How community grants can support grassroots



Voices Gloucester is supporting local people like Kelly Horsley to explore and share their heritage. Credit: Kelly Horsley.

Voices Gloucester shows that small, locally delivered grants have a big impact.

From Romany families and Ukrainian refugees to skateboarders, breakdancers and Medieval scholars, Gloucester's history has been shaped by countless different communities. But for a long time many of the city's stories remained untold.

In 2021 we awarded Voices Gloucester £249,000 to run its own grants scheme, offering local people £500 to £2,500 for projects sharing their communities' culture and heritage.

Running a community grants programme

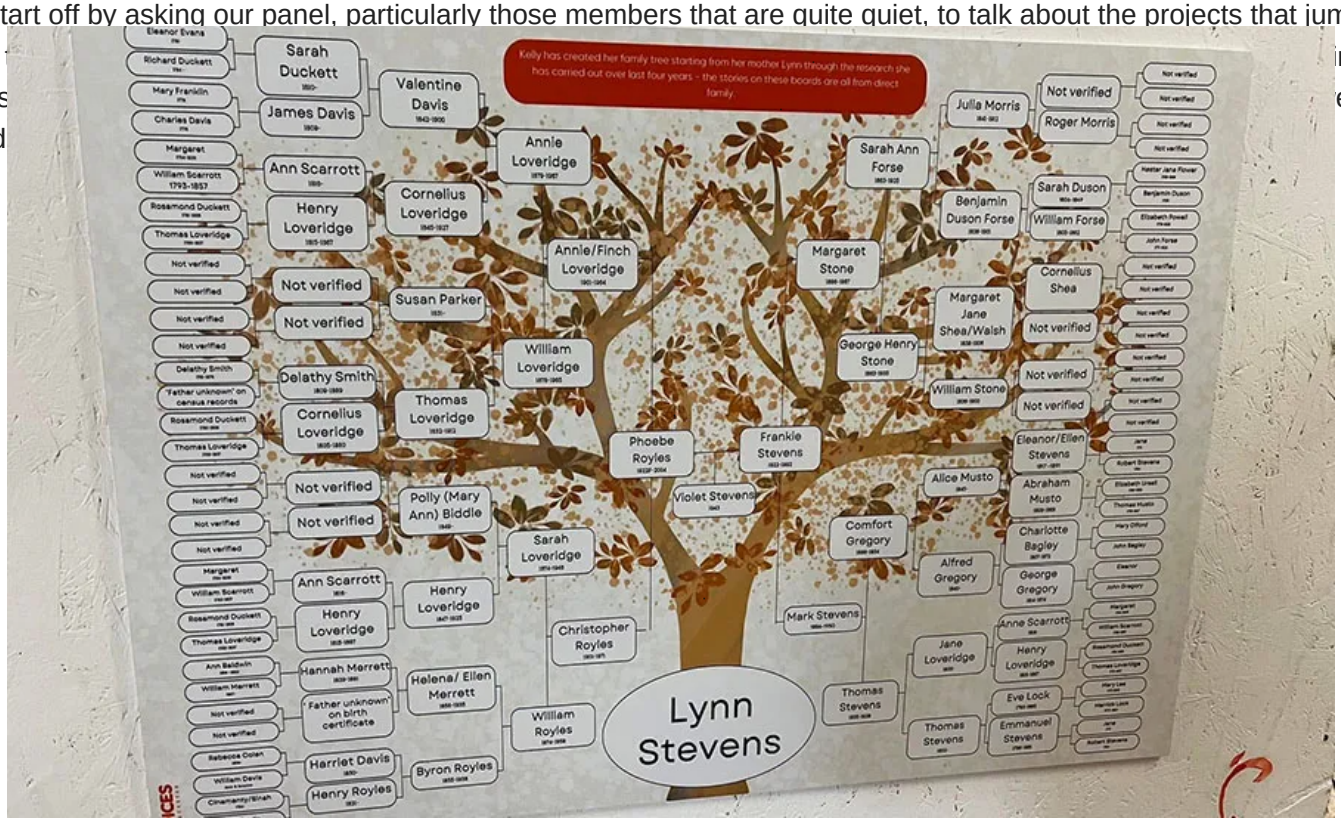
"The grants enable people to tell their own stories, rather than us speaking for them," says Jacqui Grange, Director of Voices Gloucester. "It's a community upwards rather than a top down approach."

One of the ways Voices Gloucester supports a wide range of heritage is by recognising that many of the scheme's applicants will have never applied for funding before.

“Over 30% of our applications are from first timers and over 30% are from under-served communities. Having a powerful support process in the pre-application and application stages makes all the difference.”

Since starting out, the programme’s decision panel has welcomed an increasingly diverse range of representatives, and members are encouraged to look beyond the scoring process.

“We start off by asking our panel, particularly those members that are quite quiet, to talk about the projects that jumped out at [illegible]ins. “It means [illegible]e hear d[illegible]



Community grants have helped Kelly's project to grow. Credit: Kelly Horsley.

A success story

For community producer, Kelly Horsley, the impact of the programme has been huge.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdowns, Kelly began researching her family’s Romany Gypsy heritage and sharing the photos she found in local history Facebook groups. Delivering a heritage project wasn’t something she’d ever considered, but when someone shared a link to Voices Gloucester on one of her posts, Kelly decided to apply.

“I wanted to dig a little deeper into my roots, because with the Romany community a lot of stuff can be hidden away. Some older family members couldn’t read or write and people like my grandparents didn’t always want to speak out about their heritage,” Kelly says.

The funding supported her to work with young curator Georgia Williams and community space The Folk of Gloucester to put on an exhibition, Kushti Divvus – Forgotten Stories of Gloucester’s Romany Gypsy Community.

Since then, Kelly has gone on to give talks at schools and universities, has featured on ITV News, won a Friends, Families and Travellers Arts, Culture and Heritage award and produced a second exhibition and film with Voices Gloucester, Dordi Dordi Dikka Kie (which means “oh dear look at this” in Romany).

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Kelly's great-grandmother Annie Royles, with her Vardo (wagon) in the 1940s. Credit: Kelly Horsley.

Bringing people together

It’s not just financial support that makes a difference. Community grants projects like Voices Gloucester can offer valuable opportunities for people to learn, collaborate and make connections.

“Our superpower is connecting people,” Jacqui says. “Somebody will come to us with an idea and then we're able to match them with some young creatives in the area, or hook them up with a filmmaker or do some training to help them see their idea through to reality.

“We have a training and inspiration day where we bring together people who are thinking of applying for grant, people who are just starting out and people who have had a grant so they can meet and learn from each other. We really have built a community.”

Kelly agrees: “It’s like a second family. It’s so helpful meeting people from other projects. Everyone chips in and gets involved in what everyone else is doing.”

Supporting everyone’s heritage

Want to help bring heritage projects to life in your area? Find out what we expect from community grants schemes and discover other projects celebrating diverse voices.



Act for Action CIC, recipients of a community heritage grant from One Knowsley. Photo: Act for Action CIC.



eir heritage

School children take part in the Bradford Book Project



rated and shared thanks to local knowledge

Traveller flower sellers in the New Forest in the late 1800s. Photo: New Forest Gypsy Traveller.

How we’re helping to save the heritage of community traditions and ways of life