

Corra Foundation responded to a Scottish Government consultation titled Democracy Matters. This document reproduces the response that Corra sent in.

When we respond to a consultation or provide evidence, we do so based on the learning gained from our work and insights gathered from grant holder reports. For this consultation, we only provided answers to questions that we had evidence to support forming a position on.

How could your community use these types of powers to achieve its ambitions, now and into the future?

Corra is a Scottish grant-making charity that is about strengthening and amplifying people's voices and their power to make change. We distribute funding and work alongside communities through a place-based approach. Through our Place Programme, we see communities make use of some of the powers outlined. You can read more about the communities we work alongside on our website: www.corra.scot/people-in-place. We have shared examples of how communities make use of these powers below.

Power to direct associated budgets

Corra has supported thirty participatory grant-making programmes working alongside communities that are seldom heard and experience barriers to participation. In 2022/23 Corra distributed over £5m in grants where decisions had been made through participatory grant-making. This has included the Promise Partnership fund from Scottish Government where the criteria and allocation of funding has been led by people who have lived experience of Scotland's 'care system'. We also worked alongside Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Communities to direct £150,000 from Stewart Investors through the Equity Fund. Place communities have been involved in participatory budgeting processes at a locality level with funding through Corra's People in Place programme, anchor organisations, and local authorities.

For example, 'Doon the Dam' (a group of community members in Methil) led on a participatory grant making programme called the 'Small Fish Fund' which distributed £20,000 from Comic Relief to groups in the local area. The Doon the Dam group tell us that they felt the experience was positive and they built connections with groups and activity in their local area. Doon the Dam also facilitated connection between the groups that had applied for funding too. The group told us they wanted to be more involved in setting the parameters for allocating funding. Community decision making cannot just happen at the end of a process – the involvement needs to be at the outset and throughout.

Communities also told us that some participatory budgeting decision making approaches – which focus on mass voting days – sometimes feel inequitable and can result in the biggest and most popular groups receiving funding. These approaches do not always allow the community to identify priorities or to co-design approaches that work for the community.

With power to direct budgets, communities could direct resources in a community focused way. Through our grant making and place-based working, we see a wide variety of activity funded and that this varies from place to place. For example, in Blacklands, a community garden was established to provide food for the community and provide therapeutic gardening. In Carbrain, a community hub was set up which provides warm space, activities, and advice for the local community. In Dunterlie, a holiday partnership was set up to provide activities for children, young people, and families. Another group, Mohila Ogrojatra, began as an informal group of Bengali women meeting together to decide how to spend funding. With "a programme designed by us" the group have used funding to run sessions on gardening, exercise, cultural activities, and educational programmes such as English lessons and IT classes. [You can read more about the group in this blog](#). This brings a range of benefits in meeting immediate needs but also enables longer-term change through building connections, relationships, community confidence, and nurturing community leadership. Our experience also tells us that many of the localities will naturally evolve, with successful delivery of smaller ideas building the skills, confidence and capacity needed to take on bigger projects. Our model enables a natural progression through micro, small and capital grants. To help illustrate this an example from a community we currently work alongside is given below.

Carbrain Community Hub

Prior to the pandemic the women's group that met in Carbrain Primary School were hoping to establish a swap shop and services in Cumbernauld town centre by taking on a shop unit which would deliver services and support for the local community. In 2019 small amounts of funding for volunteer training (£120) and community cooking

classes (£1,000) were provided to support their ambition. This ambition was delayed by the pandemic.

In June 2021, a temporary Community Hub at Lenziemill was successfully established as a space where local people could socialise and meet for women's groups, Breakfast and Blethers, men's groups, a clothes and furniture swap shop, food pantry, arts & crafts, and wellbeing groups.

By April 2022, the group's initial ambition was realised and Cumbernauld & Carbrain Community Hub moved to the town centre. Having established themselves as a charity, The Hub has been able to secure larger amounts of funding to underpin and enhance the support they offer to the community (secured £350k in 2023).

This funding with the combined support from Corra's skilled staff and significant work by local community volunteers – have enabled the Hub to grow from an informal group to a thriving, established anchor organisation.

Power to employ staff.

Each community that we work alongside in the Place programme has a Community Coordinator who supports the community. Often, communities participate in the recruitment for this post, and in helping direct the resource need – for example whether a part-time or full-time position might be needed. Communities tell us that they value this approach. Corra are seen by communities as very much 'part of the team', willing to 'show up', to genuinely be 'alongside', 'mucking-in' in practical ways when needed, 'going the extra mile' and at times, able to offer a more strategic or independent perspective. Corra are also seen as 'less shackled' than other organisations and funders. This has helped community members feel more comfortable with not necessarily 'knowing all the answers'. Communities describe Corra as 'not looking to fix' communities.

