

DTAS Member Support Service Evaluation

Findings Report

June 2025



**Development
Trusts Association
Scotland**

A Thriving Community-led Network

Introduction:

From managing community centres to spearheading heritage projects, and constructing affordable housing, development trusts juggle a multitude of roles and responsibilities within their communities. These organisations are often the last resort for the provision of essential services and find themselves grappling with expanding responsibilities without the requisite resources. Within this context the work of support organisations and intermediaries such as the Development Trust Association Scotland become critical.

At DTAS strive to provide our members, and community organisations across the country, with vital support ranging from governance training, access to specialist support such as HR and legal advice, and access to peer-learning networks and opportunities. As representatives of a diverse network of community anchor organisations we actively work to represent the interests of these organisations at the local and national level, advocating for requisite powers and resources to deliver such essential support.

To ensure our support aligns with our members needs and priorities in March 2025 we conducted an evaluation of our member support offering via an online survey. The survey was distributed to our membership, we received a total of 69 responses, an estimated 20% of our membership.

The goal of this report is to analyse the results of the survey and assess how widely used DTAS' member services have been, what services are the most valued, and what direct impact have these services had on our member organisations. Additionally, we highly value input from our members about what is missing from our member support offering and how we can improve, these questions will be covered in this report.

Profile of Respondents:

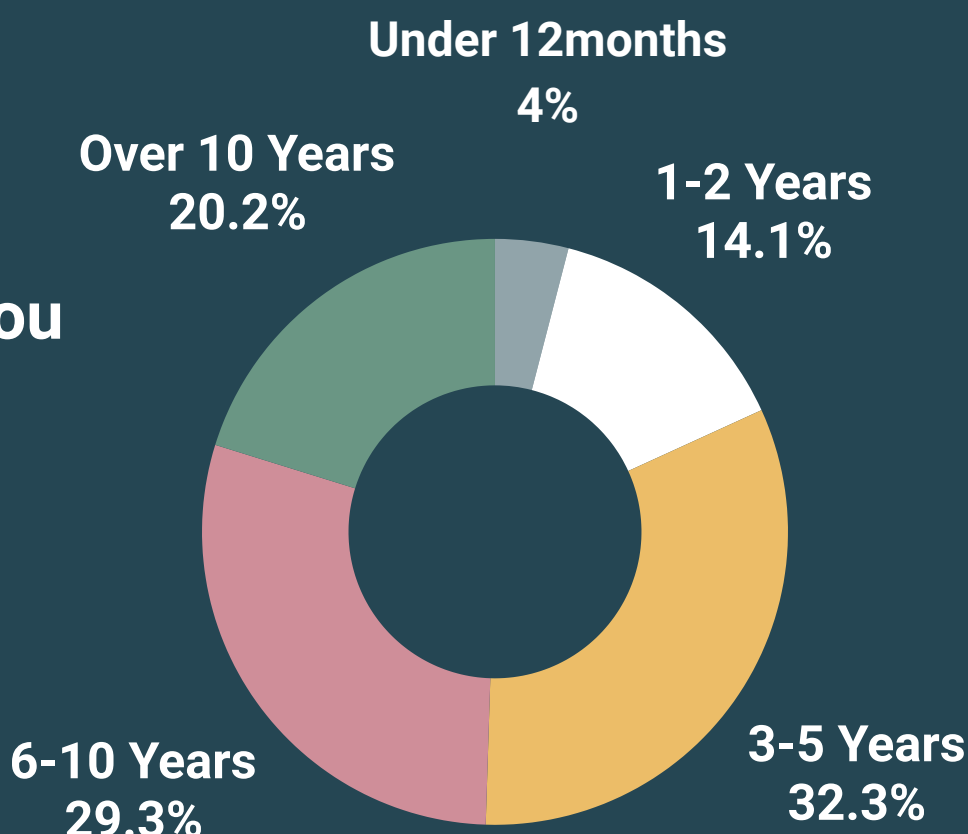
86% Full members

12% Provisional members

3% Unsure of membership status

This split is broadly representative of the makeup of our wider membership, which is split between 78% full members, and 22% provisional members.

