



WE RETHOUGHT PARKS

PARKWORK BRISTOL

Nesta...



Awarding funds from
The National Lottery®

BIG
LOTTERY
FUND



WE RETHOUGHT PARKS

PARKWORK BRISTOL

ABOUT THE RETHINKING PARKS PROGRAMME

Rethinking Parks was a joint Nesta, Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund England programme to find, support and test new approaches to raising income or reducing costs for public parks. Public parks face cuts of 60% and more from current local authority revenues over the next decade, and this programme trialled new methods and models to address this funding gap. Other resources from the Rethinking Parks programme, including descriptions of other models, the summary report and links to tools for the sector can be found at: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks>

ABOUT PARKWORK BRISTOL

Bristol City Council Parks Department and Bristol Parks Forum partnered together to develop the ParkWork project. Bristol is a city in South West England.



PARKWORK BRISTOL AT A GLANCE



Giving people routes to employment whilst improving parks

ParkWork provides training and work experience for unemployed and/or under-skilled people through practical improvement projects in parks. Participants gain work experience, skills and qualifications, while parks benefit from improvements or maintenance that would not otherwise be done. [Work and employment services achieve good results for their clients at relatively low cost.]

We have been delighted with the success of ParkWork, it has given valuable work experience to many volunteers, several of whom have gained full time employment as a result. In addition, Bristol's parks have been significantly improved beyond our normal budgeted level.

(Di Robinson, Service Director, Neighbourhoods and Communities.)

CORE CHARACTERISTICS



QUICK TO DELIVER



A MODEST BUT
MEANINGFUL LONG
TERM IMPACT



WIDER BENEFITS
ACHIEVED



VOLUNTEERING

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS, AND WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL?

The team delivered £27,000 worth of improvements to parks over their first seven months of operation, representing over 400 hours of work across over 40 parks and open spaces in Bristol.

Seventeen people participated in ParkWork's first three eight-week placements. From this group:

- Seven have gone on to employment
- One has returned to work from long term sickness
- One has moved to full time training.

ParkWork is projected to provide a further £27,000 of improvements in 2016/17 and provides Bristol City Council with £2.40 back for each pound invested. The team are exploring how to achieve even more, for example by working for more days in the year, securing contracted work, involving more volunteers or recruiting another coordinator.

WHERE MIGHT FUNDING COME FROM?

- Local authorities (who achieve both parks improvements and employment outcomes with the same investment)
- Employment placement agencies (who may contribute funds for participant placement)
- Organisations with funds for landscaping or parks improvements (e.g. Friends groups)

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR DELIVER?

- A steady supply of suitable participants
- A good volunteer coordinator with solid horticultural skills
- Demand from parks managers for improvements, especially higher cost projects
- A varied and engaging programme of work for participants
- A balance of in-house work and paid projects
- Leadership and buy in from Councillors, unions and parks staff
- In kind support and contributions from the local authority, for example meeting overhead and strategy development costs

HOW LONG MIGHT IT TAKE?

Three to four months to develop, and have first placement operating.

PARKWORK: WHAT THE TEAM DID

WHAT WAS THE TEAM'S ORIGINAL IDEA?

The ParkWork team comprised:

- **Bristol Parks Forum** (joint lead)
- **Bristol City Council** (BCC) parks team (joint lead)
- **Land Use Consultants** (LUC) (researched assistance)
- Alison Hope (income strategy support and fundraising)
- A part time project manager (employed through BCC in development phases)
- A full time ParkWork coordinator (employed through BCC)



The original vision was to run a series of 12 week programmes for people who are unemployed or with long term sickness conditions. The programme would improve the skills and employability of participants who volunteered. It was important to the team this was not a mandatory work development programme. Participants would be referred by agencies working with people who have difficulty entering employment (e.g. people with learning difficulties). The teams would carry out work that wouldn't be affordable otherwise, across Bristol's parks.



WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT NEXT FOR THE TEAM?

ParkWork had a positive impact for participants and parks. Three sets of eight week programmes were completed, with a total of 17 participants. The team made £27,000 of improvements to over 40 open spaces in the seven months of operation.

ParkWork is continuing into the 2016 year and beyond with support from Bristol Parks Forum and Bristol City Council (BCC) who recognise the benefit for the parks team and parks directly and also the direct benefit to participants. BCC are providing a financial safety net, giving the team an opportunity to explore other funding and operating models.

