

Thriving in Nature Grant Fund - 2025

Guidance document

Building on the success of our 2024 Thriving in Nature grants round, OCF is pleased to relaunch this fund in 2025, 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

- We will be offering multi-year funding (further details below)
- We are allocating £50k of the fund to provide smaller grants to less established groups who are keen to grow.
- We are 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.
- Successful groups will be supported by the OCF grants team, invited to face-to-face progress catch-ups each year and an online forum to support with monitoring and evaluation methods. OCF will keep monitoring and evaluation minimal but impactful, putting grantees in the driving seat.
- We value collaborations and may suggest combined efforts for similar activities.

We are eager to learn about the work that groups are undertaking and understand how this funding can empower them to flourish. This could be through supporting staffing and core costs, alleviating particular pressure points, or to 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 make:

- At least 4 large grants between £10,001 and £50,000 to be paid over two years. To be eligible for a large grant a group's annual income should be between £50,001 - £500,000.
- At least 5 small grants of up to £10,000 to be paid over one year. To be eligible for a small grant a group's annual income should be under £50,000 per year.

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. This will require completion of a progress report followed by a face-to-face progress meeting with a member of the OCF grants team.

We encourage applicants to consider how their proposed activities can support and protect the local environment. As part of our commitment to sustainability, we will be working with a local ecology expert to review all applications. This will help ensure that projects not only benefit people but also respect and enhance the natural spaces they engage with.

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. Complete the EOI [here](#)

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

Eligibility

Organisations that have been awarded funding from the 2024 Thriving in Nature grants are not eligible to apply for the current funding round.

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

Applicants must have:

- A governing body (trustees or directors) of at least three unrelated individuals
- A governing document (a signed set of rules or constitution)



- A bank account in the organisation's name with at least two unrelated signatories A safeguarding policy and procedures – recommended for all, but essential if you work with children, young people or vulnerable adults
- Successful groups will be asked for up-to-date accounts – signed annual accounts for the financial year ending 31st March 2024, 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 2025
- 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
- Circa 90% of beneficiaries must live in Oxfordshire

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

To be eligible, non-charity social enterprises must provide a plan (in the Detailed Application stage) explaining how the organisation is or aims to be financially resilient with trading as a core part of its income. If we agree that plans are appropriate for the organisation's age and size, we can then consider applications for:

- i. reasonable direct costs of services that address a new or unmet community need or which provide new ways of addressing issues.
- ii. building the organisation's capacity to develop and run such services.
- iii. equipment, land, and buildings in line with our rules on capital grants to non-charities in paragraph 4.6 of our Grants Policy

We have additional due diligence requirements for non-charity social enterprises which we will discuss with groups which progress to the Detailed Application stage. For example, requirements include:

- The organisation has 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

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 IT equipment or premises.

The following requests are not eligible:

- Contributions to general appeals or circulars
- Activities where the primary benefit is the advancement of religion
- Activities where the primary benefit is to enable a public body to conduct its statutory obligations
- Activities where the primary benefit is the advancement of animal welfare
- Activities which have already taken place
- Grant-making or equivalent gifts in kind by other organisations (although we can fund provision of necessary goods for a service e.g. food parcels or activity packs)



- Applications from privately owned and profit-distributing companies or partnerships.
- Costs that have already been incurred
- Changes to land/buildings that do not belong to the applicant
- Large-scale construction projects (including fixed structures e.g. playgrounds).

Please see our [Grants Policy](#) for more information:

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:

- **14th May 2025** - Applications are open to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI).
- **20th May** - Online EOI advice session – 12.00-2pm. 10-minute bookings can be made with our Grants Team by emailing grants@oxfordshire.org
- **2nd June** – EOI stage closes at midday. 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 (Detailed Application).
- **9th June** - Groups will be notified of the outcome of their EOI.
- **9th June** – Groups successful in EOI stage open to submit Detailed Applications. Details to be provided.
- **17th June** - In person drop-in advice session for Detailed Applications. This will be in our central Oxford office. Details will be provided to all groups who are eligible to submit a Detailed Application.
- **7th July** – Detailed Application round closes at midday.
- **w/c 11th August** – Groups receive notification of results.

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

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

In addition, successful applicants will receive ongoing support from the OCF grants team. This includes invitations to annual in-person catch-ups and access to an online forum designed to share learning and strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices.

We aim to keep monitoring and evaluation light-touch but meaningful — empowering grantees to shape how they demonstrate the impact of their work.