We have supported community groups in communities we work alongside to transition into employing their own staff. For example, the recently formed Nest Wellbeing Group in Cumnock now employs three staff and Carbrain Community Hub now employs their own Community Development Worker. Employing staff is a significant undertaking and communities need sufficient support and development to do this. We have supported communities to access further support through anchor organisations already employing staff – this includes the Phoenix in Castlehill, Barrhead Housing Association in Dunterlie, Cumnock Juniors in Cumnock, CLEAR in Buckhaven, and Methil Community Children's Initiative. We see, through our Place programme, that community development staff need skills and time to build relationships - this requires long-term funding.

Power to enter joint collaborative arrangements.

Corra recognises the importance of partnership working and through our Place Programme we work closely with a range of partners which includes public sector, community groups and charities as well as local businesses. We also see communities working in partnership to identify challenges and find solutions.

An example of this is the Dunterlie Action Group, a group of representatives who use Dunterlie Resource Centre and work in the Dunterlie area. The group identified that considerable time was spent by each group writing funding applications and working to secure hall hire costs. Dunterlie Action Group decided to send in a single funding application to cover the hall lets cost of all the groups involved in the application, and to provide free hall space to new groups. The group received a grant of £10,000 from the National Lottery Community Fund for Scotland to cover all hall hire costs. The group worked with East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure to provide free hall space to new groups. This has enabled a folk music project to provide free music sessions and tuition, creative activities, and a warm and welcome space offering food, advice, and entertainment. The Action Group have also continued engagement with East Renfrewshire Council's Economic Growth and Inclusive Development Department around the re-development of the football pitch at the Dunterlie Resource Centre and wider developments in the community.

Communities tell us the importance of organisations or departments within public sector bodies connecting their work across a community. Without departments and plans joining up, we have seen multiple community consultations at similar times, asking similar questions with a duplication of effort and resource. Conflicting decisions can be made, and information is lost.

Communities tell us that they value supportive partnership working and transitions into taking on more responsibility. We have seen this in community asset transfers which are a significant undertaking for a community. We have supported Cumnock Men's Shed in East Ayrshire through this process with helping the group to set up themselves, completing paperwork, and fundraising. In East Ayrshire, each community asset transfer request starts with a lease first. There is then the potential to progress into full asset transfer if the lease is successful and the community would like to continue. This has given communities support and space to manage new assets and responsibilities. It shows how shared responsibility continues to be an important part of community decision making.

When thinking about who might be part of new decision-making bodies, what are the best ways to ensure they truly reflect their communities and enhance equality?

Equity is a golden thread running through Corra's work. We want to see more equitable representation of Scotland's communities within local decision-making structures. We know that:

- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities are disproportionately under-represented within many decision making bodies as highlighted by CRER: [Minority Representation in Scottish Politics \(or rather a lack of\) — CRER](#). Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities face barriers to participation.
- Disabled People face barriers to participation. Glasgow Disability Alliance have produced several reports into specific challenges faced: [Participatory budgeting and local democracy • Glasgow Disability Alliance \(gda.scot\)](#)
- Children and Young People face barriers to participation – particularly younger children.

The structures and mechanisms of local decision-making bodies and spaces can be inaccessible to many. To ensure that decision making bodies reflect their communities, we believe specific action should be taken:

1. Participation must be meaningful with decision making in the hands of the community. Often, boundaries and agendas are set before a community is asked to decide. An example of this is the Dunbarton West Community Action Group and the development of the Community Events Group. The Community have shared that they see their community as Dunbarton West rather than the individual areas (Castlehill, Westcliffe, and Brucehill). They access services and resources across the three areas.
2. Free and easily accessible support to participate must be provided where required. This might include accessibility support, childcare support or interpreters for example.
3. Local decision-making spaces should be safe spaces for a range of community voices. An example of this is identified in the [Sky Consultation Report](#), that explores the impact and effect of hate crime in Scotland and a resulting distrust of public authorities for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities. The Nest in Cumnock have worked hard to create supportive spaces which has resulted in many communities working together – this includes people with substance issues.

