FAQs: Species Survival Fund

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Answers to questions raised at the pre-applicant webinar.

Page last updated: 13 July 2023. See all updates.

Fund criteria and eligibility

1. Is the restoration/creation of anthropogenic habitats such as dry stone walls, church roofs, church meadows, hedgerows, heathlands etc, included in this scheme?

The fund aims to create wildlife-rich habitats at a range of scales, including ecosystem restoration. It is context-dependent, but specific anthropogenic habitats like dry stone walls or church roofs may not meet this aim. The scheme focuses on general habitat restoration, rather than specific work that targets a particular species. Repairs to church roofs or dry walls in isolation are not eligible, however, they could be included as part of a wider package of measures if benefits to multiple species can be demonstrated.

We welcome applications for projects that include meadows and heathlands within the planned habitat creation and restoration works as they can provide important habitats for wildlife. Similarly, we welcome projects containing hedgerows which can provide critical wildlife corridors within a landscape.

2. The T&C's specifically exclude land purchase, but the purpose of the grant is to create additional habitat. Is there a reason land purchase has been excluded? Will this also include costs for leasing land to create habitat?

In the immediate-term, the funding pot of £25million focuses on supporting the creation and/or restoration of habitats where land ownership/management control is already secured. This is expected to deliver benefits more quickly for species abundance by 2030.

3. How do you define landscape-scale? Can projects be geographically distributed but dedicated to one type of habitat?

There are no minimum size requirements for habitat creation/restoration within the fund. Projects can be at a landscape, catchment or local scale. Projects may be geographically dispersed or themed around particular habitats if they contribute to ecological networks. For example, hedgerow creation to enhance connectivity between existing habitats or riparian strips to buffer watercourses, as long as the proposed intervention is appropriate for the location. The boundaries of a county or region are not an issue.

4. Would a project with activities which do not directly target habitat restoration be eligible? For example, removal of Invasive Non-Native Species, or ecological surveying?

A project focused entirely on these activities would be less competitive, but they can be a component of a wider project for restoring habitats.

5. Would funding for engagement activities with schools, universities and education projects be eligible? Likewise, could green infrastructure projects such as cycleways be eligible?

The primary focus of a Species Survival Fund project should be habitat creation and restoration in order to support species abundance. We will also consider projects where they also connect people with nature where appropriate, improving access and engagement with nature and benefiting health and wellbeing.

6. Can this fund be used to help local authorities meet their biodiversity duties?

Local authorities may lead a project, or participate as a partner in a project, and this may be one way of taking action to conserve and enhance biodiversity under the strengthened duty. The actions taken could also then be included in the reports that local authorities are required to publish, with the first of these reports being due by January 2026.

7. Given the complexity of planning nature projects and the timings of this programme, are you expecting projects that are almost 'oven ready'?

We are looking for projects that are fully planned and able to deliver within the funded period. Projects which are less prepared will pose a higher delivery risk, so your grant request should be scaled to reflect this. This ensures that you can deliver what you have promised to do.

8. Would saltmarsh restoration be applicable under the coastal category?

Yes.

9. Would INTERTIDAL seagrass projects be considered? They lie on the intertidal zone (on mudflats, out of the water at low tide) and are very much estuarine habitat?

Yes, the intertidal areas only.

10. Could habitat creation include expanding the distribution of rare plant species that may currently be confined to SSSIs?

Species conservation translocations are out of the scope of this programme. This includes population reinforcement as well as the reintroduction of large mammals or apex predators such as beaver, lynx and white-tailed eagle.

Grant terms

11. Do all capital works need to be identified before the project starts, or can these be identified during the project? We have considerable demand from landowners, but the work isn’t lined up in advance.

This depends on the scale of the capital works being proposed and likely costs. We'd expect large-scale capital works, or works that are likely to go over tender thresholds in value, to be identified before the project starts, as this will impact your project plan and costs. We are looking for projects that are confidently able to deliver within the two-year window, and we need to see clear evidence that plans are appropriately planned with realistic timelines for securing landowner consents, going to tender/ securing contractors, securing statutory permits and consents, and with well-informed costs.

However, if you are talking about lower value interactions such as gap filling hedges, then these do not all need to be concretely identified at the start, so long as we understand what it is you are intending to do and what the impact of that work will be in terms of nature recovery. You might want to consider including a sum for third party grants to cover this. In our guidance, we call this 'community grants'.

12. Can we apply to this fund if we are also applying to The National Lottery Heritage Fund?

You can apply to both the Heritage Fund and the Species Survival Fund if you are working on two independent projects. You cannot apply to both funds for the same project. National Lottery Grants for Heritage cannot be used as partnership funding for the Species Survival Fund. During assessment, we would be checking to ensure there is no double funding or overlap between the two projects; that both can be delivered independently of each other and that you have the capacity to deliver both projects.