Options for scale include:

- Increasing days worked or number of participant teams involved (as per forecast below)
- Engaging the general public as volunteers, making use of tools and equipment when not used by ParkWork
- Becoming a partner of choice for Friends groups and other not-for-profits with grants

The outyears for the financial forecast (below) are highly dependent on overheads being met by the BCC, volunteers starting to supervise additional teams and increases in both project and high value in-house work.

FINANCIAL FORECAST:

PARK WORK BRISTOL - RETHINKING PARKS FINANCIAL PLAN

Financial Year	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21
INCOME						
Rethining Parks Grant	£ 85,450	£ 14,000	£-	£-	£-	£-
Project fees	£ 11,400	£ 23,000	£ 59,829	£ 59,829	£ 59,829	£ 85,701
Bristol City C Contribution	£ -	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£35,000
Agency fees	£ 1,350	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
<i>In kind support</i>						
Management & Strategy	£ 19,200	£ 9,600	£ 9,600	£ 9,600	£ 9,600	£ 9,600
General & Administration	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000
TOTAL INCOME	£ 141,450	£ 95,600	£ 118,429	£ 118,429	£ 118,429	£ 154,301
EXPENSES						
Project development	£ 31,788	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Management & Strategy	£ 19,200	£ 9,600	£ 9,600	£ 9,600	£ 9,600	£ 9,600
Team supervisor	£ 33,989	£ 33,989	£ 47,584	£ 47,584	£ 47,584	£ 61,179
Vehicle costs	£ 8,507	£ 8,507	£ 17,014	£ 17,014	£ 17,014	£ 25,521
Depot	£ 6,000	£ 6,000	£ 12,000	£ 12,000	£ 12,000	£ 18,000
Tools & clothing	£ 1,038	£ 1,038	£ 2,076	£ 2,076	£ 2,076	£ 3,114
Capital costs	£ -	£ -	£ 14,000	£ -	£ -	£ 14,000
General & Administration	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000	£ 24,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	£ 124,522	£ 83,134	£ 126,274	£ 112,274	£ 112,274	£ 155,415
Net result	£ 16,928	£ 12,466	-£ 7,845	£ 6,155	£ 6,155	-£ 1,114
Number of teams	1	1	2	2	2	3
Value delivered to BCC	£ 36,151	£ 27,450	£ 49,280	£ 49,280	£ 49,280	£ 73,920
Rebate on BCC grant		£ 12,466				
NET VALUE TO BCC	£ 36,151	£ 14,916	£ 24,280	£ 24,280	£ 24,280	£ 38,920

Some modifications to delivery are being considered. The team are exploring a different joining approach for participants so it is less rigid than only being able to join at the start of each eight week block. Opportunities also exist to channel existing local authority funding streams such as health and wellbeing, training and education to help fund ParkWork. This approach should help to keep a full team and also give the agencies a bit more flexibility when they have possible candidates.



THE FUNDING MAZE: FINDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR A VIABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Developing a sustainable funding model is like navigating a maze. There is a starting point and an end goal and a network of convoluted paths through which a route has to be found; along the way there are hurdles to negotiate and overcome.

ParkWork has had first hand experience of navigating the path to find funds for parks. The project's end goal was to identify the best business model for the ongoing engagement of volunteers in the improvement of Bristol's parks. The starting point, according to project leader Fraser Bridgeford of Bristol Parks Forum, was a set of ideas about how to make this happen: "We set out with the expectation that volunteers would come through employment agencies and other charitable organisations. These volunteers would be on the route to employment and looking for structured opportunities to gain valuable work experience. Our assumption was that agencies would pay us to offer placements for the volunteers."

What the team actually discovered when they approached such agencies was quite different. "We found that whilst it was possible to recruit suitable volunteers, the funding that they came with was not sufficient to cover the costs associated with their co-ordination, training and support," recalls Fraser Bridgeford. To overcome this obstacle, and achieve their goal of identifying a viable and sustainable business model, the team would need to identify alternative income streams.

And so the potential to secure funding from charitable sources, such as Trusts and Foundations, was explored. This would entail establishing ParkWork as an independent organisation, separate from Bristol City Council. But it was soon apparent that this pathway was also obstructed, as Alison Hope, the fundraising advisor, explains: "What became quite clear is that for parks to benefit we needed to recruit volunteers who were physically capable of doing the work, reliable and motivated. This target population is not particularly attractive to charitable trusts who have moved, over the years, towards funding activities directed at people with more complex needs." These setbacks mean that progress towards ParkWork's end goal has been slower than initially anticipated, as Alison Hope acknowledges: "We are probably around a third of the way towards proving this is a viable business model. "