4. A range of ways to participate should be facilitated for those who may have other commitments and are not able to make scheduled meeting times or commit as much time as other people. For example, Mohila Ogrojatra join English learning classes via Zoom. Most of the women are parents and joining online means they can participate around their home and childcare responsibilities. We also supported some of the women with digital devices and data connections to enable participation.
5. Structures and processes should be simplified. In each local authority area, there are an array of plans (LOIP, Locality Plans, HSCP Plans, CLD Plans, Local Development Plans, Local Place Plans) each led by a different organisation or local authority department. Communities tell us that current decision-making opportunities are onerous and require a certain degree of confidence and experience in communities – e.g., Local Place Plans/Community Planning Partnerships.
6. Facilitation support should be provided to navigate often complex local relationships and different opinions. Through our System Changers work, we have seen the value in external facilitation helping to create the right conditions to support discussion of complex issues and the different perspectives that community members bring.
7. Other decision-making bodies should listen to and learn from communities. We see the value in this and have been involved in work for Creative Scotland exploring the involvement of young people, and work for Audit Scotland exploring digital exclusion.
8. Recognition that different communities organise in diverse ways. The current systems must be redesigned to work for Scotland's communities.

Thinking about your own community, what groups would you like to see represented through other selection methods, and what should these methods be?

Corra works to amplify the voices of seldom heard communities across our grant making and place-based work. We have worked to better understand the communities we are not reaching. We've used this insight to focus our resource to reduce barriers and offer greater opportunities to access funding. For example, we have made a commitment to provide a ring-fenced funding pot within our Henry Duncan Grants for organisations led by Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people. Within our participatory grant making approach, we are also working to ensure that our decision-making panels reflect Scotland's communities and know that we have more to do here.

Through this we know that representation in decision making could be strengthened to reflect Scotland's communities. Many of activities delivered in Place communities are targeted at older people and families with young children. There is limited engagement with older young people and only around 2% of the activities delivered were targeted at connecting, engaging, and supporting people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Local decision making would be strengthened by increasing representation of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities, people with care experience, young people, and people with experience of substance issues.

Methods

Our work is largely informal and our approach organic to community participation, but we see the benefits of widening participation through our Place Programme and our Place Coordinators look to engage seldom heard voices.

Through our grant making, we have funded a Mini Public approach in Aberdeenshire to distribute £20,000 through the Comic Relief Shift the Power Fund. This was shown to be an effective approach involving people at random to make decisions on allocation of funding. As part of this approach, significant time was spent supporting decision makers in understanding specific issues that they might not have direct lived experience of. Several groups formed from this work and took forward specific activity that they felt was lacking in the area – this included a women's group, and family hub.

Through our racial equity work at Corra, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups tell us they value the one to one, relational way we work. Diverse teams are an important step to work alongside diverse communities. This helps build trust and

strengthen relationships. This was particularly important through our Equity Programme – a participatory grant making programme working alongside Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities.

What would the role of local elected representatives be, and what would incentivise other people to take on/be part of decision-making?

Elected representatives should represent and respond to local priorities. This must include a priority of listening to and amplifying seldom heard voices.

Communities tell us they want to see change and action. Through our work, people have been incentivised to get involved by seeing the impact of their participation on improving the local area and their own lives. An example of this is in Castlehill where many community members first became involved through a walking group. The group met weekly and would walk around the local area, enjoying company, and meeting neighbours. Gradually, the group developed and wanted to put on events, and make positive changes to their community. Eventually, some members formed The Dunbarton West Community Action Group, after leading on a local skip amnesty to tackle the increasing amount of items left on the streets due to the cost of uplifts. This group is now leading on the development of a Community Action Plan and are seen as a representative voice by West Dunbartonshire Council.

What do you think are the best ways to ensure new decision-making bodies are accountable to their community?

Corra has made commitments to being an open and transparent grant maker to ensure we are accountable to our communities. We make public commitments to action and change, we review these on a yearly basis, and publish a report outlining our progress in achieving these. To assess our progress, we gather data from our systems and listen to our communities. Each year we review our progress against our DEI and racial equity commitments. We publish a report sharing what we've done and what we will do to further embed DEI across our work. Read the DEI Progress Report 2023: <https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/DEI-Progress-Report-2023.pdf>

We believe that transparency, a commitment to listening, and committing to action and sharing progress are vital to accountability. Importantly, we want our community to see how their feedback has directly influenced decisions and changes at Corra. We are working with others to explore how commitments made through the open and trust grant-making community could be used to support public sector organisations in Scotland. The findings may provide some guidance around trust, relationships, transparency and reducing bureaucracy that should aid accountability.

What other mechanisms would help achieve high levels of community participation in local decision-making processes?

