Green Recovery Challenge Fund - questions and answers from our webinars for applicants

On 16 and 18 September 2020 we hosted two webinars for applicants to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Below is a digest of the questions asked and the answers provided in those webinars.

Don't forget:

The £40m Green Recovery Challenge Fund is open to environmental charities and partnerships in England with projects that are ready to start and can be completed by March 2022.

Applications for grants from £50,000-£250,000 must be submitted by midday on 2 October 2020. For applications over £250,000 up to £5m, there is a two-step process, with initial expressions of interest required by midday on 24 September 2020.

Read the full criteria and application guidance and apply online.

Fund criteria and eligibility

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Can Community Interest Companies apply?

CICs are not eligible to be sole applicants to this Fund. They may be involved as part of a partnership.

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Are Local Authorities/Parish Councils/Town Councils eligible to apply?

Yes, they can lead a partnership project but the application must include working in partnership with at least one environmental charity. They cannot apply on their own.

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Could a not-for-profit body that is not a charity (eg: Internal Drainage Board) be a lead delivery partner for works without tender given value for money could be proven?

Non-profit-making bodies that are part of a partnership are entitled to receive grant to deliver activities as part of the project, provided that a substantial proportion of the grant goes to environmental charities directly. Bodies that are profit-

making or not part of a partnership are not entitled to receive grant directly. We will require all grantees to follow The Fund's standard rules on procurement.

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Is a charity that has environmental education and awareness as one of its charitable objectives eligible to apply?

Yes, a charity with objectives around environmental education, awareness or access is eligible.

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What does 'ready to deliver' mean? How much flexibility is there with projects which still have an element of design or planning to complete? Do all permits and planning permissions need to be in place?

We recognise that not all permits or licences will necessarily be in place at time of applying and that these will vary from project to project. We will be looking for evidence that applicants have identified what permits or consents are required and that any potential exemptions have been explored. Ideally there will be evidence that applicants have spoken to the consenting organisations. If planning permission is required we would like to see an indication that discussions are well advanced. Priority will be given to projects where permits, consents and licences are already in place.

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Will projects that are entirely focused on the connecting people with nature theme be eligible?

Yes. We will judge all projects according to the outputs they are proposing to deliver against the fund themes – it is not necessary to meet more than one theme.

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Can a project focus on research/strategy/planning, rather than making physical on-the-ground changes?

This fund is not designed for 'pure' research or project development. However, research and development are fundable activity if it includes activity on the ground where people benefit and are engaged actively with nature as a result. This work must be fully deliverable by end March 2022.

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Will how the project addresses COVID-19 recovery be weighted in the assessment criteria?

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund as a whole has been designed to a support the green recovery so no specific weighting will be applied to projects during assessment.

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We don’t think we can be ready to start by December due to local lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions. Does this prevent us from applying?

We recognise that people are working in challenging circumstances presently. COVID-19 restrictions do not prevent you from applying, but we would like to see that your project plan and risk register have considered your local context, with adequate mitigations in place to make the project deliverable by March 2022.

Multiple projects

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Can we apply for multiple sites within one application? If yes, do sites need to be linked thematically or within a defined project area?

Yes, you can apply for one project which is working across geographically dispersed sites, either within a defined project area or due to thematic links.

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Can one organisation make multiple applications on its own? Is it worth making multiple bids?

Yes, one organisation can make more than one application. However, we will consider your capacity and capability to deliver more than one project as part of the assessment. We expect there to be high levels of demand for this fund, so make sure you prioritise those projects which best meet both the fund criteria and your own priorities.

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Can we submit multiple bids including one over £250,000 and also the same projects broken down in to smaller individual projects too?

No, you cannot do this. You must choose which approach you wish to take. There is no greater chance of success within one application band or another – we will judge each project on its own merits. If your smaller projects are linked to achieving wider project outcomes, then an umbrella approach may be advisable, as there is no guarantee multiple bids will all be successful.

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Can projects start part-way through 2021?

We are generally looking for projects that are ready to start soon after approval. However, you won't be penalised for a later start, as long as you can clearly show us why this is necessary and also demonstrate that the project will be fully delivered by end March 2022. We would also expect the grant request to be proportionate to the duration of project delivery.

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How will the Green Recovery Challenge Fund deal with two applications coming in that are from different organisations but are located in the same geographies and covering similar activities?

In this circumstance, we would assess each application on its own merits. It is highly unlikely that two very similar projects in the same area will be funded, so if organisations have identified similar priorities in the same area, it would be preferable for them to work in partnership to achieve the outcomes.

