FAQs: Nature Networks Fund (round two)

See all updates

Answers to questions raised by attendees of our pre-application advice webinar and workshop.

Page last updated: 9 November 2022. See all updates.

Eligibility criteria

Can our organisation apply for two projects at once, and will doing so affect our chances of success for each project?

You can submit more than one application. We will consider your capacity to deliver as part of the assessment. Please be aware that this is a competitive process, so we recommend that you focus on the main priority for your organisation as you could end up competing with yourself.

Priorities

The scheme is stated as being for activities on the protected site network or surrounding areas. What is your definition of ‘surrounding areas’? Is Nature Networks (round two) only related to protected sites?

Nature Networks' aim is to improve the condition and connectivity of the protected site network, but we recognise that ecosystems/species can be spread across wider areas. Therefore, these grants are designed to take a flexible approach to ecosystems/species.

A resilient ecological network is one where habitats and species are managed at a landscape-scale so that they have enough space to thrive and form multiple connections. ‘Surrounding areas’ could include landscape corridors, buffer zones or stepping zones which connect to, and form connections between, protected sites. The improved condition or management of these surrounding areas will benefit the resilience of the wider network.

You need to make the case for how the protected site network will ultimately benefit in your application. You may also find it useful to refer to National Resource Wales' Practitioners’ guide to Resilient Ecological Networks and maps of habitat networks which can help identify appropriate locations for actions.

Is there a fixed allocation of funding per area, or is it based on the quality of application?

There is no fixed allocation per area. If we receive more good quality applications than we can fund we will consider the balance of applications across geography.

Is a smaller application more likely to be awarded?

Details of how we will assess projects can be found within the Nature Networks Fund (round two) application guidance page. We are seeking a range of grant sizes, so a smaller application will be judged on its own merits.

Can you apply to restore peatland that one day could be entered into the peatland code, and carbon credits sold to pay for future maintenance?

Nature Networks could fund costs relating to Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) style scheme validation. Validation for carbon credit schemes such as the peatland code are required in advance of restoration. Applicants should therefore check that proposals align with the peatland code as only certain types of peatland restoration are eligible. Please contact NPAP@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk in advance of your application for further advice and to make sure that best practice is followed.

Would connections with other designated sites be acceptable, for example Wildlife Sites/Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)?

The priority of this fund is enhancing the protected sites network. You would need to make the case for other connections but they could be included as part of a wider project.

Does the Nature Networks fund cover geologically designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)?

Geologically designated SSSIs would be fine as they will likely have associated natural features or habitats. Your project should focus on the natural heritage.

In the marine environment, how do you define ‘communities’ to engage with?

There are some practical challenges to marine-based projects, but we are keen to see action that improves the marine area but also engages communities. It depends on the nature of your project. There are many under-served communities along the coast who almost never have access to their marine environment. Engagement doesn’t have to happen in-situ or on-site.

Can the project be used to develop relationships with new sites, or do relationships with sites have to be in place already?

It depends what you would like to do with those partnerships and whether there are costs associated with this. If it is part of a resilience aspect to your project, then you should have sufficient time to develop these relationships. If you expect to perform capital works on these sites, we need an agreement in place in advance so you may not have time to deliver these elements. We will consider this risk when assessing your project.

The guidance states that we cannot apply for a grant to cover work which falls within our statutory obligations. How do we make sure that our project is eligible and doesn’t constitute our existing statutory responsibilities under Section 6?

Section 6 does not prevent Local Authorities and other public bodies from applying for funding to support those duties. We have included this clause in our guidance to make sure applicants do not apply for double-funding for work they are

already required to undertake. As long as your application is for additional project activity, then it should be eligible in relation to this clause.

Eligible costs

Can you clarify how much of a grant can be for revenue costs?

Unlike round one, there is no specified split for capital and revenue costs for Nature Networks Fund (round two). Please apply for the costs that your project needs.

Capital delivery for marine protected sites is extremely difficult and what is needed is revenue to influence pressures on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Can funds be used for this?

