

National River Walks Competitive Grant: Invitation to Apply Guidance for Applicants

Grant Scheme: C34447

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SECTION A: PARTICULARS AND CONDITIONS OF APPLICATION

Glossary

Unless the context otherwise requires, the following words and expressions used within this Invitation to Apply shall have the following meanings (to be interpreted in the singular or plural as the context requires):

| TERM | MEANING |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “Agreement” | means the agreement (set out in Annex A and Annex B) to be entered into by the Authority and the Applicant if its Application is successful. |
| “Applicant(s)” or “you” or “your” | means the organisation(s) who submits a completed application in accordance with this Invitation to Apply (ITA). |
| “Application” | means an Applicant’s formal proposal in response to this Invitation to Apply (ITA). |
| “Application Process” | means the process by which Applicants apply for a National River Walks Programme grant and responses to the qualification questions and the technical questions. |
| “Authority” or “We” | means DEFRA acting as part of the Crown |
| “Atamis” | means the e-system used by the Authority for awarding grant funding agreements to successful applicants https://defra-family.force.com/s/Welcome |
| “Code of Conduct for Recipients of Government General Grants” | means the code of conduct all government grant applicants and recipients are required to follow. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771152/2019-01-15_Code_of_Conduct_for_Grant_Recipients_v.1.01.pdf |
| “Conditions of Application” | means the terms and conditions set out in this Invitation to Apply (ITA) relating to the submission of an Application. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “Conflict of Interest” | means an actual or potential conflict of interest on the part of the Applicant in connection with the Invitation to Apply (ITA) or the Agreement. |
| “Double funding” | means funding provided by a third party to the Grant Applicant, which is for the same purpose for which the Grant Application is made but has not been declared to the Authority. |
| “EIR” | means the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (as amended) together with any guidance and/or codes of practice issued by the Information Commissioner or relevant government department in relation to those Regulations. |
| “Find a Grant” | means the application platform used by the Authority for conducting this Application Process, which can be found at https://www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/ |
| “FOIA” | means the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended) and any subordinate legislation made under such Act from time to time together with any guidance and/or codes of practice issued by the Information Commissioner or relevant government department in relation to that legislation. |
| “Grant Recipient” | means a successful Applicant who subsequently receives funding from this scheme. |
| “ITA” | means this invitation to apply and all related documents published by the Authority and made available to Applicant(s). |
| “Match Funding” | means the financial or in-kind contributions that applicants (or their partners) commit to a project alongside the grant funding provided by DEFRA. |
| “Partnership” | means an informally or formally constituted group of organisations who will be working together to deliver the project as described in the grant application. |
| “Project” | means the project for which grants are being made available. |
| “Standard Qualification Questions” | means questions used to perform due diligence checks before the Application can progress to the technical evaluation stage. |
| “Technical Questions” | means project specific questions located in the Technical Application Form and used to decide the technical merit of the application. |

General

1. The Authority is looking to award grants via the National River Walks Programme to address the Environmental Improvement Plan 2025 commitment to deliver nine new national river walks, one in each region of England. One river walk has already been delivered in the North West region. We are not looking for further applications from the North West.
2. The Authority is using Find a Grant for this grant Application Process. The ITA is only available in electronic form, accessed via the Find a Grant platform. <https://www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/>
3. Applicants are required to complete the on-line questionnaire including the technical questions and budget plan, in accordance with the instructions set out in Find a Grant.
4. It is important that Applicants provide all the information asked for in the ITA in the order and format, and using the file naming convention specified. This enables the Authority to consider applications fairly and equally.
5. Applicants should read this ITA carefully before submitting an Application. The ITA sets out:
 - the timetable and process for the Application
 - sufficient information to allow Applicants to submit a compliant Application
 - information regarding the evaluation criteria which will be used to assess the Applications
 - the administrative arrangements for the receipt of Applications
6. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that they understand the requirements for this Application Process. If any information is unclear or if an Applicant considers that insufficient information has been provided, they should raise a query via the clarification process described below.
7. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that they have submitted a complete and accurate Application and that costs quoted are arithmetically correct.
8. By applying, Applicants accept the terms and conditions in the ITA and the Code of Conduct for Recipients of Government General Grants. Failure to comply with the instructions set out in the ITA or the provision of false, inaccurate or misleading information, may result in the Applicant's exclusion from this Application Process.
9. If there is any conflict between the information set out in the ITA and the information displayed in Find a Grant, the information set out in the ITA shall take precedence over the information displayed in Find a Grant.
10. If you need a reasonable adjustment to access, Find a Grant or the application materials, please contact as early as possible using the contact details in the Find a Grant advert. We will consider requests on a case-by-case basis.

