

Thriving in Nature Fund

Guidance document

OCF is delighted to introduce this fund, aimed at enhancing lives through the power of nature. We believe in the transformative power of green spaces. Spending time in nature has numerous health benefits, from reducing stress to boosting confidence and self-esteem. The focus will be on improving health and wellbeing, and nurturing work opportunities, by supporting charitable organisations to unite people with nature.

Our approach

This grants round is transformative for OCF and the groups we support. We will be funding in a different way, having listened to what groups need:

- We will be offering multi-year funding over two or three years.
- We're allocating 10% of the fund to provide smaller grants to less established groups who are keen to grow.
- We're committed to providing a variety of application methods and ensuring the application process remains straightforward.
- Successful groups will be asked to set their own key performance indicators (KPIs) to track the project's/organisation's success. This empowers them to tailor the project to their specific goals and define their own success. It is all about making a difference.
- Successful groups will have the benefit of access to a mentor. This mentor, with their extensive knowledge of the charitable sector, will provide guidance over the period of the grant.

We are eager to learn about the impactful work that groups are undertaking and understand how this funding can empower them to flourish. This could be through supporting staffing or core costs, alleviating pressure points, or enabling groups to focus directly on serving their communities. This funding could also incubate innovative ideas and project development.

Desired outcomes

We are seeking grant proposals which deliver these outcomes:

- Enhancing **mental or physical health and wellbeing** through engaging with nature, green spaces and the rural environment
- Boosting **rural skills, training and job opportunities** through engaging with nature, green spaces and the rural environment
- Expanding **access to nature**, green spaces and the rural environment for underrepresented groups.

Our commitment

We will provide multi-year funding for the most effective initiatives. We are excited to offer full support to applicants throughout the process via drop-in sessions, full guidance, and FAQs to make applying simpler.

We will be looking for multi-year applications over two to three years. We will make:

- one large grant of £75,000 stretching over three years
- 4–6 medium grants of £50–60k
- 4–6 small grants of up to £10k.

Grants will be paid in advance on an annual basis, according to an agreed schedule of milestones, and subject to an annual review of progress.

We value collaborations and may suggest combined efforts for similar activities.

The process

We are launching a two-stage application process. The first stage is an Expression of Interest (EOI) where groups can make an initial enquiry.

Eligible groups will be invited to submit a full application. Applications will be assessed by our OCF grants panel and independent assessors.

Eligibility

Income

Applicant organisations must have an income under £500,000 per year. Applications from a group of organisations with a collective income greater than £500,000 are welcomed, as long as the individual organisations each have incomes under £500,000.

£50,000 of grant funds are ring-fenced for grants of up to £10,000 total for organisations with an income under £50,000 per year.

Organisation type

You must be one of the following:

- Registered Charity
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Unincorporated Club or Association
- Community Benefit Society
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

Applicants must have:

- A decision-making team (trustees or directors) of at least three unrelated individuals
- A signed set of rules or constitution
- A group bank account requiring dual authorisation or two signatories.
- A safeguarding policy and procedures – recommended for all, but essential if you work with children, young people or vulnerable adults
- Up-to-date accounts – signed annual accounts for the financial year ending 31st March 2023, plus management accounts or an income/expenditure document covering the last 12 months, as provided most recently to your trustees/directors or equivalent, i.e. reporting on data up to at least 31 March 2024
- A minimum of one year of operation; if you have been constituted for less than one year but have been active for longer, you will be asked to demonstrate this activity
- Reserves: expected to be a minimum of three months' running costs, and if they are more than 12 months, an explanation will be requested.

If you are a Community Interest Company (CIC), or non-charity* you'll also need to show:

- At least three directors, most of whom are not paid employees
- Salaries and benefits for any paid directors are approved by most non-executive directors, and are fair considering their work and the organisation's finances
- There are no individuals with significant control.

*Successful organisations that are non-charities will be subject to grants being **restricted**, and a specific grant agreement with clear conditions and outcomes will be provided and restrictions required.



Eligible costs

Applications to the Thriving in Nature Fund can request funding in the following categories:

- **Project costs:** these are costs directly associated with the delivery of a project.
- **Core costs:** these are costs that keep your organisation running, such as salaries, rent, utilities, etc.
- **Capital costs:** these are costs related to any physical assets your organisation may need, such as equipment or IT support.

The following costs are not eligible:

- Costs that have already been incurred
- Changes to land/buildings that do not belong to the applicant
- Purchase of buses or other vehicles
- Large-scale construction projects (including fixed structures e.g. playgrounds).

Timeline

Here are the application deadlines, but also dates for a variety of sessions with our Grants Team who will be able to provide guidance on the application process and answer any questions you may have:

- **15th April 2024** - Applications are open to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI).
- **7th May** - In person drop-in session for EOIs. This will be in our central Oxford office.
- **8th May** - Online drop-in session for EOIs. Details to be provided.
- **13th May 2024** - Deadline to submit EOIs. All EOIs are reviewed after the deadline, with the strongest matches to the desired outcomes of the Thriving in Nature Fund being invited to submit a full application.
- **21st May 2024** - Groups will be notified of the outcome of their EOI.
- **29th May** - Online drop-in session for detailed bids. Details to be provided.
- **3rd June** - In person drop-in session for detailed bids. This will be held at a community location to be confirmed.
- **12th June** - In person drop-in session for detailed bids. This will be in our central Oxford office.
- **18th June 2024** - Deadline to submit full application. This stage is only available for those invited to apply following a successful EOI.
- **w/c 22nd July 2024** - Funding decisions will be announced during this week.

Monitoring and evaluation

Successful groups will be asked to set SMART Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track your project's success. This empowers you to tailor the project to your specific goals and define your own success. It's all about you making a difference.

In addition, successful groups will also have the benefit of access to a mentor. This mentor, with their extensive knowledge of the charitable sector, will provide guidance over the period of your grant.

SMART KPIs are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-bound.

