value perceptions among the wider public, not just existing trail users will therefore be essential in reducing strategic risk and supporting confident decision-making across the wider Public Engagement Programme.

### **Project Objectives:**

- To deliver qualitative and quantitative information and insight from current and potential future National Trail and NTUK consumer audiences.
- The information and insights should be sufficiently broad, in depth and robust to confidently support the development of a new multi-year public engagement strategy that will aim to grow a community and develop our corporate membership.
- The information and insights outputs should be considered as potentially acting as a benchmark to demonstrate impact and progress at regular intervals in the future against our Theory of Change document. Specifically, against our aim to increase awareness and understanding of National Trails including among under represented groups.
- If possible it would be helpful to understand what the potential drivers are for people to support the individual National Trails and/or National Trails UK (i.e. through financial donations/volunteering) and to use this insight to map what a potential supporter journey could look like from casual user of a National Trail through to supporter/donor.

### **Specific Requirements**

NTUK requires a supplier to deliver a comprehensive report providing market research into who our key audiences are and how to reach them.

We require the following:

- An understanding of who our current and potential future audiences are with an output of prioritised audience groups (based on strategic importance) and their motivations.
- We are looking to be advised by you on how to go about this, but we envisage this coming from a mixture of desk-based research, including a review of existing limited audience data/audience insights, and

primary quantitative and qualitative work, as well as insight likely to be available via the Discovery stage of website.

- This research could also include a report from a UK wide, omnibus style survey.
- An understanding of how we will reach these audiences, with outputs of audience personas, channel mix by audience
- A strategic framework with recommendations, for narrative and key messaging to resonate with each key audience group and content framework that we can then take and use to inform the development of a usable communications strategy aimed at growing our community.
- Outputs to meet the supporter journey objective above

For information: our stakeholders included in website discovery phase are: National Trail Partnerships and equivalent, Government Agencies (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and NatureScot), target public audiences, funders and potential corporate partners.

There will be a requirement of regular check-ins and updates with key NTUK staff, as outputs become available/are complete, to help inform the Discovery and subsequent 'minimum viable product' stages of website development and build. Plus 3 meetings with the NTUK Team and Board to discuss the developing report, its content and possible edits. This will include an interim presentation to the Board likely to be end of July/early August, as well as a final presentation following delivery of final report end of August. Exact dates tbc. The final report should be made available in an accessible and editable format, so that the NTUK team can make small changes in the text if required. Formats could include Canva, AdobePDF, Powerpoint.

### **Content and Style**

Work should be inclusive, accessible, and aligned with NTUK's evolving communications strategy, ensuring clarity and engagement across diverse audiences.

### **Timeline**

- ITQ goes live 3 June
- Submission deadline: Midnight Sunday 21 June
- Shortlist w/c 22 June
- Interviews (if required): w/c 6th July
- Appointment: w/c 6<sup>th</sup> July

- Project start: early July
- Interim outputs by end of July/early August
- Final deliverables by end of August

### **Fees and Payment**

Budget: up to £25,000 (VAT inclusive)

50% paid on appointment; 50% paid on completion of the final report.

### **Management of the ITQ and Project**

This ITQ is being managed by the Senior Communications Manager, with support from the CEO, Treasurer and Trustee.

The project will be managed by the Senior Comms Manager, with support from the CEO, Fundraising and Development Manager and NTUK Board.

### **Selection Process and Method**

Proposals will be assessed on understanding of the brief, clear methodology to achieve the project aims, inclusivity, experience, and ability to deliver within timelines.

Please outline who from your team will complete this work and what their relevant experience is and how the work will be spread across the team.

Please provide a simple budget breakdown showing how spend is broken down between individual team members and costs

Please give a very brief indication of similar projects you have worked on before e.g. not-for profit/charity projects, projects with landscape/environmental organisations.

We anticipate receiving a document outlining your response to this invitation to quote in NTUK's branding, sent to [Katec@nationaltrails.uk](mailto:Katec@nationaltrails.uk). You can find the [NTUK Brand book here](#).