

Invitation to Tender: Paths to Inclusion

Issued by: National Trails UK (NTUK)
Project timeline: October – February 2027
Research budget: £10,000 exc VAT
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Introduction

We are seeking an evaluation consultant to measure the impact and outcomes of NTUK's *Paths to Inclusion* project. The evaluation consultant will co-design a measurement structure in line with an existing story of change, that will inform how NTUK and our delivery partners can identify impact and paths forward from the findings of the research project.

About National Trails and National Trails UK

National Trails UK is the independent champion of the UK's National Trails.

National Trails are designated long-distance walking, riding and cycling routes representing the gold standard of the UK's public rights of way. There are currently 20 National Trails across England, Wales and Scotland, connecting over 305 million annual visitors to our natural, built and cultural heritage. With the addition of the King Charles III England Coast Path, the network will span 5,500 miles of the UK's most exceptional landscapes.

Background to the Project

A growing body of research - including the 2019 Landscapes Review - highlights the persistent lack of diversity among those accessing Protected Landscapes. Many people, particularly those from minoritised ethnic communities, disabled people, and both younger and older age groups, often feel excluded or unable to access countryside spaces. A 2022 Defra review identified several ongoing barriers to equitable access - including low awareness, poor-quality access information, and a lack of representation in communications.

National Trails have a key role to play in addressing these inequalities, by offering highly managed, accessible routes and targeted engagement programmes that aim to welcome underserved communities. However, while Equity, Diversity and Inclusion projects have seen success at a local level, there is currently no consistent or joined-up approach across the UK to address the root causes of underrepresentation. For example, there is no central resource or 'point of truth' that showcases the diversity of experiences National Trails offer, or explains how to access them. Many in the National Trails workforce also lack the resources, training or confidence to co-create and share inclusive, engaging content with their target audiences.

To address this, National Trail Officers and Natural England are looking to NTUK to take on a strategic leadership role in the national promotion and interpretation of National Trails, and to develop the joined-up approach that has been missing. At the heart of our approach is a commitment to tackling access barriers at their source by co-creating content and campaigns with target communities, and sharing power with those who have lived and professional experience of the physical, cultural, social or economic barriers that limit access to nature.

About the Project

This research forms part of *Paths to Inclusion*, a new NTUK-led initiative that aims is to inspire and empower more people to connect with the wide-ranging social and economic benefits of National Trails. Specifically, *Paths to Inclusion* will explore how NTUK can collaborate with National Trails, our partners and diverse communities to co-design and deliver inspiring, inclusive and accessible content that empowers and enables underrepresented groups to experience National Trails.

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Paths to Inclusion builds on our 2024 Defra-funded *Language of Access* project, which developed a framework for Protected Landscapes to present access information consistently, as well as decades of experience and local solutions delivered by National Trails and their host authorities (National Parks, National Landscapes and Local Authorities).

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.

About the Audience

The project will focus on two audience groups:

1. People from minoritised ethnic communities (specifically East and South East Asian communities, and People of Colour)
2. People with physical disabilities

Specifically, we want to reach:

- People who are not currently visiting National Trails, or do so infrequently

- But who might be open to visiting, given the right information and support

Research, Scoping and Pilot

We have secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to undertake the **Research, Scoping and Pilot phase** of the project. In this phase, we will explore the effectiveness of similar existing projects, understand the needs of our target audiences, test approaches through pilot projects, and produce practical recommendations and a replicable model. Specifically, we will:

1. Identify best-practice models and examples from within the National Trail network and the wider sector
2. Explore the content and communication needs and preferences of target audiences
3. Assess the current knowledge, skills and capacity among delivery partners (including National Trail Officers, government agencies, content creators and community representatives) to create inclusive, user-led content
4. Collaboratively co-design and test pilot content and approaches with target audiences and delivery partners
5. Use insights to:
 - a. Develop clear, practical recommendations for NTUK and the National Trails network
 - b. Produce a blueprint for the wider sector to undertake similar work

Evaluation Objectives and Role of Partner

The Evaluation Consultant will undertake the following:

1. **Work with our Project Panel to design an evaluation framework.** This should remain in line with our existing story of change and with reference to actionable insights for a second phase of Paths to Inclusion.
2. **Work with our pilot project delivery teams to design evaluation frameworks for each.** These must effectively balance consistency for aggregation with capturing the unique impacts of differing lived experiences.
3. **Independently evaluate each of the pilot projects.** This will take place to provide input on participants views of the work conducted and any future projects, as well as support NTUK iteratively improve our co-creation model.
4. **Prepare an end of project evaluation report.** This will consider how the project has identified and tested ways to improve the preparation and delivery of information to the target audiences.

Outputs

The Evaluation Consultant will work with NTUK's Fundraising and Development Manager and Project Panel to produce one core output:

1. **Evaluation Report for NTUK and the National Trails network:** A practical report outlining clear, evidence-based recommendations for NTUK and its delivery partners. This will set out next steps for designing and delivering inclusive content and campaigns that can be scaled across the wider National Trails network.

This should be accessible, engaging and suitable for sharing with external stakeholders.

Assessment Criteria

We will appoint the Evaluation Consultant based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevant experience and expertise:** Demonstrated experience of designing and delivering high-quality evaluation frameworks and deliverables regarding research projects, with a strong emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We are particularly interested in partners who have undertaken evaluation with underrepresented communities and/or in the heritage or outdoor sectors.
2. **Approach and methodology:** A clear, thoughtful and robust proposal for how you will deliver the evaluation framework - including research methods, how you will ensure the work is inclusive (including any reasonable adjustments you will make for people of varying needs) and co-designed, and how you will work collaboratively with NTUK and our delivery partners.
3. **Quality of outputs:** Evidence that you can work with delivery partners to produce accessible, inclusive, engaging and practical outputs for a range of audiences - including strategic recommendations and practical guidance for others to adopt.

Timeline

- Submission deadline: 25th September
- Interviews (if required): w/c 28th September
- Appointment: w/c 5th October
- Project start: Immediate

Management of the ITT and Project

The project will be managed by the Project Manager, with support from the Fundraising and Development Manager, Senior Communications Officer, and NTUK Board. 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 brief indication

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of similar projects you have worked on before, with particular interest in participation, not-for-profit projects, and projects with heritage, landscape or environmental organisations. We anticipate receiving a document outlining your response to this invitation, sent to **rob@nationaltrails.uk**.