



A FOCUS ON NATURE CAREERS HUB

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

© Emily Burton

NICOLA LYNES – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICER,
SUPPORT STAFFORDSHIRE



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is your role, and how long have you been doing it?

My role is Community Engagement Officer, and I've been in the post for two years. It's a fixed term, project-funded role of four years in total.

I work on a landscape partnership scheme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and led by the local Wildlife Trust. The scheme is made up of 18 different partners working to complete 16 different projects within the five-year scheme. My employer is Support Staffordshire, which is part of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector rather than the conservation sector. I have a unique role in the organisation, merging the traditional work of Support Staffordshire - which is providing support and guidance for community and voluntary groups - but also leading projects for the scheme which have more of an environmental focus, such as recruiting and managing volunteers in a wildlife recording scheme, running school sessions based on wildlife recording and organising and running BioBlitzes.

What are your main responsibilities?

I am responsible for the successful delivery of the three projects that I am the lead staff member for. These are: delivery of a community grants project (giving out funds to other community groups), delivery of the wildlife recording project, and delivery of an oral history project. These each have specific targets to reach and a separate budget to manage.

Who are the main people you have to work with?

Partners within the scheme - mainly the local Wildlife Trusts who employ the rest of the team, but also other organisations who are delivering projects to ensure we are working together efficiently.

I also have a lot of contact with smaller community groups and local volunteers in the area to provide support for their work where it crosses over with our work, or signposting and providing volunteer opportunities.

What does your day-to-day look like?

This can be very varied! In any given week, I could have days where I am running school activities in school grounds, organising and running walks with my wildlife recording group, giving presentations (in person or over zoom), attending community events, meeting community groups, writing progress reports, scheduling social media, managing recruitment of volunteers for the scheme, managing admin for the community grants scheme (so checking paperwork, ensuring budgets and invoices are correct, arranging for payment), arranging training courses or managing finances and budget (arranging purchase orders and invoices etc).



Nicola presenting project ideas to a local community group

What was your pathway into your role?

I worked on a previous landscape partnership scheme in the area, employed by the local Wildlife Trust. This Trust now leads the scheme I currently work on, and the timing worked very well for me to be able to finish my contract on one scheme and interview for the next.

My background is a mix of conservation, countryside ranger volunteer roles, environmental education in the UK and abroad, youth engagement with the Wildlife Trust and plenty of volunteering experience in working with groups of volunteers and young people. I draw on elements of all of these in my current role.

What is the salary range for this type of role?

£22,000-£25,000 (outside London).

Is a degree essential to your role?

Job descriptions for these roles tend to ask for a 'relevant degree', however proven experience is just as important, if not more so. If in doubt, I would contact the employer to discuss this.

What are the most useful skills to have for this role?

A knowledge of volunteering, through personal experience or working with volunteers in other roles. The ability to talk to a very wide range of people, from local residents who are passionate about their local area, to community groups, charities, local authorities and businesses. You need to be flexible and adapt to changes and the local needs of the community (or pandemics). Be good at seeking opportunities for partnership and cross-organisational working. A knowledge of wildlife/conservation issues is useful, but I also work with a wide range of people with a huge knowledge base, so if I don't know something there is always someone to ask.

CAREER PATHWAYS

What GCSEs could someone study to help get into this career?

Follow what you enjoy doing. Geography is always a good subject, as it can lead to a lot of different pathways.

What A-Levels or BTECs could someone study to help get into this career?

Again, do what you enjoy. The career will follow from this (but if I had to pick a subject, again geography is useful). I struggled through Maths for two years, and don't use any of the advanced maths I learnt at A-Level now (however, this was useful for getting my offer for university).

What could someone do after they leave school to help develop their skills for this career?

Pick a course that sounds interesting and inspires you! If you're interested in what you study, you will find opportunities in that (for reference, I studied environmental science, as it was broad and I was able to study a wide range of modules which kept my options open).

If you can volunteer while at university, this will really help when looking for work later on. Try a few different opportunities and see what inspires you. Many jobs in conservation are fixed term or part time, and you may have to find other part time work to fit around this. I spent many years in hospitality and working evenings to supplement my income while I worked short term/part time/voluntary placements, and learnt a huge amount of transferable skills, customer service and time management. These jobs are not 'wasted time' while you find a conservation job, they are helping you build experience in a workplace.

If someone has graduated university, what next steps could they take to develop their skills for this career?

In these roles a post graduate degree is rarely required. If you want to continue with studying, I would always advise taking at least a year between finishing an Undergraduate degree and starting another course. Spend time volunteering, travelling, working, and gaining 'real life' experience outside of the academic world.