

# Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund



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## Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund

Information and Guidance Notes

Application deadline: Midday, 3 March 2025

THE CARMAN  
FAMILY  
FOUNDATION



INSPIRING SCOTLAND



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# About this fund

The Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund supports community groups in Scotland to develop local ecosystem restoration projects. This document provides guidance for applicants.

The Fund seeks to inspire, encourage, and enable communities to explore and develop ambitious ecosystem restoration projects locally. It also seeks to raise awareness about the importance of local ecosystem restoration and address barriers faced by communities.

## An ecosystem approach to nature restoration

There is an urgent need to restore Scotland's nature – to revive damaged, degraded or destroyed ecosystems. We are living in a climate and biodiversity crisis, with rising temperatures and extreme weather damaging Scotland's ecosystems. [One in nine \(11%\) of Scottish species are threatened with extinction, and we have lost 15% of our wildlife since 1994.](#) This has far-reaching consequences for our landscapes, places, and people.

We need a whole-ecosystem approach to support Scotland's biodiversity. An ecosystem approach looks at the 'whole puzzle' rather than focusing on specific species, recognising that everything in nature is connected in a dynamic, integrated system. For example, plants need quality soil, animals depend on plants, and water sustains all life. People are a part of this system too – and an ecosystem approach balances conservation, sustainable use, and equity.

## Supporting communities to lead local action

We want to create a more sustainable and interconnected world where nature and people thrive. Communities can and should be leaders in this work. By harnessing their knowledge of, and passion for, their local areas community groups can bring more nature and biodiversity back to Scotland's diverse places.

The aim of the Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund is to help communities develop their ideas for ecosystem restoration into a pipeline of deliverable projects. We know that communities are at different stages of this work and that it can be challenging to get support for the early stages of projects.

Grants can be used for the development stages of undertaking ecosystem restoration (the design, planning and preparation for ecosystem restoration). Successful community groups will also receive professional fundraising support from the Fund to move their projects from development stage to delivery.

This Fund is supported by the Carman Family Foundation, the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund, which is managed by NatureScot, and others. Inspiring Scotland administers this funding.



## Key information

- **Community groups can apply for up to £13,500.** Your project should focus on activities which promote whole-ecosystem restoration, recovery, enhancement, or resilience.
- **Projects must be led by their community.** A key aim of the fund is community engagement, participation and learning. Successful applications will address community priorities and reflect the opportunities and challenges in your local environment.
- **Projects should focus on the development and feasibility stages of undertaking ecosystem restoration, rather than physical delivery.** Development and feasibility stages can include activities aimed at developing a project to the point of being ready to deliver, such as project design, research, specialist/technical expertise or surveys, and wider community/partner participation.
- **Successful applicants will receive up to £1,500 in professional fundraising support.** This is to help projects obtain funding for delivery.
- **Projects must be delivered between 1 June 2025 - 31 March 2026.**
- **The deadline for application is 12pm (midday) Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025.** You can apply by completing the online application form.

## Examples of communities leading ecosystem restoration

Some examples of previously funded projects include:

- Lochgoil Community Trust's project to undertake a river restoration study, exploring the initial stages of re-meandering part of the River Goil.
- Huntly Greenspace Collective's project to develop and cost ecosystem restoration activities for their local meadow, including community engagement activities, work with key stakeholders, and recruiting specialist expertise.
- PLUS Perth and Kinross's project to increase the biodiversity of an urban space in city-centre Perth, through collaboration with residents, businesses and other community groups.
- Calton Hill Conservation Trust's project to undertake specialist and citizen-science surveys to inform the development of a new Biodiversity Action Plan.

# Who can apply

To apply for this funding, you must be a not-for-profit community-led organisation based in a specific place in Scotland.

- **Your organisation must be a place-based local community group in Scotland.** The purpose of this Fund is to support local ecosystem restoration. You must be able to clearly define your community, the location and size of the area for restoration.
- **Your organisation must have an income of less than £200,000 in the last year and its own bank account.** This Fund seeks to support grassroots community groups who may find it difficult to access funding for ecosystem restoration. As part of your application, we will ask you to submit a copy of your annual accounts.
- **Your organisation must be a not-for-profit organisation.** This includes SCIOs, CICs, Community Benefit Societies, Cooperatives, and not-for-profit Companies Limited by Guarantee. Unincorporated organisations can apply, but must have a constitution, a bank account registered in the name of your organisation and require two signatories for withdrawals.