State aid and grant terms

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Does state aid apply to this fund?

Yes it does. Please carefully check the supporting documents needed to ensure you have understood and complied with state aid requirements.

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If we have already met our de minimis state aid limit is it still worth applying?

The de minimis limit only applies to funding that is deemed to be state aid. If you have already relied on EU State Aid de minimis up to the stated limit of 200,000 euros (or 20,000 euros for agriculture) over the previous three years, this does not exclude you from applying for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. We have asked for confirmation of this in your application to help speed up the application process and allow us to ensure that any payments we make ahead of the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 are compliant with existing EU State Aid rules. Further guidance will be available later in the year on rules governing state aid in the UK from 1 January 2021.

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We believe the requirement for landowners to commit to grant terms for 10 years may limit the ability of projects to go forward. Is there any wriggle room?

It is important to ensure our investment is sustained, so this is a standard grant requirement for projects involving third party landowners. It is not possible to vary terms from project to project.

Jobs and apprenticeships

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Do we need to commit to retain new posts/individuals beyond the end of the grant period, or demonstrate how future jobs will be created for trainees?

We do not expect a firm commitment of longevity of jobs. However, one of the supporting assessment criteria is a viable exit strategy in order to assure longevity of the project's results. You can include costs within your project to develop a legacy plan during the grant period, for example, considering links to future nature recovery funds or attracting private sector investment.

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Are there any minimum requirements of job creation/is there a particular ratio of jobs to funding to demonstrate value for money?

Creating and retaining jobs is one of the primary assessment criteria and applications will be assessed on the extent to which the number of jobs created/retained reflects the size and nature of the project. However, we do not have any minimum requirements around job creation, or a specific ratio in mind. We are looking for value for money across the fund criteria as a whole, rather than job creation for its own sake

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Will the fund support the self-employed and will supporting them count as sustaining green jobs?

Yes, we are looking at job support and creation in a broad sense, so include details of how your project will support freelancers and the wider supply chain of contractors and suppliers too.

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What do you need to show about the retention and creation of job numbers? If we are using local suppliers how can we quantify this?

Please specify how many jobs you expect to retain and create within your own organisation. In addition, please provide a reasonable estimate for how many jobs your spend on suppliers might support over the project period.

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Can apprentices be recruited after an award is granted?

You can recruit after grant award but you will need to show us how you plan to get the project underway quickly. You will need to build in recruitment timescales to ensure completion by end March 2022.

Costs and match funding

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Can we use other projects to act as match including from The National Lottery Heritage Fund?

We would not expect to see projects already funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and in delivery being used as match funding to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Projects should not have already started at time of grant award, and should be discrete.

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Can we use the fund to work alongside other funding streams like Agri-environment funds? Can other Defra funds/Countryside Stewardship/Agri-Environment funds be used as match?

You can work alongside other projects that are funded by others, but the Green Recovery Challenge Fund project needs to be a discrete project. You may wish to use other sources of funding as match, including other Defra funds, if it

helps you increase the delivery of more outcomes, but these should be additional. If Agri-environment funding is to be used alongside then it needs to be transparent how the Green Recovery Challenge Fund project is different from what is already being funded, and you need to be mindful of specific match funding requirements for the relevant Agri-environment scheme. In our assessment we will be looking for overall value for money for public funds.

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Can you clarify what AONBs/NPAs/etc can claim? Do 'activity costs' include capital costs/costs of delivery in this fund?

The fund is principally targeted at supporting environmental charities impacted by COVID-19, so we expect a substantial part of any grants awarded to go towards supporting them. However if an AONB, National Park or local authority wish to undertake activity or works themselves, we can fund that, but you need to explain why you are best placed to undertake that work rather than an environmental charity. We would also expect an AONB/NPA to demonstrate how the project to be funded is additional to your day-to-day work.

Note, we have updated the online guidance to make the inclusion of delivery costs clearer.

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Who can claim Full Cost Recovery (FCR) and is it available to non-charity partners?

FCR is only available to charity partners – both environmental charities, and other charities. Non-charity partners like AONBs or NPAs are only able to claim for specific costs as outlined in the guidance.

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Is there a specific way to calculate Full Cost Recovery?

We recognise different organisations use different methods for calculating FCR, and for this fund we are not being prescriptive as to how you present this. Please ensure your rationale is made clear in your supporting documents. We will consider the value for money of FCR overall.

If you are calculating FCR for the first time, you might find the guidance and template supplied by The National Lottery Community Fund a useful starting point.

