

£2million National Lottery boost to innovate and improve public parks

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Children playing in a park

Groups and organisations are being sought to test innovative ways of managing the UK's public parks following a £2m National Lottery funding boost for the Rethinking Parks programme.

Rethinking Parks – a partnership between Big Lottery Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Nesta - has today announced a £2m grant fund, matched by more than £300,000 in support from innovation foundation Nesta, which will learn from and share the most innovative and promising new business models for parks.

The new funding will build on learning from the first Rethinking Parks programme, which ran from 2014 to 2016 and involved a £1m investment into 11 park schemes across the UK.

This yielded some promising results, with one of the schemes, ParkWork in Bristol, finding new ways to engage the community in caring for their park. It offered training and work experience to unemployed people who took part in park improvement projects.

A second scheme - Bloomsbury Squared - tested a way of including a parks focus in a Business Improvement District while, in Burnley, Go to the Park realised savings of £62,000 in its first year, improved staff wellbeing and supported biodiversity through taking a permaculture approach to management.

With a further £2m in grants available, the programme is now inviting proposals for funding in two areas;

- Replication – which will support partnerships to replicate and build on promising models for managing public parks sustainably, including some of the concepts from the original Rethinking Parks such as Parks Foundations
- Prototyping – to support new ideas for testing and learning with park communities and managers; finding ways to use digital and data approaches to help address parks challenges

Digital technologies are changing the landscape of how parks are used and managed. For example, Bournemouth Parks Foundation (one of the 11 original Rethinking Parks schemes) combined an innovative operating model with testing how direct digital donations from park users, while physically in a park, could fund improvements.

Over 37 million people in the UK regularly use parks each year and 90% of households with children under five visit their local park at least once a month. Parks are important to wellbeing and community cohesion and are key to addressing challenges such as childhood obesity and climate change [1].

While 95% of park managers expect their revenue budget to be cut over the next three years, the State of UK Public Parks 2016 report found that partnerships and collaborative working – between local authorities, charities, funders, businesses and park users – can play a key role in protecting parks by sharing resources and expertise[1].

The Rethinking Parks programme will encourage parks to share skills and learn from the most promising approaches for reducing costs and generating new income streams so they can become more sustainable.

Dawn Austwick, Chief Executive of the Big Lottery Fund, said: “The Rethinking Parks programme has already supported a number of pioneering ideas for UK public parks. We are delighted to continue to our support for this programme with additional funding. Thanks to National Lottery players this funding will find new ways for people to keep much loved parks at the heart of their communities.”

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of HLF, said: “Public parks are not a luxury, they are vital to the physical, mental and economic wellbeing of local communities. Rethinking Parks has already given local people, businesses and authorities the tools to explore and deliver innovative ways to manage and protect parks for the future. This new round of funding will go further to help parks not only survive but to thrive.”

Vicki Sellick, Executive Director of Programmes at Nesta, said: “Our parks are too valuable to see slowly decline over time. Funding for parks has fallen over the last decade which means we need to find innovative new ways of running our parks to ensure they thrive as community spaces for years to come. Nesta is delighted to be running the programme and bringing our expertise in innovation to our national parks again.”

Rethinking Parks is inviting groups, including local authorities, social enterprises, business improvement districts, ‘Friends of’ groups and beyond, to submit their ideas for the Replication and Prototyping funding streams.

More information about the Rethinking Parks programme, including how to apply, can be found on the Nesta website.

Further information

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Notes to Editors:

1. [State of UK Parks report 2016, HLF](#).

Rethinking Parks

Rethinking Parks is awarding £2m of National Lottery funding, with support worth over £300,000 from Nesta. The funding will enable parks to replicate ways of generating income using proven business innovations and test new ideas for using digital technologies. Building on the learning of the first Rethinking Parks programme, it is a partnership between the Big Lottery Fund, HLF and Nesta.

Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund uses money raised by National Lottery players to help communities achieve their ambitions. From small, local projects to UK-wide initiatives, our funding brings people together to make a difference to their health, wellbeing and environment. Since June 2004 we have awarded £8.5billion to projects that improve the lives of millions of people.

Nesta

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