Private individuals and for-profit companies, public bodies, schools, academic institutes, and charities or other not-for-profit organisations operating at a national or international scale (NGOs) are not eligible for this fund. They may participate in partnership projects where the lead applicant meets the other fund eligibility criteria.

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# The type of projects we fund

To be successful in your application, you must explain how you meet all the following requirements:

## Your project must focus on one (or more) priorities for ecosystem restoration.

These are:

- **Connecting nature corridors:** connecting areas of habitat or patches of greenspaces to support to nature revival and restoration.
- **Habitat and species restoration** (e.g. creating flower-rich grassland). This includes restoration of unused and derelict land, including farmland.
- **Freshwater and wetland restoration** (e.g. pond creation or river restoration).
- **Coastal and marine** initiatives which promote restoration, recovery, enhancement or resilience in Scotland's coasts and seas.
- **Control of invasive non-native species** (INNS) impacting on nature (e.g. early-stage community action to plan removal of isolated invasive plant species).
- **Urban nature:** Enhancing and connecting nature within villages, towns, or cities (e.g. creating pollinator friendly habitat spaces).

## Your project should focus on early-stage development work

This fund seeks to provide communities with the funding they need to be able to develop ecosystem restoration activities to the point where they have a project with an advanced plan or business case, which other funding bodies support.

We are looking to fill what we see as a gap in the funding landscape. For this reason, we will prioritise early-stage work and expect most of the funding to be awarded to proposals aimed at helping projects get up and running.

### Example of development activities

- Developing a delivery plan or business case
- Generating support, participation or partnerships within a community for a proposal
- Undertaking modelling, surveys and feasibility studies.

### Examples of delivery activities

- Installing physical landscape interventions or other construction works.
- Community action days to remove non-native invasive species, undertake planting or other practical activities.

In a small number of cases, we will consider applications where a mix of development activities and delivery activities will take place. However, these projects are only likely to be funded if it is clear why the delivery activities are crucial to the overall development of the work.

## **Your project must support your community to participate in ecosystem restoration**

The Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund seeks to help communities to initiate and lead ecosystem restoration at a local level, engaging and involving local people. In your application, you should explain who has been involved in developing the project and how your community will be involved or benefit from the activities. Successful projects will combine ecosystem restoration with community engagement, participation and leadership, resulting in an increased ability by the community to undertake future ecosystem restoration.

## **You must have the permissions needed to carry out your activities**

It's likely that your project will relate to a specific place or piece of land. As part of your application, we will ask you to confirm that you own the land or have sufficient permission from the landowner, to carry out your proposed activities. You can apply for the costs of seeking planning permission or other costs associated with gaining relevant permissions as part of your grant.

## **You must have a plan for evaluating if your project has been successful**

As part of your application, we'll ask you to clearly explain how you'll evaluate your project's impact on biodiversity and the local community. You should consider the evaluation methods, the information you'll gather, and the frequency of data collection. As part of your application, we'll ask you for up to five pictures of the proposed project location to establish a baseline for your activities.

Funded projects will be expected to share their insights with Inspiring Scotland and external evaluators, contributing learning to future funding programmes for community-led ecosystem restoration projects.

## **You must be able to complete your activities by 31 March 2026.**

We encourage all applicants to plan their projects based on beginning to start activities in June 2025. If you are successful in your application, you will be able to start your activities immediately.

**We have collected [a list of resources](#) from UK-based charities and nature-based organisations to help inspire and inform your application.**

# What you can spend the money on

## How much you can apply for

You can apply for up to £13,500. This is to cover the activities set out in your application. Funded projects will be eligible for an additional £1,500 in fundraising support to progress their work to its next stage.

## Eligible expenditure

You can use funding to pay for:

- **Specialist consultancy and technical expertise:** You may need to recruit experts to engage with communities in the design and implementation of ecosystem restoration proposals.
- **Activities:** This can include ways to enable your community to participate in your ecosystem restoration project, such as training, events and workshops. Your activities should link to the nature focus of your project and be tailored to the needs of the people you want to work with.
- **New staff posts and training placements:** This could also include part of a current employee's role, if they will dedicating a specific amount of time to the project or training for existing staff, to support the aims of the project. You may want to increase staff time or recruit additional people to support your evaluation or communications activities.
- **Core costs:** Up to 20% of the funding can be used to cover the management costs and organisational overheads required to support your ecosystem restoration project work, such as day-to-day running costs, insurance, or routine accommodation.