How long have you been a DTAS member?



What you value the most:

We were thrilled to receive such a positive response to this evaluation with 100% of respondents stating that they recommended working with DTAS, and 100% stating that being a DTAS member is good value for money. Some of the most mentioned and valued sources of DTAS support include:



Direct 1:1 support from staff:

Survey responses and comments overwhelmingly highlighted the value of the personal support provided by the DTAS staff and wider network. In a sector that can often be personally challenging and rely on part-time and volunteer labour the DTAS network offers much-needed personal support through the one-to-one advice and support provided by our DTAS Development Officers.



Training, resources, and expert knowledge:

The extensive training and resources and knowledge of DTAS staff was mentioned several times. Knowledge on specific projects such as housing, asset transfers and community buy outs, facilities management and governance expertise were consistently mentioned by respondents.



Advocacy and strength of network:

DTAS is also valued for its role in advocating for members and providing a 'strength through numbers' network.



Peer learning:

The peer-learning opportunities provided by the network are also highly valued, especially regional gatherings, debate and discussion events and online drop-in session which connect organisations and employees experiencing similar challenges.



Funding:

DTAS managed funding programmes such as Greenshoots, SCP, and Pockets and Prospects were specifically highlighted as indispensable sources of support for members.

What you asked for:

In addition to the overwhelmingly positive responses there were many useful and constructive suggestions as to how we can improve.

Support, Training and Resource Gaps:

- Some participants noted they would like more regular contact from DTAS staff. Access to direct mentorship and more regular member health checks were also mentioned.
- More targeted support around funding was mentioned several times – specifically how to secure funding, advice writing funding applications, and awareness of opportunities.
- More vocal lobbying and advocacy, and more information for members around policy developments in the sector. For example, through briefings on relevant changes to legislation, best practice, consultations and other relevant information.
- More networking events, participants value the opportunities to meet other DTAS members at the annual conference, regional gatherings, DTAS debates events and drop-in sessions.
- Several participants noted that more structure and topic focus to drop-in sessions would be useful.
- Other specific suggestions for support included: facilitating group procurement initiatives for DTs, access to policy templates and legal advice, a toolkit for community consultation

Communications:

- More regular communication and newsletter was mentioned.
- Specific communication around funding opportunities was also suggested by one respondent.
- These suggestions were caveated by some comments stating that DTAS currently only sends out important messages and should be wary of over-communication and overloading members.
- Finally, one participant also suggested DTAS should be doing more to keep members informed of policy and lobbying work the organisation is undergoing on behalf of members. This final suggestion is in line with findings that indicate members are least aware of the work DTAS does representing the sector on policy steering groups and meetings.

Survey results detailed analysis:

Service Use:

Most respondents, 49%, access DTAS services an average of 3-5 times per year. 19% of respondents access DTAS services over 10 times per year.

Respondents were asked what they value most about being a DTAS member, from the below list of services. These answers were ranked by popularity. An overwhelming number of responses, 62%, listed 'access to advice and 1-1 support with a DTAS development officer' as the most valuable service provided.

Below is the ranking of DTAS services:

Service	Ranking
Access to advice and 1:1 support	1
Access to networking and events	2
Links to other organisations	3
Use of training	4
Referral to professional services e.g. HR	5
Representation and influencing policy	6
Use of resource tools	7
Other (space to comment)	8

Other valued aspects of DTAS support:

Comments for those who responded 'other' indicate the value of the network, notably the moral and emotional support often provided by DTAS staff and the wider network of development trusts.

Comments included:

“Moral support”

“Being connected with people and supported when you are working as a solo member of staff or lead volunteer.”

“As a DTAS member, we value the opportunity to connect with like-minded organizations, share best practices, and gain insights from others who have successfully navigated similar challenges.”

One responded noted the strength that can come from being part of such an expansive network: “the ability to shout about being a member adds gravitas to our activities”.

Funding and access to training and resources were also mentioned in further comments.

Awareness of DTAS support services:

When asked to rank a similar list of DTAS' support services by how aware respondents were of their existence, the results generally mirror the service use ranking, with access to 1:1 advice and support coming strongly at the top.

