

Countryside Management Association Gordon Miller Award 2018



Nominee

Name of individual, organisation or project being nominated: Dialogue Matters Ltd with the National Trust
Where is the activity/project being carried out? (location & region) Hatfield Forest, Essex

Nominee Contact details – CMA needs to be able to contact someone about this nomination (NB these personal details will not be published without explicit permission)

Primary contact name:
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Your contact details (if different to above)

Contact name:
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About the activity/work/project

<p>Summary (150 words max)</p> <p>Please summarise the work/project, being clear about what was achieved and the difference the project has made.</p> <p>This will be used on the web site and in Ranger to describe your project.</p>	<p>Hatfield Forest in Essex is one of the last remaining intact Royal medieval hunting forests in Europe.</p> <p>Since 2007 visitors have increased from 105,000 to around 500,000, which has caused severe damage and poaching on wet clay soils, with habitats and visitor experiences deteriorating. The custodians of the forest, the National Trust, had closed rides and pathways, locked gates and put up signs telling people not to follow particular routes. But this didn't solve the problem, just provoked furious reaction.</p> <p>Recognising a different approach was needed, the local team brought in Dialogue Matters, neutral third party participation experts, to design a stakeholder engagement process which used consensus building methods and gave participants genuine empowerment.</p> <p>By giving those who care for the forest the chance not just to be listened to, but fully involved in shaping the outcome, meant decisions were well informed, and there was buy-in and support for implementation.</p>
<p>What was done (500 words max)</p> <p>Please describe the work/project in more detail</p>	<p>In response to the increasing tension and animosity towards the National Trust by site users, the Trust launched the Every Step Counts project to raise awareness and understanding of the issues. As part of this, they brought in Dialogue Matters as project partners to work closely with National Trust staff on resolving the issue.</p>

Dialogue Matters designed and planned a process of stakeholder engagement that introduced a best practice approach to the Trust. It is considered best practice for seven key reasons...

- It placed a strong emphasis on the architecture of the dialogue, so that one form of engagement fed directly into the next.
- It used a consensus building method to shift people from their adversarial positions to cooperative behaviour. The skilful use of techniques also ensured that concerns and ideas were taken on merit, not on the status or power of a particular party.
- Each workshop was structured following design principles that can increase what is covered by up to ten times.
- Dialogue Matters and the National Trust ensured the stakeholder invitation list was balanced and equitable. This meant the process had legitimacy and people had confidence that the process was fair, with no side able to dominate.
- Dialogue Matters took a constructive dialogue approach, so instead of focussing on problems, which leaves people discouraged, it focussed on what was working and what more needed to happen. This fosters a positive view and a greater willingness to get involved.
- It embedded ongoing participation. A critique is that people can be empowered to share decision-making over what needs to happen, but once that process is concluded the power reverts back to the usual decision makers. Best practice is to find ways to embed participation at the implementation stage too. In line with this, the National Trust team discussed with stakeholders how best to do this, so as well as the working group they also set up a wider forum to meet a few times a year – this will create a network of champions and supporters who can come together to learn about the forest and each other’s interests, provide walks and talks to explain the sensitivity of the site, help with practical tasks and act as informal wardens.
- Perhaps most importantly it delivered genuine empowerment, with National Trust staff deciding priorities for action with stakeholders, rather than the Trust deciding what to do and consulting on it.
- To do that, Dialogue Matters designed and facilitated a half-day workshop to bring together members of the local National Trust team. They shared ideas about what the future would look like if the process was successful. They also quizzed Dialogue Matters about the risks and sought reassurance that it did not mean ‘selling out’. They then decided, cautiously, to go ahead with the Consensus Process.

Outputs/Outcomes

(300 words max)

Please provide **some facts and figures** (e.g. no of

Number of National Trust staff involved in the process – Five staff and three National Trust volunteers participated in the workshop, representing different interests

<p>schools / vols engaged, events delivered, acres improved /joint working), how the project was innovative or demonstrates best practice.</p> <p>Sell your project!</p>	<p>Number of stakeholders other than the National Trust to attend the workshops – 25.</p> <p>Wider digital and drop-in engagement approximately 150.</p> <p>Duration – November-February</p> <p>Events delivered – two workshops, online engagement and one drop-in</p> <p>Biodiversity along rides and paths improved – in excess of 22 kilometres</p> <p>Key outcomes...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anger and hostility calmed down and led to amicable conversations and cooperation as the trust built that the process was genuine, and that the National Trust was of good intent. ▪ Trust continues to grow as progress is made on implementing solutions – including the contentious path closures solution. There has been the odd spat, but communication between the National Trust and their harshest critics is now open, regular, more amicable and more readily resolved. ▪ The National Trust team learned about refocusing negative relationships into solution-focused outcomes, and that success relies on the support of stakeholders. ▪ Thanks to appropriately managed path closures and effective communication with stakeholders within and beyond this process, the habitats are seeing good signs of recovery. This approach will continue to be taken to allow damaged ground time to recover, while keeping the forest open and enjoyable for users.
<p>If appropriate: (150 words max) who was involved? Partners? Employers? Vols? Funding?</p>	<p>The three-man team at Dialogue Matters worked as project partners alongside staff at the National Trust to deliver this work. We also valued the time and energy given by those to be representative stakeholders for their organisations or interest parties. This included people representing the local community such as parish councils, residents’ associations and schools; recreational groups such as walkers, dog walkers, horse and bike riders; environmental organisations such as Natural England and the National Trust; local businesses including farmers, graziers and tourism interests; heritage and educational organisations including schools and National Trust staff.</p>
<p>Downloads, videos, images <i>(please add links or attach 2 -3 images for use on the CMA website Ranger and wider promotion eg press releases. (Please only list if credits agreed)</i></p>	<p>The state of the path health following an initial survey by Footprint Ecology</p> <p>One of the forest’s boardwalk trails</p> <p>Enjoying the forest in all seasons</p> <p>Stakeholder summaries are still present on www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hatfieldesc</p>

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Date: August 6, 2018