FIRM FOUNDATIONS
The experience of Growing Community Assets projects
Introduction

Since 2006, the Big Lottery Fund’s Growing Community Assets grant programme (or GCA) has been using National Lottery funding to enable communities throughout the length and breadth of Scotland to become stronger by acquiring and developing assets that matter to them. These have usually been physical assets like land and buildings, but other project types, such as renewable energy, have also been funded. Communities then use the assets to generate income to support quality services and amenities that are viable and sustainable in the long term.

To date, a truly diverse range of 170 projects totalling £86 million have been funded under GCA, the final awards from which will be made in March 2017.

This report summarises the findings of a survey of 58 GCA projects undertaken in the Spring of 2016.
Research aim

At the Big Lottery Fund, we aim to make the best use of knowledge and evidence. We do this to improve our own effectiveness, as well as that of our applicants and grant holders. The more we do this, the more learning can be shared and take place.

With this in mind, we issued a questionnaire to 58 GCA projects last Spring, asking about their experiences and the learning they had gained.
The 58 projects given a questionnaire were a mix of...

- Community cafes
- Bunkhouses
- Community shops
- Renewable energy schemes
- Petrol pumps
# Questionnaire responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of project</th>
<th>Number contacted</th>
<th>Number responding</th>
<th>% response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community cafe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunkhouse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community hub</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community shop</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewable energy scheme</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol station</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Question 1. What was the motivation for projects?
Most responses came from community hub projects who mainly sought GCA funding to replace unsuitable, existing facilities.

Forgewood Community Centre, Motherwell

Before

After
Question 2. How were projects doing?

Most projects claimed to be performing very well...

...but one island community renewable energy scheme had encountered major problems finding suitable wind turbines.
Question 3. Had projects turned out as expected?
Some projects had turned out as expected, but others had not. The main reasons for differences included building, operational and staffing challenges such as...

- Building delays
- Turbine failure
- Succession planning
- Too few customers
- Struggling to cope with demand
Question 4. Would projects have done anything differently?

Some projects would have done things differently, including:

- Taken more time
- Made better governance arrangements
- Reconfigured their layout
- Pushed to have building works finished earlier
- Gotten policies and processes right
- Hired consultants
- Got better advice on VAT
- Put a better staffing structure in place
Question 5. What about the Big Lottery Fund’s role?

A majority of projects said the Fund had been professional, helpful and supportive – but our application process could still be improved.
Question 6. What about other support arranged by the Big Lottery Fund?

Projects particularly welcomed the support received from the Fund’s contractors - Social Investment Business and Community Energy Scotland - as well as advice received on a variety of issues from a range of other bodies.
Question 7. How about help from elsewhere?
Many projects received funding and support from multiple sources, including:

- Local authorities
- Local windfarm trusts
Question 8. Was further support needed after funding was awarded?

Projects would have liked further support with a range of issues, including...

- Policies and procedures
- Volunteering
- Sustainability
- Mentoring

But sometimes projects felt overwhelmed by support from consultants - especially if it was contradictory!
Question 9. What about long term prospects?

Projects described their long term prospects as ranging from ‘excellent’ at one end of the spectrum, to ‘challenging’ at the other.
Question 10. Is more support needed now? If so, where from?

Perhaps unsurprisingly most projects wanted help finding funding.

Other pressing needs included help with...

- Networking
- Hiring specialists
- Managing volunteers
The findings have been taken on board in the design of GCA’s successor – Community Assets, which has no application forms, provides business support, and is supported by a capital mentor network.
Further research has been commissioned from...

...and will be published in Spring 2017
Leave comments or further enquiries at...

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