Service	Ranking
Access to advice and 1:1 support	1
Online training programme	2
Strategy sessions and organisational	3
Board training sessions	4
Learning exchanges / Networking events / Drop-in sessions, Facebook groups and other online support	5
Toolkits, templates and factsheets	6
Business planning and finance support	7
Referral to professional services e.g. HR	8

Respondents were the least aware of DTAS participation in policy engagement forums, our specialised support on crisis and resilience, coaching, and workplace wellbeing, and our referral to professional services. Aside from the policy and advocacy work, this lack of awareness is likely because these specialised services are not typically widely accessed and due to staff and organisational capacity are often only available to a handful of organisations at a time.

Communications:

We are currently reviewing the way we communicate our services and support offering to the wider membership. As part of this we asked respondents to rank platforms used for communications. The most popular platform by far was our email newsletter, followed by the DTAS website which has recently undergone a revision to make it more accessible and useful to members.

Method Of Communication	% of Responses
Email Newsletter	86%
DTAS Website	78%
Facebook	45%
Eventbrite	39%
Annual Review (members map)	19%
Instagram	9%
Bluesky	6%
LinkedIn	4%

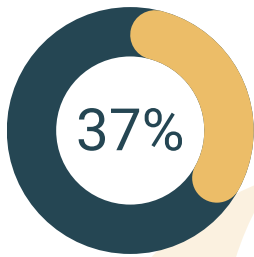
When asked to give further comments about how we communicate important information, news, and events to the membership respondents were widely positive with 65% stating they were satisfied with current methods of communication.

However, there were also useful suggestions; several responses indicated that they would like more regular communication via the DTAS newsletter, while being mindful of overcommunication or overloading members with unnecessary emails.

DTAS Project Support:

DTAS support and services have contributed to a variety of projects and initiatives among our members. From community ownership to strategy development and running an enterprising community business.

Community Ownership:



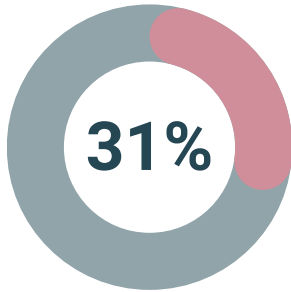
of respondents mentioned receiving extremely useful support from our Community Ownership Support Service to secure a community buy out or community asset transfer.

Testimonials:

“We have completed one CAT successfully with the support of COSS, and we now have 2 further CATS in the pipeline with a 4th lined up for 2026. The confidence the 6 CAT modules gifted the trust has been crucial to our ability to secure community asset transfers within Renfrewshire.”

“We couldn't have bought our community building without the support of our DO at DTAS. They guided us through the journey to community ownership, supported our applications to the Scottish Land Fund and National Lottery and helped us navigate difficult conversations with the council, as well as a shoulder to lean on during stressful times.”

Strategy, Capacity, and Resilience of Organisations:



of comments mentioned the strategic support provided by DTAS specifically around governance, board training sessions, vision and mission toolkits, and more.

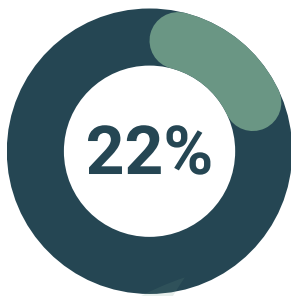
These sessions and resources have allowed organisations to become more resilient and strategic in their approach to community work.

Testimonials:

“I was supported through the transition from a badly run and secretive Trust to a community organisation which now has the confidence, by and large, of the community it serves.”

“DTAS has supported us immensely, helping us to expand and develop our social enterprise activity and address some of our ongoing challenges around capacity, which in turn has allowed us to take a more sustainable approach to our ongoing costs, building and other challenges.”

1-1 Support, Training, Coaching and Wellbeing Support:



of respondents mentioned the value of direct support and one-to-one visits from DTAS development officers, especially when facing a challenging situation or time of crisis.

Testimonials:

“We had a very difficult situation with some former trustees. Our DTAS rep was really supportive, providing templates for policies, helping with letters and referring us to specialist legal assistance. Having that critical friend during a time of crisis was invaluable, providing peace of mind and a way out of the situation.”

