

UK Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships

UK Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships 2025 Event:

Building Community Science

19 November 2025

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January 2026

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This document was produced by JNCC in collaboration with Nazia Sultana (Sustainably Muslim) and Claire Narraway (Earthwatch Europe).

This document should be cited as:

Salvati, J. & Newton, N. (2026) UK Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships 2025 Event: Building Community Science 19 November 2025, JNCC, Peterborough.

<https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/66893a96-ad6f-4cb2-a0bf-b0fc758a5654>

Acknowledgements:

We thank Nazia Sultana and Claire Narraway for their excellent presentations at this event, and to all the event participants who contributed thought-provoking questions during the Question-and-Answer session.

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1. Introduction

The UK Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships (TEPoP) has a [commitment](#) to increasing accessibility and breaking down barriers to Diversity and Inclusion in our [citizen science monitoring schemes](#). A 2024 TEPoP Festival workshop, “Building Strategies on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Citizen Science Monitoring Schemes”, highlighted that TEPoP partners have a lot of enthusiasm and willingness to engage in DEI strategy building, but knowing who to reach out to in different communities is difficult, and having the confidence to approach community leaders can be challenging.

In response to these concerns, the TEPoP 2025 Festival Event on “Building Community Science”, invited two speakers to speak about their experiences of building relationships with community groups, and about how different community groups may wish to engage with TEPoP partners.

A [recording of this event](#), including presentations and Q&A session, is available on the JNCC YouTube channel.

1.1. TEPoP DEI objectives

In 2024, TEPoP published our Strategy for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). This strategy outlines seven objectives for the partnership, which include:

- To establish networks to share experiences of connecting to communities, and of developing pathways to inclusion.
- To invite and be steered by a diversity of perspectives, working with communities to ensure our approach is appropriate and equitable.
- To establish sustainable opportunities for people with a range of expertise and experience.

Recommendations provided by event speakers, Nazia Sultana and Claire Narraway in this 2025 TEPoP event, are highly relevant for meeting these objectives, and provide steer for the next steps taken by TEPoP monitoring partnerships.

1.2. Presentations

TEPoP were excited to host two speakers at this talk, both of whom are experts in community building and environmental engagement.

Nazia Sultana is the director and founder of [Sustainably Muslim](#), an organisation aiming to empower Muslim communities to engage in environmental and sustainability work through a variety of events, workshops, and volunteering opportunities. Nazia spoke about the motivations Muslims may have for wanting to contribute to environmental causes; the work Sustainably Muslim does to build opportunities for that contribution; and the ways in which partnerships such as TEPoP may work with organisations such as Sustainably Muslim in the future.

Claire Narraway is a Research Lead at [Earthwatch Europe](#), overseeing the [Tiny Forest](#) initiative and researching the social impacts of citizen science as part of the EU project NATALIE. The Tiny Forests project works with local communities across the UK to plant, grow, and monitor small, fast-growing, urban forests, for the benefits of both the environment and the community in the short and long term. Claire spoke about the ways Earthwatch has

built connections with communities; how Tiny Forest projects are co-developed; and the lessons learnt from Tiny Forest.

2. Recommendations

TEPoP partners are building ways of working into monitoring schemes that increase accessibility for volunteers, aiming to break down barriers to inclusion for a diversity of participants. Nazia and Claire, through their talks and their answers in the Q&A, outlined recommendations which have progressed our understanding and can be taken forward by anyone engaging in environmental monitoring and/or community engagement.

2.1. Co-develop engagement opportunities with community members

- It is important to work with, and alongside, the existing interests of communities. This creates a higher chance of long-term buy-in and feelings of ownership from community members.
- Work within existing community groups looks to develop accessible and meaningful projects for those groups. For example, Sustainably Muslim has worked with mosques to create diverse and sustainable gardens. Bringing local, invested community members into planning means the gardens are both utilised and recognisable as a community space by the mosque congregations.
- Community members should be able to point out potential sensitivities when organising events, ask questions and raise concerns. For example, Muslims may not feel comfortable going to a cemetery in the dark for a bat walk. Community members could vote on the allocation of space to specific projects.
- Develop opportunities for communities to be involved in planning right from the start of a project.
- Test materials for community engagement with 'non-experts' to ensure accessibility, avoid jargon, and remove language with different connotations to the target audience

2.2. Plan long term projects with communities; do not rely on one-off events

- Think about the long term when engaging with communities, and to ensure that we are not hosting 'tick-box' events. Sustainably Muslim has noted that when organisations run single events with no follow-up, communities can feel demotivated to engage. Projects that have created long term relationships with communities achieve wider reaching goals.
- Equally, be honest with partner organisations, community organisers, and hosts about your aims, the scope of your project, and your limitations. Look to work in the long term by building a foundation of trust and overcoming barriers together.

2.3. Provide a variety of opportunities and be flexible in planning

- Providing multiple ways to engage in citizen science can engage a greater diversity of volunteers, with a greater diversity of interests. For example, since 2023, the National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS) has created opportunities for photography, verification, and data entry volunteers.

