

Briefing for Empowering Communities Debate

Corra Foundation

September 2026



Corra Foundation is a Scottish grant-making charity that works to strengthen and amplify people's voices and their power to make change.

This briefing shares two key actions to empower Scotland's communities. They are rooted in our experience working alongside communities to support community-led activity, and our grant-making programmes designed to resource communities in ways that work for them. These programmes include:

- [Getting Alongside Communities](#) which was a long-term commitment to support community-led change in nine communities from 2015 to 2026.
- [Every One Every Day](#) which is a co-led programme of creative and social activities with residents in Kirkcaldy, Kinghorn, Burntisland and Auchtertool.
- [Community Leadership Collective](#) supporting community leaders to build confidence, develop skills, and form strong networks across Scotland.
- [Boost Fund](#) supporting community-led activity with grants up to £3000.
- Community-led funds with local people as fund designers and decision makers such as the [Methil Small Fish Fund](#), [Cumnock Community Leading](#), and [#ShiftThePower Dumbarton West Community Grants](#).

Ensure community-led activity and knowledge is central to decision making and system wide responses to complex challenges.

Every day across Scotland, communities come together to create incredible solutions built on their collective knowledge and experience. There is a great, untapped opportunity to embed this community-led activity and knowledge in wider system responses to complex challenges such as poverty, health, community cohesion, and public service reform. If we can do this well, our systems will function better for the people they serve, and lives will improve.

Through Corra's place-based programmes we see the result of this sort of approach; communities creating vibrant initiatives and activities that make the most of local assets and address the local challenges that matter most to people.

- In **Dunterlie (Barrhead)**, the community responded to the loss of a vital bus service by conducting their own research, delivering an awareness campaign, and are now at the stage of trialling a community-led bus service. [You can read more about the Better Buses Barrhead campaign here.](#)
- In **Carbrain and Cumbernauld**, what began as a small women's group is now the Carbrain and Cumbernauld Community Hub providing a wide range of services all aimed at reducing poverty and building connections across the community. [You can read more about the Carbrain and Cumbernauld Community Hub here.](#)

Community-led action is often in response to gaps left in systems that have changed without taking into account their knowledge and experience. Too often, opportunities to meaningfully put community-led activity and knowledge at the heart of decision making and system wide responses are missed. This results in services that can fail to deliver the support people need and lead communities to feel unheard in decisions that affect them. Scottish and local government decision-making systems must evolve to value different types of knowledge and experience including that of communities.

Resource and support communities in ways that work for them.

Communities also need funders, including the public sector, to resource and support them in ways that work for them. Many of our systems are not designed around the things that community-led activity needs: time, trust, supportive relationships and funding that is flexible and easy to access. Through Corra's place-based work and grant making, we see the impact of designing funding programmes and support in ways that work for communities.

Our Getting Alongside Communities programme made a long-term commitment to nine communities across Scotland to support community-led activity. This required a long-term staffing and funding commitment which departed from the traditional approach of a grant maker. Evaluation shows this long-term commitment supported communities to experiment, grow, and develop initiatives with the security of having staff time and support alongside modest amounts of funding. This led to a range of new initiatives designed to tackle loneliness, health inequality, and poverty alongside the expansion of community assets such as new community spaces and expanded use of existing buildings.

Similarly, within our grant making we recognise that different types of organisations have different needs from funding. For small-scale community-led activity, we developed the Boost Fund to meet the needs of informal groups (those without a formal constitution) and small charities and community groups. The Boost Fund is a partnership between STV Children's Appeal, Comic Relief, and Corra Foundation, and is supported by players of Postcode Lottery. The fund provides grants of up to £3000 that can be spent flexibly, it is a rolling programme with a straightforward and streamlined application form and grants available all year. We aim for a turnaround time of 6 weeks from application to outcome. Designing a fund to deliver this took considerable work behind the scenes flexing and rebuilding our systems. The value of this work, designing a fund to support communities in ways that work for them, is immense. Over 800 grants have been made with examples of the variety of funded activity below:

- TLC **Inverness** who used funding to buy chairs with arms so that older adults could join Brew and Blether where 60 people come along for a brew, blether and a range of activities from knitting to dominoes. [Read the full story here.](#)
- Baraka Family Connection Hub in **Glasgow (Glasgow Anniesland)** who used funding for facilitator fees, venue hire, refreshments, arts and games materials and transport support for the Monthly Family Connection Hub. [Read the full story here.](#)
- Little Stars ASN Stay and Play in **East Ayrshire** set up by a grandmother who found it near impossible to find ASN places suitable for their granddaughter to play. Little Stars ASN used funding to offer free groups, cover hall hire, and expand to bigger premises. [Read the full story here.](#)

These are just a few stories of community-led activity made possible by designing a funding system that prioritises flexible and responsive funding alongside a quick turnaround time that small-scale community-led activity often requires. There is a big opportunity to consider how more organisations – including in the public sector - resource and support communities across Scotland in ways that work for them, recognising that there is no one size fits all approach. This is a chance to build flexible and responsive systems that help, rather than hinder community-led activity.

About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

Our ways of working

At Corra we have a set of principles that we strive to put into practice across our roles as an employer, independent funder, charity and partner, as well as in our influencing activity.

We will:

- Listen and respond to people, communities and organisations and amplify voices that are less well heard – their wisdom is at the heart of Corra's approach.
- Build relationships, always working alongside others on the basis of shared power, mutual trust and shared learning.
- Pursue diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), trying to challenge structural discrimination and contribute to radical shifts in the funding sector.
- Be an open, trusting and flexible grant maker.
- Ensure we contribute to tackling climate change, through our investments, operations and grant making and encouraging others to take action alongside us.
- Be bold, taking considered risks and supporting others to do the same.

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