

Eliciting Payments for Ecosystem Services via Visitor Giving

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Visitor Giving is the process of inviting voluntary donations from visitors who feel inspired to put something back into looking after the places they love.



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Research shows Visitor Giving is most successful when visitors can contribute towards specific projects that deliver tangible, measurable benefits to society.

This closely matches the criteria that PES schemes must meet.

- So what is the potential for Visitor Giving schemes to elicit new funding for environmental projects via PES?
- What are the evidence gaps?
- What might be some of the benefits, pitfalls and limitations, and how may these be overcome?



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What did we do?

- Literature review and catalogue of Visitor Giving schemes (VGS) across the UK
 - Typical design and operation of VGS
 - Likely barriers and opportunities for PES
- Interviews with as many of the schemes identified in the UK as possible
- Supplemented with a small survey of visitors and businesses in the Lake District National Park

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Why link visitor giving to environmental benefits?

Examples of potential benefits of linking VGS donations to provision of ecosystem services:

- Payments linked tightly to the delivery of specific, measurable outcomes, which research suggests is likely to increase donations
- Opportunities to raise awareness among visitors and businesses about conservation issues, and societal benefits of projects they support
- Helps avoid perceptions that Visitor Giving is a “stealth” or “bed tax”

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Example limitations:

- Visitors may be more motivated to pay for tangible ecosystem services (e.g. providing habitat for wildlife), than less tangible services (e.g. planting wildflowers to support pollination services)
- Only suitable for a narrow range of projects that clearly deliver measurable ecosystem services (e.g. hard to pay for red squirrel conservation)
- Not suitable for all existing payment mechanisms (e.g. collection boxes)



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How do you link VGS donations to ecosystem service benefits?

Most payment mechanisms can be adapted to support PES

Most promising mechanisms are able to target the people who are most likely to benefit from specific ecosystem services and make direct links between payments and the delivery of ecosystem services:

- Business sponsorship
- Fundraising campaigns that target specific visitor groups and ecosystem services
- Supplemented with ongoing payments via smart phone apps (from typically younger, more affluent visitors)

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How do you link VGS donations to ecosystem service benefits?

Use of Smart Phone Apps as payment mechanisms

Advantages:

- Offer the potential to supplement Visitor Giving Schemes with ongoing income
- Associated with relatively low administrative costs
- Offer opportunity for visitors to learn more about the projects they support as they travel through the landscape

Disadvantages:

- Likely to only appeal to a particular demographic
- Can be expensive to design and market

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Good practice in designing Visitor Giving for ecosystem services

- Target requests for donations clearly towards specific projects with identifiable and measurable outcomes
- Target projects towards specific visitor profiles, making it clear to visitors exactly how their investment will benefit projects of particular relevance to their interests
- Where possible, offer a range of different payment mechanisms to suit the needs of different types of visitor
- Make payment quick and easy
- Marketing VGS effectively is essential to their success.
- Prioritise local projects and seek funding from visitors only when they visit the area local to the project

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- To elicit repeat donations from regular visitors, it may be beneficial to rotate the projects a business supports within a VGS
- Use positive language e.g. visitor giving, visitor gifting and investment
- Keep running costs to a minimum
- Provide immediate feedback on the effects an individual donation will make, and demonstrate the benefits of donations from previous visitors
- Prioritise "feel good" projects for funding
- Provide opportunities to donate immediately on-site, rather than later
- Decouple from Governmental organisations (e.g. local authorities) and channel payments via independent charities, trusts, partnerships or other not-for-profit organisations (e.g. Community Interest Companies)

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Next steps:

- Monitoring of usage statistics of mobile apps over the next year
- Visitor Giving Learning Network
 - Generic helpsheets on Visitor Giving hosted by Visit England website
 - Guide for mobile developers on integrating PES payment functions
 - Linking PES and VG helpsheets

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