Nevertheless the ParkWork team has made significant advances through their innovation maze. First, new income streams have come to light such as the opportunity to secure short-term contracts from the council to carry out volunteer-led park improvements. Second, the team has hard evidence of the financial benefits of engaging volunteers: "We have been able to demonstrate to the council that every £1 invested in the project delivery, generates a £2 return in volunteer hours" states Fraser Bridgeford. Third, the team now has a much better understanding of how to balance the needs of volunteers with the needs of parks. They appreciate that compromise is sometimes necessary, as described by Fraser Bridgeford: "If people are on an eight week volunteer programme, you don't want them laying a path or sweeping leaves for eight weeks. You need a variety. It's about finding a balance because sometimes you are undertaking work that just gives people valuable experience rather than being a priority for parks."

The team is continuing their journey towards identifying a sustainable business model. They are aware that they could explore many different directions – corporate volunteering is one, for example. However as Fraser Bridgeford admits, "It is also possible to get lost in many directions." The team is confident that, given time, they can identify the best business model, but also a degree of realism that this may look very different to the one they envisaged at the outset.

INSIGHTS AND ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Contrary to original assumptions the team learnt that the majority of participants don't come with contributions from recommending organisations, and those contributions that do come are minimal. Over the course of the year only £1,400 in contributions were received, in contrast to the team's initial thinking that this income source could be a key element for a sustainable funding model.



"It would have been possible to attract high levels of participants' money but these people would require greater levels of support so the benefits for parks improvements for investment would be minimised."



Fraser Bridgeford, Bristol Parks Forum

Traditional interview formats may not be well suited to potential volunteers, or give them a realistic sense of the working environment. The ParkWork coordinator established a less formal interview approach, held at the ParkWork yard instead of council offices.

Have a clear schedule of works to show volunteers and discuss the skills they will learn for each one. Be aware of individuals who need more support and integrate them into the daily work tasks by giving them specific jobs and responsibilities.

Participants need induction into a broader range of skills, over and above using tools and work practices. The induction now includes discussion and direction about working with other people and diversity training.



It is important to make sure the whole team is working together. More confident team members can be given extra responsibility in supporting the not so confident and therefore help all members of the team to work together.



Joe McKenna, ParkWork Coordinator



QUICK STEP GUIDE TO DELIVERY: PARK WORK BRISTOL

Feasibility Assessment

1. Identify local agencies which could refer participants, and what they want to achieve.
2. Assess the demand and commitment from stakeholders (e.g. Council Parks teams, relevant Unions and Friends' Groups) for participants to carry out parks improvements.
3. Secure a senior leader who can champion the idea.
4. Assess the opportunities to access funding to cover delivery costs (e.g. from employment support agencies, the local authority, groups with grants to undertake parks improvements).
5. Assess the cost benefit and potential funding. If the model appears viable, progress to development stage.

Development

6. Design the programme (length, skills and qualifications offered, scope of work), incorporating the requirements of participants, referring agencies and stakeholders.
7. Identify desired impact (e.g. improvements to parks, changes in wellbeing or employability for participants), based on what organisations funding the programme want to achieve.
8. Develop a schedule of work for participants. Focus on highest value activities.
9. Develop local branding (if necessary) and market the programme. Make connections through local authority, placement agencies and others.

“Keep regular communication with agencies so the project is at the forefront when advising candidates on work placements. Make sure they are informed and updated.”

10. Recruit a volunteer coordinator.
11. Purchase relevant tools and equipment .
12. Source or hire transport for team and secure a depot for use.

Implementation

13. Select participants based on their enthusiasm for the tasks, benefit for them and ability to contribute to park improvement.
14. Commence delivery, ensuring work includes high profile projects and a diverse range of sites.
15. Keep Friends groups and other stakeholders informed about and directly involved with the programme and where the team will be working.
16. Get feedback from participants, placement agencies and parks managers and use it to inform changes to the programme: don't wait until yearly reviews to learn what could work better.
17. Continue to market and communicate with placement agencies and parks managers so pathways for participants into the programme and into employment / further training are identified.

WHERE CAN I GO TO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/parkwork-bristol-parks-forum>

<http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/>

<http://ways2work.org.uk/jobs-skills-south-west/parkwork-work-experience-bristol-parks/>

1 Plough Place
London EC4A 1DE

rethinking.parks@nesta.org.uk
www.twitter.com/nesta_uk
www.facebook.com/nesta.uk
[#rethinkingparks](#)
[#parksmatter](#)

www.nesta.org.uk

January 2016

Nesta...



Awarding funds from
The National Lottery®