Proposed Timetable

11. The timetable below is subject to change by the Authority. Applicants will be informed accordingly.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|--|-------------|
| Issue Invitation to Apply (ITA) on Find a Grant | | 2 July 2026 |
|-------------------------------------------------|--|-------------|

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Deadline for clarification questions from Applicants | Date | 13 th August 2026 |
| | Time | 12:00 |
| Deadline for submission of Applications | Date | 27 th August 2026 |
| | Time | 12:00 |
| Applicant Due Diligence Prior to Evaluation | | 28 th August - 3 rd September 2026 |
| Evaluation of Applications | | 3 rd September- 1 st October 2026 |
| Post Evaluation Enhanced Applicant Due Diligence | | 1 st -8 th October 2026 |
| Funding award notification | | 15 th October 2026 |
| Funding start date | | 5 th November 2026 |
| Monitoring and Reporting Period | Start | 5 th November 2026 |
| | End | 31 st March 2028 |
| Funding end date | | 31 st March 2028 |
| Submission of final reporting including grant usage certificate | | 31 st May 2028 |

Completion of Application

12. By applying, Applicants agree to be bound by the terms of the ITA if the Authority accepts the Application via Find a Grant.
13. The Authority may amend or withdraw all or any part of this ITA at any time. All applicants will be notified of any such amendment or withdrawal. In order to give Applicants reasonable time in which to take into account an amendment in preparing their Applications, the Authority, at its discretion, may extend the deadline for the submission of Applications and/or any other stages of the Application Process.
14. During the period of this competition all communications from Applicants (including their Partnership members, consultants and advisers) must be undertaken by email to RiverWalks@defra.gov.uk unless stated otherwise by the Authority. The Authority will not respond to communications made by other means.

Submission of Applications

15. Applicants must complete all parts of the Application form in Find a Grant in accordance with the instructions therein.
16. As part of an Application, in accordance with the instructions in Find a Grant, the Applicant must read and confirm acceptance of the Eligibility Question when starting the online application.
17. The Application and any documents accompanying it must be in English and submitted in accordance with the ITA.
18. Costs must be submitted in £ Sterling, inclusive of irrecoverable VAT, but excluding recoverable VAT.
19. Only Applications verified as complete and compliant, in accordance with the Conditions of Application, will be evaluated. You will be notified if your application has not qualified for technical evaluation.

20. Applicants must be explicit and comprehensive in their Application as this will be the single source of information used to score and rank Applications. The Authority will only take account of information specifically asked for in the ITA.
21. Where a length of response is stipulated, for example, a word count or page limit, only the information within the set limit will be evaluated.
22. Failure to provide the information required or supply documentation referred to in the Application within the deadline for Applications may result in rejection of the Application.
23. Applicants should only refer to general marketing or promotional information/material if specifically required by the question. General marketing or promotional information / material not deemed specifically relevant to the question may not be accepted.
24. Proposed River Walks should be wholly or primarily within a region's geographical boundary.
25. Find a Grant will allow you to submit multiple applications, however, you should only do so if you can demonstrate sufficient capacity and capability to deliver each project effectively. Organisations may also be included as delivery partners in multiple applications, subject to the same requirement to evidence capacity and capability across all proposed projects.

Clarifications sought by Applicants

26. Any request for clarification regarding the ITA should be submitted at the earliest opportunity via email to RiverWalks@defra.gov.uk with the subject heading 'ITA clarification question and unique reference code' and in any event no later than the deadline for clarifications set out in the Timetable. The Authority shall be under no obligation to respond to queries raised after the clarification deadline.
27. The Authority will respond to all clarifications as quickly as possible but cannot guarantee a minimum response time. The Authority will publish all clarifications and its responses to all Applicants on Find a Grant other than in exceptional circumstances. Clarification updates will be added to the Find a Grant opportunity as a Q&A document. **To receive an alert that the Q&A document has been updated you will need to have selected 'sign up for updates' on the front page of the Find a Grant advert.**
28. If an Applicant believes that a request for clarification is commercially sensitive or that publishing the same together with the Authority's response as set out above would reveal confidential information, disclosure of which would be detrimental to the Applicant, the Applicant should clearly state this when submitting the clarification request. However, if the Authority considers that:
 - the clarification is not commercially sensitive or confidential; or
 - all Applicants may benefit from its disclosure

The Authority will inform the Applicant via email, and the Applicant will have an opportunity to withdraw the request for clarification. If the request for clarification is not withdrawn within 48 hours of the notification, the clarification request and Authority's response will be published to all Applicants.

29. The Authority may not respond to a request for clarification or publish such a request where the Authority considers that the response may prejudice the Authority's commercial interests or be contrary to public interest. In such circumstances, the Authority will inform the Applicant of its view.

Changes to Applications

30. Applicants may modify their Application prior to the deadline for Applications. No Applications may be modified after the deadline for Applications. In the event that an Applicant submits early but wishes to modify their Application before the deadline please contact the Authority by email RiverWalks@defra.gov.uk
31. Applicants may withdraw their Applications at any time by submitting an email to RiverWalks@defra.gov.uk. Unless withdrawn, Applications shall remain valid and open to acceptance by the Authority for 120 days from the deadline for Applications.