As this is project funding, the expectation is that most applications will be for revenue expenditure: the day-to-day operational costs that come from doing your activities. Requests for small amounts of capital funding to purchase or upgrade physical items essential to delivery of the project will be considered.

## Additional grant funding for fundraising activities

We know that applying for funding can be a lot of work, especially for community groups. The Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund wants to help these groups by providing access to expertise in fundraising for the onward funding of their ecosystem restoration projects. If your application is successful, you'll receive extra support (up to the value of £1,500) from professional fundraisers to help you obtain funding to progress your project.



## What we will not fund

- **Projects which do not have a clear ecosystem restoration benefit.** The Fund seeks to increase high-quality, ambitious nature restoration that takes a whole-ecosystem approach. We will not fund projects that focus exclusively on conservation activities, maintenance, community gardening or which cannot demonstrate how activities will actively promote ecosystem restoration, recovery, enhancement, or resilience (e.g. beach cleans, litter picking).
- **Projects which have already secured significant funding towards their ecosystem restoration activities.** This Fund seeks to support small scale, new or early-stage community-led projects, and is not intended to act as 'top-up' funding for larger projects.
- **Projects which are part of large-scale or regional initiatives.** We are unlikely to fund applications which are part of established regional initiatives or partnerships which have already attracted significant investment.
- **Projects already funded by the Nature Restoration Fund.** Your project must not be funded by the Nature Restoration Fund during the same delivery period as your Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund grant. You can have received Nature Restoration Fund funding in the past.



# How to apply

You can apply by completing our online application form. We will ask you a set of questions relating to your planned activity, and you will need to complete a budget template which sets out what you plan to spend the funding on.

## Guidance notes and fund information

Please use these guidance notes to inform your application. You should ensure that your organisation is [eligible to apply](#) and that your [project is the kind of project we fund](#).

## Expression of interest & application form

[Please submit an Expression of Interest through this link.](#)

Completing the Expression of Interest will give you access to:

- A link to the online form, through which you submit your application
- A Microsoft Word copy of the questions, to help you prepare your application
- A copy of the budget template
- A copy of these Fund Information & Guidance Notes

You must answer the application questions in the online application form and upload the required documents. When you have submitted your application, you will receive a confirmation email. Check your spam folder, and please contact us if you have not received this email after applying.

You must submit your completed application by 12pm (midday) on Monday 3 March 2025. We cannot accept applications after this deadline.

## Documents you will need

We will ask you to upload the following documents as part of the online application form:

- Project budget (you will receive a template for this)
- Your organisation's constitution
- A copy of your latest annual accounts
- At least one (up to five) photos of your project site
- *[If you are submitting a partnership application]* A copy of your partnership agreement or MOU.

Incomplete applications won't be considered for funding. If you can't provide these documents for any reason, get in touch with [nature@inspiringscotland.org.uk](mailto:nature@inspiringscotland.org.uk) before the application deadline.

# Additional application notes and guidance

## Preparing your application

**Multiple applications:** We expect there to be lots of demand for this funding, so we recommend only one application per applicant.

**Partnership applications:** We welcome partnership applications. However, we cannot accept applications from one organisation applying on behalf of another. The primary applicant organisation must fulfil all the application requirements, and you need to be clear why the partnership exists and how you will work together to deliver your activities.

**Match funding:** We expect that grants from this Fund will cover 100% of the total project costs but will ask you to tell us about any other funding you have already secured. If your total project cost exceeds the size of the grant you are applying for, we will ask you to explain how you have raised the additional funds.

## Planning your written application

Applications must be submitted online. However, to help you plan your answers, we have prepared a Microsoft Word copy of the application form. Please note that **we can only accept applications submitted through our online application process**. If using the Microsoft Word template to draft your written application, you should copy & paste your answers into the online form to submit your application.

## Submitting your online application

**Read over the entire application form before answering questions:** To save you repeating information, we recommend you read the questions before starting the form. Please gather the additional information and documents you may need to upload prior to starting the online form.