13. Do all grants made under this fund have to be considered subsidies? Would this be included, if granted, in an organization's £315,000 Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) total for the "applicable period"? Or is it an exempt activity?

Defra have assessed this funding, deemed it to be a lawful subsidy and have published it as a scheme. As such, grantees will have their applicant and grant details published on the publicly-available Subsidy Database, managed by the Department for Business and Trade.

14. Where a project would be taking place on land owned by a Government Department such as the Environment Agency, could the EA co-sign the Grants Agreement rather than enter into a third-party ownership legal agreement, despite not being able to be a project partner?

This is not possible. To co-sign the grant agreement would make EA a grantee or partner. They should be treated like any other third-party landowner.

15. From what date do you expect projects to be able to start?

Awards will be made in February 2024. You then need to enter the Permission to Start process, which includes obtaining the correct legal signatories to the grant contract and submitting finalised documents such as signed partnership agreements and evidence of land registry or land ownership etc.

16. Will we need to evidence the Heritage Fund's usual outcomes?

No, this is not National Lottery money so these outcomes do not need to be evidenced.

Project costs and sources of partnership funding

17. Can applicants include capital costs for purchasing new vehicle/tractor/machinery and the associated maintenance over the two years?

This can be an eligible cost as long as it directly contributes to the capital works of the project. The programme is not designed to cover general equipment/maintenance costs.

18. Can we apply for funds for extra maintenance work up to five years after project completion?

You can include project costs related to maintenance and ecological monitoring for up to five years after project completion, but the equivalent value also then needs to be covered in your partnership funding. Note that staff costs are not eligible or included in this. We can offer further support and guidance on this for projects that reach the full application stage to explain how this impacts your grant payment percentage.

19. Is there any flexibility with payment schedules to assist small/medium organisation with cash flow?

In certain circumstances, we can be flexible for projects to increase the frequency of payments to ease cashflow issues. Payment will continue to be in arrears as we are not able to pay these projects upfront.

20. Can we include partnership funding from the following organisations?

- Local Authority – **yes**
- The National Lottery Community Fund – **yes**
- Charity reserves – **yes**

21. Can agri-environment schemes be used as partnership funding, as they tend to pay nominal rates rather than full cost?

No, agri-environment schemes cannot be used as partnership funding for a Species Survival Fund project.

22. NERC/BBSRC/HS2 funding currently, can we use overlapping areas of work as partnership funding?

The Species Survival Fund funded elements of a wider project must be supported by new and separate partnership funding. Projects are encouraged to seek partnership funding from public or private sources. Projects that include funding from non-government sources will be prioritised.

23. Can BNG credits be used as partnership funding?

Landowners cannot use funding from Biodiversity Net Gain towards a Species Survival Fund habitat action or enhancement project. Further guidance on combining environmental payments and BNG can be found on the UK Government website.

Habitat creation or restoration projects paid for in full by public funding are not eligible to be sold to developers for meeting mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements or nutrient mitigation. Biodiversity Net Gain and/or nutrient mitigation credits may be sold where they arise from distinct or additional improvements over and above the new baseline habitat condition funded through a public grant. Explore further information on stacking net gain and nutrient mitigation credits with public grants.

Other questions

24. Will there be any future rounds of this fund for projects that are not fully developed and ready to go by the EOI deadline?

We will monitor the success of round one closely before making decisions regarding future funding. We anticipate the fund to be highly competitive, so we do not advise submitting an EOI if you are not yet prepared to do so.

25. Where are we able to find the information regarding the organisations/local authorities developing their priorities for nature?

Responsible authorities for local nature recovery strategies have been published on the UK Government website.

26. How does this fund map to/complement the Natural England Species Recovery Programme. Can we use this grant as partnership funding?

The Species Recovery Programme (SRP) focuses on actions to recover threatened and priority species, in particular the significant number of species within the threatened category that need highly targeted bespoke actions and won't benefit from general habitat measures alone. This is in contrast to the Species Survival Fund, which is largely focused on broader landscape scale, habitat-based actions for nature recovery to support the statutory species abundance target, alongside actions and benefits for more threatened species that occur in these areas and hence require dedicated consideration in formulating project plans (for example, species monitoring or surveys for under-resourced sites).

An SRP grant cannot be used as partnership funding for Species Survival Fund. However, if projects are adjacent, project activities will need to be complementary, and double funding must not take place.

Page updates

- **13 July 2023:** page was created.