Receipt of Applications

32. Applications must be uploaded onto Find a Grant no later than the time and date set out in the Timetable as the deadline for Applications. Applications received before that deadline will remain unopened until that deadline or such time thereafter when all Applications are opened together. The Authority will not consider Applications received after the deadline. The Authority may, however, at its own discretion, extend the deadline and in such circumstances, the Authority will notify all Applicants of any change.
33. If an Applicant is experiencing problems when uploading their Application, they should contact the Find a Grant helpdesk for assistance at findagrants@cabinetoffice.gov.uk and inform the Authority via RiverWalks@defra.gov.uk

Acceptance of Applications

34. By issuing this ITA, communicating with an Applicant or an Applicant's representative or agents or any other communication in respect of this competition, the Authority shall not be bound to accept any Application or award any of the funding for which Applications are invited. The Authority reserves the right to withdraw or terminate the competition at any time.

Costs of Application

35. Applicants shall bear their own costs and expenses incurred in the preparation and submission of their Applications. The Authority will not be responsible or liable for those costs regardless of the outcome in relation to individual Applications, even if the Authority amends or terminates the competition.

Clarifications sought by the Authority

36. The Authority reserves the right (but is not obliged) to seek clarification of any aspect of an Application and/or provide additional information during the evaluation phase in order to carry out a fair evaluation. Failure to respond in a timely manner and/or to provide an adequate response to such a request may result in rejection of the Application.

Confidentiality of the ITA and related documents

37. The contents of this ITA and of any other documents or information published or provided by the Authority in respect of this competition are provided on condition that they remain the property of the Authority and are kept confidential (save in so far as they are already in the public domain). The Applicant shall take all necessary precautions to ensure that they remain confidential and not disclosed, save as described below.
38. Applicants may disclose information relating to the grant Application Process to their advisers and sub-contractors in the following circumstances:
- disclosure is for the purpose of enabling an Application to be submitted and the recipient of the information undertakes in writing to keep it confidential on the same terms as the Applicant;
 - the disclosure is made for the purpose of obtaining legal advice in relation to the competition; or
 - the Applicant is legally required to disclose the information.
39. No Applicant will undertake any publicity activities with any part of the media in relation to this ITA without the prior agreement of the Authority, including agreement on the format and content of any publicity. For example, no statements may be made to the media regarding the nature of any Application, its contents or any proposals relating to it without the prior written consent of the Authority.
40. All central government departments, their executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies are subject to control and reporting within government. In particular, they report to the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury for all expenditure.
41. For these purposes, the Authority may disclose within government any of the Applicant's documents and information (including any that the Applicant considers confidential and/or commercially sensitive) provided in its Application. The information will not be disclosed

outside government during the Application Process. Applicants consent to these terms as part of the Application Process.

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations

42. In accordance with the obligations and duties placed upon public authorities by the FOIA and the EIR, which provide a public right of access to information held by public bodies, the Authority may disclose information submitted to it by an Applicant.
43. If an Applicant considers any information which it supplies to be commercially sensitive or of a confidential nature, the Applicant should:
 - clearly identify such information as commercially sensitive
 - explain the potential implications of disclosure of such information
 - provide an estimate of the period of time during which the Applicant believes that such information will remain commercially sensitive
44. The Authority will endeavour to maintain confidentiality of information identified by an Applicant as being confidential in nature and/or commercially sensitive. Pursuant to a request for this information under FOIA and/or EIR, the Authority where practicable, will consult with an Applicant before disclosure.
45. However, even where information is identified by an Applicant as being confidential or commercially sensitive, Applicants acknowledge that there may be circumstances in which the Authority may be required to disclose such information in accordance with the FOIA or the EIR (in addition to any other transparency obligations). In particular, the Authority is required to form an independent judgment concerning whether the information is exempt from disclosure under the FOIA or the EIR and whether the public interest favours disclosure or not. Accordingly, the Authority cannot guarantee that any information marked “confidential” or “commercially sensitive” will not be disclosed and accepts no liability for any loss or prejudice caused by the disclosure of information.
46. If an Applicant receives a request for information relating to this competition under the FOIA or the EIR during the competition, this should be passed immediately on to the Authority and the Applicant should not attempt to answer the request without first consulting the Authority.

Disclaimers

47. Whilst the information in this ITA and any supporting information referred to herein or provided to the Applicants by the Authority have been prepared in good faith, the Authority does not warrant (expressly or impliedly) or represent that this information is comprehensive, reasonable nor accurate, or that it has been independently verified.
48. Neither the Authority nor its respective advisors, directors, officers, members, partners, employees, other staff or agents:
 - makes any representation or warranty (express or implied) as to the accuracy, reasonableness or completeness of the ITA or of any other written or oral communication transmitted (or otherwise made available) to any Applicant;
 - accepts any liability for the information contained in the ITA or any other written or oral communication (including any communications via Find a Grant) transmitted (or otherwise made available) to any Applicant, or for the fairness, accuracy or completeness of that information; or

- shall be liable for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation or any other liability which cannot lawfully be excluded) arising as a result of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication.
49. Any party considering entering into an Agreement with the Authority following receipt of the ITA should make its own investigations and independent assessment of the Authority and its requirements and should seek its own professional financial and legal advice.
50. Neither the issue of the ITA nor any of the information presented in it should be regarded as a commitment or representation on the part of the Authority to enter into a grant funding agreement. Nothing in the ITA or in any other communication made between the Authority and any other party, should be interpreted as constituting an agreement or representation between the Authority and any other party (save for a formal award of grant funding) or as constituting an agreement or representation that grant funding shall be offered.