Corra made a 10-year commitment to work alongside communities through our place-based work recognizing that many of the communities had felt left behind. Through our place-based working, we have found that high levels of community participation takes time. People often get involved by attending a group – such as a walking group, a baby and toddler group, or a cooking session – and then they become more involved in decision making processes. Ensuring funding and support for a wide range of activities in a community will be important.

An example of this is the Cumbernauld and Carbrain Community Hub. The hub began as a small women's group based in Carbrain Primary School in 2019. Through continued support, the group developed their plan for a community space for people in their community – something that the area lacked and desperately needed. Four years later, the Hub is now open and provides a range of services including a community pantry, free community fridge, men's group, wellness group and much more. They have found that through building confidence and relationships with people accessing services at the Hub, some of those people have gone on to volunteer and provide their own input into the space and activities on offer.

What else should this process include to provide new community decision-making bodies with a strong locally agreed mandate?

Communities tell us that the existing ward system can be restrictive with community councils having to align their work to boundaries. This can sometimes cause challenges when areas within a community council ward often have quite different needs. This underscores the importance of ensuring decision-making bodies are representative of the community and that the needs of the wider community are heard.

For example, The Doon the Dam group recognised the need to raise funding for community activity across the wider Levenmouth area, and not just Methil. Our work in Langlees has also increased over time to include Bainsford as we have better understood how community members see their community. When planning processes focus on much larger areas – there is a risk of smaller communities experiencing deprivation and being less confident in participating.

It is important therefore that people feel their participation continues to be meaningful and change can be achieved through regular engagement and shared agendas. One way to do this is the development of shared community plans which we are developing with every Place community. These plans operate at a more local neighborhood level than community planning structures. The approach is agile and responsive to changing local priorities. Through this we see examples of communities making decisions and driving change whilst established decision-making bodies are still working on plans (and the associated targets) that were set pre-pandemic.

Are these the right set of standards to provide reassurance that new community decision-making bodies will be effective and treat everyone with dignity and respect?

Specific training and support would ensure that decision-making bodies treat everyone with dignity. This may include anti-racism training, trauma-informed training, disability rights training, children's rights training, and 'disagreeing well' training.

Impartial facilitation may be useful in navigating what can sometimes be difficult local relations and networks. This includes between community members but also in realigning power dynamics with communities and public services. Place Community Coordinators play a significant role in facilitating participation of different community members and often act as a go between for challenging or difficult relationships.

At Corra, we regularly discuss the difference between volunteers, staff, and someone providing input and at what point someone should receive payment for their input. Strong guidance on the involvement of communities and people with lived experience would be beneficial to clarify this from the outset.

How could a charter be designed to best ensure a positive relationship between community decision-makers and their partners in national and local government and the wider public sector?

The Place Principle would be a good starting point for a charter: [Place Principle: introduction - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/place-principle/introduction/pages/introduction.aspx).

The Verity House Agreement has a strong focus on subsidiarity from Scottish Government to Local Authorities. Local Authorities should look to do the same with communities.

A human rights-based approach should also be adopted using the PANEL principles. You can read more about this approach: [Human Rights Based Approach | Scottish Human Rights Commission](https://www.humanrightscommission.scot/publications/human-rights-based-approach/pages/human-rights-based-approach.aspx)

What types of support might communities need to build capacity, and how could this change the role of councils and public sector organisations?

Throughout our response, we have referenced key aspects of building capacity and support for organisations. Central to this are commitments to get alongside communities, to support communities in ways that work for them, and to ensure that resources are in place to enable change. Each community will be different, and support needs to be flexible to adapt to each community. We know that some communities will require more support and resource to build capacity because of historic inequity and this understanding should be incorporated from the outset.

Communities will require long-term support, independence, and the ceding of power to transition into increased community led decision making. Support could be provided by a range of organisations who are able to provide time, cede power, and provide support in ways that work for communities.

Are there specific additional powers and resources which would help public sector organisations to work effectively in partnership with new community decision-making bodies?

Existing powers and legislation linked to community participation could be used more fully (Community Empowerment Act). Working alongside communities needs to be resourced and staff should be skilled in community development approaches.

Thank you for considering these questions. When sending us your views, please also tell us about anything else you think is important for us to know at this stage.

Systems and processes for participating in and contributing to plans (CPP, LOIP, Place Plans, HSCP Plans) can vary across local authority areas. It can be unclear how communities can contribute or participate in planning structures. This requires a lot of confidence and previous experience to 'show up'.

We hear from communities that they are tired of being consulted, inputting, and nothing changing. We believe that work could be done to simplify and connect work already underway to increase community participation. This would ensure that community participation is meaningful and accessible for those who wish to participate.

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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