- Don't discount 'old school' communications methods - sometimes posters and visits to religious spaces will be much more relevant for the community than social media posts.
- Ensuring people with different levels of confidence, expertise, and time can engage is important. Earthwatch has a philosophy of engagement which states "the wrapping may be different, but the gift can stay the same". This refers to the methods and statistical needs of the monitoring work remaining central to the initiative but designing ways that a variety of people and purposes can engage, to increase the breadth of people and skills involved.
- In person events have been noted to bring more long-term engagement to projects from communities, requiring organising parties to consider how best to run and host in person opportunities on a regular basis. Work with community leaders and organisers to think about how to reduce barriers for participants, thinking about timing, location, possibility of needing translation, physical access, transport, and costs.

2.4. Look for success stories that can teach us how to empower individuals

- Some citizen scientists can be inspired from their participation in projects to take on new leadership roles within the community. Exploring what inspires these individuals can help to understand how to support others on a similar journey. For example, a member of the Sustainably Muslim community who started as a volunteer at their community garden, was empowered to start leading hikes and nature walks both through Sustainably Muslim and with other organisations. Volunteers becoming teachers and leaders in environmental spaces is a way to grow local enthusiasm, while increasing the diversity of representation amongst environmental leaders.
- Volunteers must be well supported, receive appropriate compensation, and must not be tokenised.
- It is important to ensure volunteers interested in leadership roles have regular and easily available opportunities to share ideas, highlight areas for improvement in the schemes, and undertake personal development.

3. Next Steps

3.1. Working with TEPoP speakers and networks

TEPoP partners are keen to explore the potential for working more with organisations such as Sustainably Muslim and Earthwatch. We want to ensure that our work is impactful for the communities we aim to reach, requiring consultation, strategic planning, and shared action.

3.2. Exploring opportunities to work with community groups

TEPoP monitoring schemes should be open to and search for opportunities to develop our relationships with other community groups, organisations and networks.

In order to work with communities and increase the diversity of our volunteers, TEPoP partners should actively search for groups to work with going forward. Previously, partners have noted the risk of taking on a task to reach out to groups without success. Actively searching for opportunities to engage with new communities can develop relationships and understanding, and this may require working in new, unfamiliar ways. Being too cautious in taking risks while exploring and developing new relationships may lead to work being tokenistic or reactive. Further, TEPoP has started to build connections with community organisations with whom we can work in communities with potentially reduced operational risk to all organisations. TEPoP recognise that we can only learn through active engagement, and that building long term community connections will be an iterative learning process.

3.3. Planning long-term projects with community groups

Building long-termism into our planning, projects and -where possible- resourcing, means we are more likely to increase scheme volunteer numbers as well as diversity. Sustainably Muslim has seen demotivation in volunteers because of failure on the part of partner organisations to think long-term or willingness to engage in more than one, discrete, project. Planning collaborative, long term projects with existing connections, and sharing resources and learning, may help to increase the sustainability of new initiatives.

Appendix: Presentations

TEPoP hosted two speakers, both with expertise in community building and engagement, each with their own perspectives on and experiences of engaging with monitoring schemes.

Sustainably Muslim

Nazia Sultana is the Founder and Director of [Sustainably Muslim](#), and Founder of Two Billion Strong, two projects focused on increasing Muslim engagement with sustainability and environmental projects. Nazia spoke about many aspects of her work and how and why Muslim communities may want to engage in citizen science, including:

- The ways in which sustainability and environmental protection are emphasised through the Qur'an and the life of The Prophet Muhammed, highlighting a key lens through which Muslim communities may come to understand the importance of environmental work, as well as a strong motivating factor for Muslims to engage with various sustainability and environmental projects.
- How Sustainably Muslim provides different routes to engagement for Muslim communities, including: volunteering opportunities such as running a community garden; working with mosques to design environmentally conscious garden spaces with strong reflections to the Qur'an and the Muslim faith; and the hosting of events such as guided walks and nature-learning days for families.
- [Two Billion Strong](#), and the ways in which different methods of communication can reach a wider audience and bring more people into environmental projects. Individuals can become more confident and engaged over time, tracking the journey of one volunteer who started helping in a community garden and is now leading nature walks for Sustainably Muslim – showcasing the path from volunteer to community leader.
- The ways in which organisations in the TEPoP partnership can engage with more Muslims, including through establishing long-term partnerships with Muslim-led organisations; supporting community led projects; highlighting role models from underserved communities; and making conservation accessible by providing a variety of paths to entry.

Tiny Forests

Claire Narraway, Research Lead at Earthwatch Europe and Co-ordinator of the Nature in Cities team, gave a talk about [Tiny Forests](#), how Earthwatch have worked to engage with different communities, and the necessity of this work on a UK-wide scale:

Earthwatch asks 'who gets to be green?', a question which highlights the inequality of access to green space amongst the most underserved communities, as well citizen scientists often being people who have more time and access to resources.

The Tiny Forest project aims to provide nature-based solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss, and urban soil health in accessible ways that help people connect to nature. Over 300 Tiny Forests have been grown across the UK, with 48,000 people from a variety of communities engaged in planting, maintenance, and monitoring. An in-person approach is important, including community listening, training, and engagement through local interest groups and festivals. Online spaces play a key role in accessible engagement to the project, and a combination of in person and online approaches is needed to be as accessible as possible. Tiny Forests has managed to engage more diverse communities at

'Discovery Days' than 'is recorded in the literature as participating in citizen science activities'.