Canvassing

51. Any Applicant which directly or indirectly canvasses any officer, member, employee, or agent of the Authority or its members or any other relevant body or any of its officers or members concerning the Agreement or this Application Process or who directly or indirectly obtains or attempts to obtain information from any such officer, member, employee or agent concerning any other Applicant, Application or proposed Application will be excluded from this competition and its Application rejected.
52. The Applicant shall not contact any other employee, agent or consultant of the Authority who is in any way connected with the Project during this Application Process, unless instructed otherwise by the Authority.

Conflicts of Interest

53. The concept of a Conflict of Interest includes any situation where relevant staff members of the Authority, involved in this grant Application Process have, directly or indirectly, a financial, economic or other personal interest which might be perceived to compromise their impartiality and independence in the context of the grant Application Process and/or affect the integrity of the grant offer.
54. Where the Applicant is aware of any circumstances giving rise to a Conflict of Interest or has any indication that a Conflict of Interest exists or may arise it should inform the Authority of this as soon as possible (whether before or after submission of an Application). Applicants should remain alert to the possibility of conflicts of interest arising at all stages of the grant Application Process and should update the Authority if any new circumstances or information arises, or there are any changes to information already provided to the Authority. Failure to do so, and/or to manage properly any conflicts of interest may result in rejection of an Application.

Changes to an Applicant's circumstances

55. The Authority may:
- reject an Application where there is a change of identity, control, financial standing or other factor which may affect the Authority's evaluation of the Application; or
 - revisit information contained in an Application at any time to take account of subsequent changes to an Applicant's circumstances; or

- at any point during the Application Process, require an Applicant to certify there has been no material change to information submitted in its Application and in the absence of such certificate, reject the Application.

Joint Applications, Collaboration and Subcontracting

56. Where a Partnership Application is proposed, Applicants are required to complete the relevant questions in the Standard Qualification Questions section of the on-line application. This must include a completed Partnership Form Annex E and include information of all Partnership members including the lead applicant. Note that a Partnership agreement will need to be provided to the Authority if the Partnership is made a grant offer.
57. Relevant information should be provided in the Application in respect of each organisation that will play a significant role in the delivery of the Project.
58. Where an organisation in a joint Application change at any time during the competition, the Applicants should inform the Authority immediately via RiverWalks@defra.gov.uk
59. In such circumstances, the Authority reserves the right to take such action, including excluding the organisation from participation in the competition, where the change in membership is material to the Authority's evaluation of the Application.
60. The Applicant shall ensure that its sub-contractors and advisers abide by the terms of the ITA.

Costs

61. As stated above, costs and any financial data provided must be submitted in £ Sterling, inclusive of irrecoverable VAT, but excluding recoverable VAT. Where official documents include financial data in a foreign currency, a Sterling equivalent must be provided, [calculated at the exchange rate](#) at the time you submit the Application.
62. The relevant question in the Technical Questionnaire in Find for a Grant sets out the minimum cost information required for the Application. The Authority may request a more detailed breakdown of any cost information provided as part of an Application.
63. It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure their Application accurately reflects their VAT liabilities. If the application is successful and it subsequently transpires there has been an error in the Application, the Authority shall be under no obligation to increase Grant Funding to meet any VAT liability of the Applicant.
64. Please don't forget, if you're a UK Taxpayer, you'll receive your grant or subsidy payments without tax taken off. You may need to tell HMRC about these. For more information go to Business Income Manual 40451¹. You may wish to discuss this with your accountant.

Notification of Award

65. The Authority will notify successful and unsuccessful Applicants via email of the results of their Application. Successful applicants will then be asked to register on Atamis from where the grant agreement will be issued and managed.

¹ [Business Income Manual 40451](#)

SECTION B: THE NATIONAL RIVER WALKS PROGRAMME

The Government's 2024 manifesto committed "as part of our plans to improve responsible access to nature" to "create nine new National River Walks, one in each region of England".

The first river new national river walk- the Mersey Valley Way- has already been delivered in the North West.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) now welcomes applications from the remaining 8 regions of England to deliver the next river walks. DEFRA aims to select four proposals for delivery by 31st March 2028. A further competition will be launched in the future to deliver the remaining four walks.

Policy Priorities

The 2025 Environment Improvement Plan sets out the government's vision for nature, including a programme of improvements designed to deliver against Goal 10: Access to Nature. Through its National River Walk programme, Defra intends to progress towards meeting the following EIP commitments:

- Commitment 86: Make sure that everyone has access to green or blue spaces within a 15-minute walk from home.
- Commitment 87: Reduce physical and intangible barriers to accessing green and blue spaces to increase the frequency of visits from those currently least likely to access them.

Policy objectives of the river walks programme are:

- Provide improved, more inclusive access to nature that is targeted to an area of higher deprivation.
- Increase engagement with nature through community participation and increased opportunities to enjoy and learn about nature.
- Work in partnership with the local community to drive increasing usage of the route.
- Improve or restore nature and/or water quality through nature recovery projects.