Grants are available for direct activity and engagement on sites. You cannot use funds for lobbying activity.

Can projects be entirely revenue, for example running activities, training and citizen science? Or do they also need to involve physical improvements to sites?

Projects can be entirely revenue/activity based. The work should result in direct improvements to the protected site network, and your application must make the case for how this will be achieved through the activities.

Can funds be applied to existing staff roles as well as for backfilling roles?

Yes, existing staff roles can be supported via Full Cost Recovery.

Are farmers able to be paid directly for works on their farm?

Farmers are eligible to apply for this funding. If you are the lead applicant you would be paid directly. If you are working in partnership with another organisation which is the lead applicant, you would need to invoice the lead applicant. Further details on how grants are paid can be found in the Receiving a grant guidance on the Nature Networks Fund (round two).

Can the funding be used to purchase vehicles under the 'Equipment' heading, where this would facilitate joined-up work between sites?

Yes, this is an eligible cost. We urge you to consider sustainability, value for money and what will be most cost efficient for your organisation.

How much leeway is there between the costs laid out in an Expression of Interest versus the costs when actually delivering? A lot of costs have to be estimated at this stage.

A ball-park figure is fine. We understand that your costs are estimated at this stage so we look at the sum of the figures submitted. We would only be concerned if the figures changed significantly.

During delivery, we allow a bit of leniency from your application costs, but we tend not to let activity costs be moved to capital costs, or vice versa. This is a conversation to be had with your Investment Manager during your project delivery.

In these uncertain times, how should we account for inflation in future years of our project budget?

The wide variety of projects that we will be funding through the Nature Networks Fund means that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to factoring in inflation. Your budget should include a best estimate of costs including inflation. There is guidance on how to calculate inflation, including forecast models, available on the internet.

Preparing your application

Is there any requirement for equal spend amongst the years of the projects?

This is not a requirement. We do request a cash flow document before your project starts to understand your grant payment requests across the project.

Are accounts mandatory for everyone?

No, accounts are not required for all applicants – for example, local authorities. If you do not normally produce audited accounts we can accept accounts verified (signed and dated) by a financial signatory at your organisation. If you do not have these, please provide bank statements covering the last three months.

If a project is likely to receive match-funding but hasn't yet, how early should they apply for this other funding?

In general, we would expect a project to have their match-funding in place by the time they start to deliver their project. If your match-funding is not in place, your organisation will be expected to underwrite it.

What kinds of agreements do you need in place to work on land we don't own?

Landowner agreements can take several different forms. As a minimum, you need an agreement with each landowner that signs them up to the terms of the grant and the grant duration, with clear roles and responsibilities, what area will be covered, and other stipulations according to our terms of grant.

If you are working in a partnership, both parties would need to bring something to the table and work collaboratively. Your partnership agreement should reflect this. Alternatively, if you are merely working on another organisation's land, the landowner just needs to agree for you to conduct work on their land.

These agreements don't need to be in place at the point of submitting an application, but we will factor this risk into the assessment of your application. Please consider the delays getting these agreements in place may cause.

Who do I contact from the Heritage Fund if I have any questions?

Please email: natur@heritagefund.org.uk. A colleague will answer your question as soon as possible.

Nature Networks Programme

If we had Nature Networks (round one) funding, are we less likely to get funding for round two?

Receiving a grant in round one does not mean you are ineligible to apply for round two. If we receive more good quality applications than we can fund, we will be looking to fund projects that represent a geographical spread across Wales, and this will include consideration of round one sites.

Can you clarify the overall budget?

The budget for Nature Networks (round two) is £9.6million.

Are other funding programmes still available for environmental projects in Wales or is the Nature Networks Fund the only path? Can bids for this fund be linked to other National Lottery Heritage Fund projects?

National Lottery funding is still available for environmental projects in Wales. Nature Networks Fund projects cannot be used as match-funding for other applications/projects.

Page updates

- **9 November 2022:** a new FAQ about how you should account for inflation was added under ‘Eligible costs’.