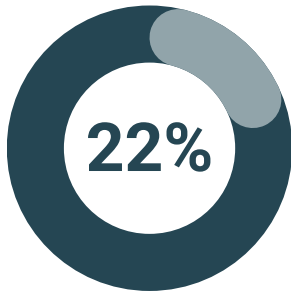
“We have a relatively new board, and DTAS provided a SORT-IT strategy workshop with the trustees. The outcomes were a clear list of actions around governance, project analysis and income generation. The depth of knowledge and the extent of preparation that our DO went to was amazing, we feel they went above and beyond, all the trustees, even the most sceptical, were deeply impressed!”

“We also have received amazing support from the coaching programme...bringing fresh resilience, belief, and self-worth to the Trust leader.”

“I have also personally benefitted from the DTAS coaching service for leaders, which has really helped me develop my confidence as a leader.”

“Keeping us moving forward by good advice when in a crisis. Our DO has been a godsend !!”

Funding and Income Generation Support:



mentioned the value of DTAS support around funding and income generation. Funded programmes specifically for DTAS members such as green shoots received mentions from several respondents. These funds have often allowed organisations to employ staff, contributing to their overall capacity, project delivery and resilience.

Testimonials:

“DTAS has contributed to funding our Project Manager, enabling us to sustain and develop the community projects and events we deliver. This support has allowed us to continue vital initiatives, such as our community café, Pantry, cultural cooking groups, and family-friendly events.”

It has also strengthened our ability to engage with volunteers, expand our growing spaces, and progress with our plans for a community asset transfer. Their contribution has been instrumental in maintaining and growing our services, ensuring we can meet the needs of our community effectively.”

“Employing our first staff member and getting the valuable help of a great person as our DO has made a world of difference to our community.”

“Access to funding has been extremely important to us as we are new and especially revenue funding was crucial.”

Events, Advocacy, and The DTAS Network:



Several respondents noted the value of the network of DTAS member organisations, whether that be for peer-learning opportunities, advocacy, or providing solidarity and strength in numbers.

Testimonials:

“The situation around Strengthening Communities Programme funding last year was very unsettling. DTAS were very supportive and clearly working to resolve the situation, as we saw with Pauline's letter to the Scottish Government. Knowing that we weren't alone, that we had a bigger voice representing us, and connecting with other DTs through the Facebook group, as well as being involved with online meetings about it, was such a help.”

“The advocacy and representation DTAS provides at a national level has helped amplify our voices and ensure community-led organisations are recognised and supported.”

“The DTAS conference field trips have been inspiring and the work that we're doing on our new community garden space has been directly influenced by what we've seen our peers across Scotland doing.”

Other Support:

Other frequently mentioned sources of support that have contributed to building knowledge within DTs, includes access to expert advice through external referrals, training and resources, and access to templates. Specific projects mentioned include:

- Peatland restoration
- Local place plan and community action plan preparation
- Community hub purchase and development
- Affordable housing

Conclusions and Next Steps for DTAS:

The survey results show the importance of DTAS support to our members and that we are focussing on the right areas. One to one support, bringing together members for peer-learning opportunities and providing useful resources are the core of how we support members, so it's reassuring to have it confirmed that members value that approach.

However, the survey also shows that there are areas where we could improve and enhance our service. We've already started that process by undertaking a thorough review of all the guidance, toolkits and templates we currently provide - to identify gaps where new resources would be beneficial as well as existing documents that would benefit from being updated. We will continue updating the members area of the DTAS website, which brings together our guidance, templates and toolkits. We will also look to improve how we signpost to other intermediaries that provide useful services and resources.

Improving our communication with members was another area identified for improvement. The new DTAS website provides an ideal platform for this with its blogs, news pages and publication of our consultation responses and other policy documents. Our quarterly newsletter will also now include regular policy updates from our Chief Exec. Pauline Smith. DTAS has also been working on incorporating Salesforce, which improves our ability to target our communications and get information out quickly and easily.

The upcoming Recovery and Resilience Fund will add another important strand to our service, with grants and support focussed solely on member's needs.