Eligibility

The proposed work must deliver new or upgraded linear access which should be multi-user (accommodating walking, wheeling, cycling or / and horse riding) where possible. We are open to applications where sections of link routes are also included if this improves access overall.

Eligible Location

The route must run alongside a river, either a main river or ordinary watercourse. The route should run through or close to disadvantaged areas. Disadvantaged areas are defined as areas in the top 30% or decile 3 for overall deprivation as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Rivers which run 'close to' a disadvantaged area are defined as rivers which run within 1km of the disadvantaged area. You can check this using the IMD mapping tool: <https://deprivation.communities.gov.uk/maps?type=imd&geog=lsqa>.

Land must be adjacent to or functionally connected to the river corridor.

Eligible regions

Proposed routes must be wholly within England and fall wholly or primarily within one of the following regions of England: North East England; Yorkshire and the Humber; East Midlands; West Midlands; East of England; London; South East; South West.

Routes that extend across regional boundaries are permitted where necessary, however, a single primary region must be identified. This will be the region where the majority of the river walk is located.

For an official map of the regions see the GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-survey-technical-reports/geographical-boundaries-covered-in-the-participation-survey>.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants must be UK-based organisations that are formally constituted. This includes, for example:

- Local authorities and combined authorities
- Highways authorities
- Registered charities and charitable incorporated organisations
- Community interest companies
- Companies limited by guarantee
- Private sector organisations (including SMEs) where not applying for a private gain from the grant.
- Public sector bodies other than central government departments and their arm's length bodies.

Partnership applications are welcomed. Where you apply as a partnership, you must nominate a lead organisation. The lead organisation will sign the grant funding agreement and will be accountable for delivery, reporting and compliance on behalf of the partnership. Organisations may submit more than one application as a lead organisation through Find a Grant, provided they can demonstrate sufficient capacity and capability to deliver each project effectively.

Organisations may also be included as delivery partners in multiple applications, subject to the same requirement to evidence capacity and capability across all proposed projects.

You **cannot** apply for funding if:

- the applicant organisation has ceased to operate, has filed for bankruptcy etc
- your organisation is not formally constituted, registered with the charities commission or companies house, unless you are a Local Authority or Combined Authority.
- you are an organisation applying for private profit or gain from the grant
- you are an individual
- you are a private individual applying for private gain
- a central government department

Ineligible organisations or individuals may be 'supporting' partners in applications but cannot be the lead applicant.

Funding Criteria

Funding amounts

Maximum amount of resource funding per project will be £100,000

Maximum amount of capital funding per project will be £1,250,000

Requests for funding outside of these thresholds will not be considered.

We expect applications to demonstrate that funding from the National River Walks programme will enable, enhance, or accelerate delivery of the proposed project.

Applications may be supported where some funding is already in place, provided the grant clearly delivers additional outcomes, improvements, or increased ambition.

Projects that would proceed unchanged without this grant demonstrate limited additionality and are unlikely to represent value for money.

The scheme will not fund activities already carried out or items already purchased. Only work taking place or items purchased after the grant agreement is issued (the commencement date) are eligible to be funded through this grant.

The funding available is a combination of capital and resource.

Capital funding can only be used to deliver work which enhances or creates tangible assets (e.g. property and equipment, heritage assets such as nature reserves) or intangible assets like new scientific knowledge.

Resource funding is money that is spent on day-to-day resources and administration costs.

There are strict rules pertaining to eligible expenditure. You must ensure you read and understand the Funding Criteria as set out here before applying. Requests for funding towards ineligible costs will be removed from application budgets before being approved and any applications which do not sufficiently meet the funding criteria will be rejected.

The Authority's financial year runs from 1st April to 31st March, the quarters are therefore Q1 April to June, Q2 July to September, Q3 October to December, Q4 January to March.

We expect funding offers to be made and funding agreements to be in place by November 2026.

It is important that you identify in your application which of your project costs are capital and which are resource and how those costs will be allocated across each financial year of the project. Funding approved at the point of grant award in each financial year is fixed and cannot be moved into a different financial year. Yearly budget and total budget approved at grant award are maximums and may reduce according to your eligible approved expenditure.

The Budget Plan Template (Annex B) categorises different expenditure types into either capital or resource as shown below together with some definitions and examples. You should use the correct cost category for each item on your budget plan. These will be checked as part of the application evaluation and will need to be corrected if wrongly categorised.

Eligible and Ineligible Expenditure

Please refer to the Grant Funding Agreement (Annex A) for further details about eligible and ineligible expenditure.

Please note that inflation funding to allow for cost increases in years two and three of delivery should be included within the above costs, not itemised separately.