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Can the lead charity's staff time be used as secured match funding? If so, is this restricted to staff who are directly contributing to the delivery of the project, or can we also include wider support staff?

Partnership income can be made up of cash funding and non-cash contributions. We define non-cash contributions to be items or services that you receive without charge that you would otherwise have had to pay for – for example, a donation of materials or the use of a room. Staff time does not count as a non-cash contribution for this fund. Please note that the fund can cover 100% of costs, although we encourage you to include partnership funding if it helps you to deliver better value for money against the fund's outcomes.

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Can Government agencies such as Natural England or Forestry Commission be listed as part of partnerships? Can any spend by them (capital work or staff time) count as match?

No, partnerships cannot include central government bodies like Natural England as they are also partners to the fund and it could present a conflict of interest. They cannot provide match funding. We do recognise that in developing bids applicants will wish to work closely with Natural England and other agencies as appropriate.

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Do applicants need to evidence a competitive process of sourcing third party quotes for included costs?

You do not need to provide this evidence at the point of application. If you are awarded a grant, yes, we will expect to see evidence that procurement has followed best practice and follows our guidelines.

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At what point is tree planting, wildflower planting, re-naturing on multiple small sites considered 'capital works'?

'Capital works' include the costs of all materials, such as trees, stakes, equipment, etc.

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Can the costs associated with applying for licenses, consents or planning applications be included in the project costs?

Yes they can.

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Our project focuses primarily on tree planting. We would also like to deliver specialist advice to site managers to create plans for nature recovery. Is this specialist advice eligible if it doesn't deliver on-the-ground changes by March 2022?

We want to see how you intend to sustain and potentially extend the benefits from your project – and you will be expected to develop a more detailed 'legacy' plan during your project. We will consider funding ancillary costs that you can demonstrate will help to deliver your project legacy, although these should not be the main focus of your project or a major focus of your costs.

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Can we ask for funding up-front to maintain sites beyond the end March 2022?

No, you cannot ask for funds for works beyond the end of March 2022. We will be asking all projects to set out how any capital works will be maintained after the project ends and will ask projects to complete a simple maintenance schedule.

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Does the evaluation report need to be sent by 31 March 2022, or the main project spend end by 31 March 2022, and the evaluation report sent after that date?

The project needs to be fully complete, including evaluation and all financial reporting, by 31 March 2022.

Funding Decisions

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Who is making the funding decisions?

Funding decisions are made by National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) Trustees following the recommendations of a panel consisting of senior staff from Defra, Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

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To gauge competition levels, can you tell us if the £40m budget has been allocated to the two different grant size bands?

No, the budget has not been pre-allocated between the two grant bands.

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Are there notional funding allocations for each of the regions of England? Will the fund be distributed fairly across the regions?

No, there are no notional allocations, but geographical spread will be considered.

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If we are awarded a Green Recovery Challenge Fund grant will that affect or diminish our chances of securing funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund in future?

No it won't. They are entirely different and separate funds.

Heritage Fund portal and application forms

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Who do I contact if I require assistance with the application portal?

Please contact our Customer Services Team on 020 7591 6044 or by emailing service.desk@heritagefund.org.uk

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How do I access the application portal?

The application portal can be accessed through our website homepage and selecting 'login/register' (top right corner), 'application portal' and 'our application portal'. New users will need to register their email address before completing an application form or Expression of Interest. Select 'register as a new user' when asked to enter username and password.

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I am an existing user on the application portal and linked to an organisation which is not associated with my application. What do I need to do?

The application portal only allows one particular email address to be linked to one organisation. Applicants can register an alternative email address on the system and link to the new organisation. Alternately, we can move your email address across to the new organisation. However, you will lose access to information relating to the other organisation. Please email this request to service.desk@heritagefund.org.uk

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I am trying to register my email address and received an error message saying 'the transaction has not been disposed'. What does this mean?

Full error message: ‘The transaction associated with the current connection has completed but has not been disposed. The transaction must be disposed before the connection can be used to execute SQL statements’.

This error message indicates your email address has already been registered on our application portal. If you have forgotten your password, select ‘forgotten password’ when asked to sign into the system.

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Our project involves working in multiple locations - how do we show this on the application form when just one postcode is requested?

Please use your organisation’s main address postcode, and then make sure you describe the multiple locations more fully in the section on the heritage.



Photo credit: Eleanor Church



ugh lockdown



Photo credit: Keeping it Wild

Government’s £40million Green Recovery Challenge Fund opens for applications

Green Recovery Challenge Fund round 1