**Maximum word limits:** Please note there are word limits to some questions. These limits are a guide only – you do not need to write the maximum number of words for each question. You will be unable to enter more than the maximum word limit. Keep your answers short and to the point. A clear and concise response that answers the question fully is much better than a long one.

**Formatting:** Please note that the online form does not capture formatting (including bold text and bullet points).

**What information to include:** Please provide as much detail and clarity as possible. Be specific, ensure your application is clear and answers the question we are asking. We strongly recommend you draft and prepare your answers prior to completing the form online, and you may find it helpful to ask someone else to read over your application before you submit it.



# What happens after you apply

## How we will make decisions

We will take the following questions into account when deciding which applications to fund:

- Does the project deliver high-quality whole-ecosystem restoration?
- Does the project support the community to participate in further ecosystem restoration?
- Is it feasible for this community to deliver this project, and have they considered the possible barriers?
- Is the budget clear, realistic, and well thought-through?
- Does the project have scope for future development or investment?

We will seek to fund a diverse range of projects, taking place in different communities and different habitats across Scotland.

## Successful applicants

1. If your application is successful, we will email you. We will let you know when you can publicise the good news.
2. We will ask your organisation to sign a grant agreement and provide us with bank account details and a recent bank statement. We will also ask for details of a finance contact for your organisation who can receive payment remittances and be able to account for how you have spent the funding.
3. Once we receive this information, we will pay your grant in one or two payments, based on the size of your project. You will receive at least 50% of your grant upfront, and the remainder following a progress report.
4. We will ask you at the end of the funding for a final report on how you have spent the money and what difference the funding has made.

## Indicative timelines

Please note that these are indicative at this stage. We will always seek to keep applicants informed about the status of their application and any changes to this timeline.

<b>Fund open for applications</b>	20 January 2025– 3 March 2025
<b>Deadline for applications</b>	<b>12pm (midday) 3 March 2025</b>
<b>Assessment period</b>	March - May 2025
<b>Feedback to applicants</b>	June 2025
<b>Partnership Agreements signed and first grant payment</b>	June 2025
<b>Mid-project report and second grant payment</b>	By 30 September 2025
<b>End of project delivery and final report</b>	By 31 March 2026

# How to get more help and advice

If you have any questions when completing your application, you can email: [nature@inspiringscotland.org.uk](mailto:nature@inspiringscotland.org.uk).

## Free resources for grassroots community groups

We have collected [a list of resources](#) from UK-based charities and nature-based organisations to help inspire and inform your application.

[Rural Community Resources](#) is a free digital resource bank which features a series of short, skills-based films with added templates, resources, and guides to support small community-led organisations. This resource was initially created in 2022 to support Scotland's rural communities and was produced by Inspiring Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government. However, key topics - such as governance, policy, fundraising and evaluation – are applicable to community groups working across all areas in Scotland.

## Accessibility

We want this information and application to be as accessible to as many people as possible. If there are barriers to you accessing this information or the application form, please get in touch:

- by email: [nature@inspiringscotland.org.uk](mailto:nature@inspiringscotland.org.uk)
- by telephone: 0131 442 8760

You can also contact us through an online British Sign Language interpreter using [Contact Scotland BSL](#). You may find the information on the Ability Net website: [mycomputermymway](#) useful in providing help on how to adapt your phone, computer or tablet to meet your needs.



Contact us via an online  
**Sign Language Interpreter**  
**Contact Scotland BSL**

Image: Anton Volnuhin, Unsplash





## About Inspiring Scotland

Since 2008 Inspiring Scotland has been working towards a vision where everyone in Scotland lives a happy and healthy life free from poverty or disadvantage.

We believe Scotland's voluntary sector has a transformative effect on the lives of those living in Scotland who otherwise may struggle to make the best of their lives due to life circumstances, poverty, or other disadvantages. Our aim is to amplify and strengthen the impact of organisations across civic society by helping them build their strength, resilience, and reach.

We partner with entrepreneurs, businesspeople, philanthropists, charitable trusts, Scottish Government, local authorities, and other public bodies to design and implement bold, long-term solutions – drawing on expertise and experience from across disciplines and sectors.

[www.inspiringscotland.org.uk](http://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk)

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