Staff Costs

Staff costs are eligible for funding where they work directly on the eligible components of the project. Staff costs must be divided into the following different kinds:

- Staff costs - education/awareness raising (Resource): this includes:
 - producing management guidance
 - producing information boards
- Staff costs - finance/admin (Resource), this includes:
 - producing purchase orders for suppliers
 - invoicing partners
 - paying project costs
 - minuting project meetings
 - collating information for grant reports and claims
 - completing grant claims
- Staff costs - landowner advice & support (Resource), this includes:
 - providing targeted land management advice
 - advising and supporting site owners and managers to implement site-level actions
- Staff costs - project delivery & management (Capital), this includes:
 - project management
 - project design
 - planning and communication of plans with landowners, partners, contractors and other affected parties
 - project delivery (conducting surveys, research, solution trialling or on-site work)
 - writing briefs procuring and managing contractors
 - supervising the work of others (contractors, staff, partners, volunteers)
 - follow up monitoring to ensure effectiveness of the activities completed

For each staff role included in your application, you need to provide information on:

- the cost of employment comprising gross salary, employers National Insurance contribution, employers pension contribution, paid leave and other contractual employee benefits

For part time staff you should calculate staff costs pro-rata, e.g. for a member of staff who works two days a week on your project, costs should be two-fifths of their full-time costs.

Overheads

We are able to contribute towards necessary organisational overheads using the resource element of our budget. If you would like to include this in your grant request you must provide evidence of how your overheads are calculated and what is included, for instance a breakdown showing each component (i.e. management time, HR, IT support) and cost per full time equivalent staff member. Overheads should be pro rata for part-time staff. The amount we will pay will be based on the evidence you provide. If your overhead rate exceeds 20% of staff wage costs, we will cap our contribution at 20% and you must contribute the remainder as match funding.

Audit Costs

Fees charged or to be charged to the Grant Recipient by external auditors/accountants for reporting/certifying that the grant paid was applied for its intended purposes are eligible costs. Please note that all Grant Recipients need to engage an auditor to conduct an examination of their project accounts as part of the grant closure procedure. If these costs are not included in your budget plan at application and grant offer stage, they must be borne by the grant recipient when incurred.

Scope of Audit

The audit should be conducted in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) issued by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC). Key standards to be adhered to include:

- ISA (UK) 200: Overall Objectives of the Independent Auditor and the Conduct of an Audit in Accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK)
- ISA (UK) 210: Agreeing the Terms of Audit Engagements
- ISA (UK) 315: Identifying and Assessing the Risks of Material Misstatement
- ISA (UK) 240: The Auditor's Responsibilities Relating to Fraud in an Audit of Financial Statements

Audit Requirements

- Segregation of Funds: identify separately the value and purpose of the Grant Funding in audited accounts and annual report.
- Compliance with Grant Terms: ensure that the Grant has been used solely for the delivery of the Funded Activities as specified in the grant agreement.
- Review of Financial Statements: verify the final statement of expenditure and income submitted to the Authority.
- Internal Controls: assess the adequacy of internal controls related to the management and use of the Grant funds.
- Fraud Risk Assessment: report on the adequacy of internal financial controls to safeguard against fraud.

For further details on UK auditing standards, please refer to the Financial Reporting Council's website: [FRC Auditing Standards](#)

Ineligible Costs

The types of costs which are **not eligible** for funding in any circumstance and should **not** be included in your project budget include:

- general staff training or volunteer training which is not specific to the delivery of the project (e.g. new staff induction, generic staff training, DSE assessment, staff appraisals)
- general (non-project) team meetings
- general communications and engagement work that is not essential in order to deliver the project (e.g. web pages and digital content creation, social media content creation, newsletters, press releases, media interviews and filming)
- buying out tenancy agreements
- landowner compensation for inconvenience or loss of income
- activities related to discharge of contractual or legal obligations
- recoverable VAT
- costs incurred before the grant is awarded
- paid for lobbying, which means using the Grant to fund lobbying (via an external firm or in-house staff) in order to undertake activities intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, government or political activity; or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action

- using the Grant to directly enable one part of government to challenge another on topics unrelated to the agreed purpose of the grant
- using the Grant to petition for additional funding
- expenses such as for entertaining, specifically aimed at exerting undue influence to change government policy
- payments for activities of a political or exclusively religious nature

Inflationary pressures

You must provide costings that are as accurate as possible for the lifetime of your proposed project. Additional funding from the Authority is not guaranteed. Therefore, all costings should be based on justifiable and evidenced information. Any additional funding requests throughout the lifetime of any project funded by the Authority will be carefully reviewed taking into consideration progress reports to date and overall benefits of the project and will be subject to budget availability. Applicants should not assume that further funding beyond that which is awarded to successful applications will be made available.

In the event of project costs increasing during the funding period, we expect successful applicants to follow these steps as a minimum:

- Review whether there is any additional match funding that can be provided to cover an increase in project costs.
- Look to reduce costs that do not negatively impact on the outcomes of the project.
- Engage with the Authority as early as possible to explore other changes that can be made in order to deliver the project within budget whilst meeting the aims and objectives of the scheme.
- Submit evidence to the Authority to show that all courses of action have been exhausted and that a variation is required. Any benefits of the change should be at least the same, or preferably greater, than in the original approved project.

Obligation Period

You must:

- provide details of how you will maintain any capital items funded through the scheme for a period of ten years from the date of final grant payment for the capital items. This is called the Obligation Period of the grant
- have management control of the land where capital intervention occurs for the length of the Grant Funding Period to undertake the capital work and ongoing maintenance during the Obligation Period
- if you do not have management control, you must get the written agreement of all other parties who have management control of the land to undertake these activities for the duration of the Grant Funding Period and Obligation Period

Due to restrictions on our funding, we are unable to pay for any costs you may incur during the Obligation Period; therefore, as part of the value for money section of your grant application you should indicate how you will meet this obligation.

