

Grantee Q&A: the value of collaboration and planning

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Hedge planting at Culgaith. Photo: Eden Rivers Trust.

We asked Elizabeth Radford from the Eden Rivers Trust to share what she's learned on the Trust's project journey – from the vital importance of the development phase to the surprises that unfold over years of delivery.

About the project

Access to Eden is a multi-year programme delivering new opportunities to explore, conserve and celebrate the habitats along the River Eden, which runs through Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales.



Elizabeth, at work on Access to Eden. Photo: Stuart Walker.

Our grant of more than £2million is helping the Trust enhance eight natural heritage sites in four areas, benefiting wildlife and people. The Trust and its partners are also running seven public engagement programmes for locals to explore, enjoy and care for the landscape on their doorstep.

What did you find most challenging about your application and how did you overcome these challenges?

"Some of the questions in the application can feel abstract, particularly relating to outcomes, needs and beneficiaries. You have to really understand what the Heritage Fund means by its terminology and [each of its investment criteria](#). Work closely with their team and your team, so you're all on the same page."

What would you recommend future applicants spend more time on when developing their application?

"Engaging with partners and potential beneficiaries during the development phase was critically important.

"For partners, our focus was on good communication – keeping them up to date, securing commitments and buy-in for their own element of the project, as well as the whole concept. Being able to map the whole funding process was helpful for managing expectations.

"For the beneficiaries, you must spend time listening hard to what your target audiences want and make sure the resultant plan fits their needs, your own objectives and those of the Heritage Fund."

What one piece of advice would you give to someone applying for funding for the first time?

"Give some thought to covering key personnel salaries between your development phase and – all being well – your delivery phase. This will enable you to hit the ground running on day one of delivery. This was vital for our charity because we don't have funds to allow us to hold the fort and our development team were crucial to the project's success."



Volunteers carry out planting to help repair wetlands at Bampton. Photo: Eden Rivers Trust.

When delivering your project, what surprised you?

"The wonderful magnification of our plans – with a team in place for four years, you can do so much. So many opportunities and ideas have emerged and so much value has been added, which is just not possible during short term projects. We've had more room to breathe, so we've been able to deliver more and have a greater impact."

What one thing do you know now that you wish you'd known before you began?

"The first time I worked on such a process, at another organisation, I stepped in when a development phase was near completion and realised that, while lots of talking had happened, none of the supplementary paperwork was in place. Madness!"

"I would recommend getting to the paperwork early in the development phase. It's needed, quite rightly, for the Heritage Fund to be confident about the project's delivery, and there are no short

cuts. To do this work well, you need good project managers, people who can write well and tell a story within a specific framework."



Young people lend a hand building bird boxes at Cold Springs Nature Reserve. Photo: Eden Rivers Trust.

What's been the most rewarding thing to come out of your project?

"We've built a great team, with a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience. We've gained so much from working with new beneficiaries – they've changed our organisation's perspective on how to engage the public in our work."

This is part of a new series of Q&As with successful grantees – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector. [Explore our most recent project updates and case studies.](#)



[For over 10 years, the team have worked alongside local communities to restore greenspaces.
Photo: Natalie Dunn.](#)



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[Local communities will engage with farms across the landscape. Credit: Joanne Coates.](#)



[orth Pennines](#)

[Bradford's project will connect communities across the city and nearby towns with nature. Credit: SWECO.](#)

[Nature Towns and Cities launches with £15million investment](#)