Value for Money

Value for Money (VfM) means achieving the best possible outcomes from public funds by balancing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. It is not simply about choosing the lowest cost option, it requires considering quality, sustainability, and long-term benefits. This

guidance aligns with HM Treasury's Managing Public Money and Government Grant Standards.

Expectations for Applicants:

- demonstrate how your proposal delivers VfM over a 10 years-time horizon.
- provide evidence that costs are reasonable, necessary, and proportionate to the benefits
- show consideration of alternative options and why your chosen approach is optimal

To ensure VfM in procurement:

- competitive process - obtain multiple quotes or tenders for goods and services wherever possible
- transparent evaluation - use clear criteria considering price, quality, sustainability, and supplier reliability
- documentation - keep records of procurement decisions, quotes, and evaluations for audit purposes
- conflict of interest - declare and manage any potential conflicts in supplier selection.

Applicants should consider environmental impact and alignment with sustainability objectives and describe any opportunities to deliver wider social benefits (e.g., local employment, employment and skills opportunities targeted at under-represented groups and wider community engagement).

For construction and/or infrastructure works, applicants should follow [Sustainable procurement: the GBS for construction projects and buildings - GOV.UK](#), or equivalent, where this is applicable. Where timber will be used it must comply with the UK Timber Procurement Policy [Timber Procurement Policy \(TPP\): prove legality and sustainability - GOV.UK](#)

All costs should be proportionate, justifiable and ensure good value for money.

Your application should provide evidence of how costs have been derived.

For further information on how value for money is considered within government grants please see the following guidance:

Managing public money: [Managing public money - GOV.UK](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money>

The HMT Green Book: [The Green Book - GOV.UK](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government>

ENCA: [Enabling a Natural Capital Approach guidance \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach-enca-guidance/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach-guidance>

Information about how we will assess your application for value for money is provided in section C3.

Note that you may be required to provide evidence that you have followed proper procurement procedures during the Funding Period. If quotes are not available at the time of submitting your application, then you should provide an accompanying narrative explaining how you have derived your budget costs. Staff costs must be based on actual employment costs incurred, i.e. employer's gross salary cost, plus employer's pension contribution, plus employer's National Insurance contribution.

The ITA gives further details and includes a budget plan template (Annex B). You should complete the required information according to the instructions provided in the template.

Match Funding

Match funding is not a requirement but where it is provided it can demonstrate shared responsibility, and under certain conditions strengthens Value for Money, and supports sustainability. It can be provided in two forms:

- Cash contributions are direct financial contributions from the applicant, partner organisations, or other eligible sources, such as other grants or donations.
- In-kind contributions are non-cash support with a clear monetary value, such as:
 - staff time dedicated to the project
 - volunteer hours (valued at the given rate)
 - use of equipment, facilities, or materials

Note that all match funding must be necessary, reasonable, and directly related to the project objectives. Double Funding is not permitted. Cash and in-kind contributions must be auditable and valued using a transparent method.

Reporting - Match funding must be:

- recorded in financial reports
- supported by documentation (e.g., invoices, timesheets, valuation statements).
- subject to audit and compliance checks

Application Decisions

Once the application window has closed, the Authority will assess and score all completed and compliant applications. If we need any clarifications about your application, we will contact you by email.

All applications will be assessed against the published criteria.

If your application is successful, the Authority will notify you in writing and send you a grant offer letter. The grant offer letter will include:

- any special conditions
- timescales to get consents or permissions
- terms and conditions

You will need to sign and return the offer letter by the date given (within 10 working days). You must not start the project until you have signed and completed all documents in the grant offer letter and fulfilled any special conditions.

There will be an embargo on publicity and external communications until such time as the Authority makes a public announcement about the grant awards. Successful applicants will be required to work with Authority staff on appropriate publicity and communications, for instance by providing a short summary of the project and one or two high quality images. Successful applicants will receive further information about payments and the claim process, monitoring and reporting, including templates.

If your application is unsuccessful, the Authority will notify you in writing including feedback.

Grant Payments and Reporting

Payments

The Authority will make grant payments in arrears for eligible expenditure towards agreed objectives and outputs as set out in your grant funding agreement, which references your

grant application. You must submit claims quarterly unless otherwise agreed with the Authority. You will need to complete the claim form provided by the Authority to submit a detailed breakdown of all costs incurred and provide the required evidence for grant claims. Some examples follow.

Financial evidence of costs incurred should include:

- receipted invoices, bank statement, remittance report

Evidence of staff costs must include:

- certified staff timesheets, broken down by task
- staff payslip showing gross salary, employers NI contribution, employers pension contribution (personal data must be redacted)

Supporting evidence of activities and work completed should include:

- specification of works, including location and type of works
- evidence of procurement process followed (e.g. quotes for purchase of equipment; brief and quotes for services; invitation to tender for letting contract, including specification; tender return report)
- photographic evidence of items purchased or activity underway or complete, with geo-tag and accompanying map

Evidence of volunteer or in-kind contributions should include:

- certified summary of volunteer contributions (number of people involved, time given) and value (using the rates provided)
- certified summary of in-kind contributions and value (using actual staff rates)

Evidence of approvals might include:

- copy of consent or permission from relevant authority
- landowner agreements

Reporting

Your Grant Funding Agreement will show the dates that reports are required. You will receive guidance and templates for each report you need to submit.

Defra (the Authority) may undertake monitoring activity throughout the project, including scheduled or ad hoc site visits. These visits will be used to verify progress, outputs, compliance with the grant agreement, and value for money. Grant recipients are expected to facilitate access to sites, relevant documentation, and project staff as required.

You will need to give quarterly updates on progress, unless otherwise agreed with the Authority, including:

- a summary of the actions and work delivered
- progress made towards project objectives
- any risks or issues encountered and how you are responding
- any proposed changes to the project (a formal change request may be needed)

At the end of March 2027, you will need to submit a year-end report, including:

- summary of project progress towards the activities you specified in your application
- summary of approved expenditure, and budget forecast for the following year
- plans for delivery in the following year of the funding award
- any proposed changes to the project (a formal change request may be needed)

By the end of the project, you must submit appropriate monitoring data, a certificate of grant usage endorsed by an independent qualified auditor and a final report.

The final report should:

- cover all work completed under the project
- evaluate how far the project achieved its original aims

Evaluation & Lessons Learned

All applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, will be asked to take part in an evaluation of the scheme application process to help inform any potential future iterations of the Scheme.

Grant recipients will be asked to participate in evaluation and lessons learned exercises focussing on evaluating the grant application process; management and reporting process; and the impact of the grant scheme on related objectives. This, together with lessons learned, will be used to inform the ongoing delivery of the scheme and any future funding opportunities.

Acknowledging Funding

You must acknowledge that your project has been Funded by UK Government, following the guidance here: [Branding - GCS](#)

You must also acknowledge the Authority's support in any publicity or materials that refer to the project. This includes any written or spoken public presentations you give about the project. You should use:

- our name
- our logo, where you have asked permission or where we request it
- acknowledgement of the Authority's funding (with wording we will provide)

Before using the Authority's name and logo you need to request our permission and follow any branding guidelines we send you.

SECTION C: HOW TO APPLY AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

C1. How to apply (Find a Grant)

You must apply through the Cabinet Office Find a Grant platform: <https://www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/>.

To submit a valid application, you must:

Complete all required sections in the online form, including the eligibility/qualification questions and the technical questions.

Upload any required attachments in the format **requested** in Find a Grant.

Submit your application by the deadline shown in the timetable

C1.1 Application limit

You may submit one application per region as a lead organisation through Find a Grant. Organisations may apply for more than one region, but they must submit a separate application for each region.

Organisations may be included as delivery partners in more than one application, provided they can demonstrate sufficient capacity and capability to deliver each project effectively.

C1.2 Attachments and file naming

Where an attachment is required, please use this naming convention: [Qualification or Technical question reference] – [short document title].

You may upload zipped files where needed, if you do, please ensure all files within the zip folder follow the same naming convention.

Find a Grant allows attachments in the following formats: .DOC, .DOCX, .ODT, .PDF, .XLS, .XLSX or .ZIP.

C1.3 Clarification questions (during the application window)

If you have a question about this guidance or the application process, please email the NRW inbox (listed in the Find a Grant advert) as early as possible and no later than the clarification deadline in the timetable.

We will publish clarification questions and our responses on Find a Grant as a Q&A document (with any genuinely sensitive information removed, so that all applicants can benefit from the same information. To receive alerts, select “sign up for updates” on the Find a Grant advert.

C2. How we assess applications

Applications will not be assessed until the application window closes. We assess applications in three stages.

Stage 1 – Eligibility and qualification (Pass/Fail)

This stage checks that your organisation and proposal meet the eligibility requirements and that you have completed the required qualification questions. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not progress to the technical assessment.

C2.1 Standard qualification questions (Find a Grant sections)

All applications are assessed using the standard qualification questions in Find a Grant, including mandatory sections (for example “Eligibility statement”, “Your details”, and “Funding”) and the SQ question set (SQ1–SQ7). Failure to complete mandatory questions, or failure to provide required information, may result in your application being rejected.

C2.2 Eligibility checks (Stage 1)

You must confirm YES/NO (and provide evidence in the latter technical questions, where applicable) that:

- the route runs through or within 1km (a 15 minute walk as defined by the Green Infrastructure standards) of an eligible deprived area:
 - In order to be eligible, areas should be in the top 30% or (decile 3) for overall deprivation as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. You can check this by using this mapping tool:
<https://deprivation.communities.gov.uk/maps?type=imd&geog=isoag>.
- you have (or are actively securing) land access arrangements. The proposed route runs through land where there is either already public access or where there is evidence that landowners are willing to allow free public access.
- The path is cattle free or mostly cattle free (more than 50%).

All Applications will be assessed using the following criteria.

| | Application section in Find a Grant | Assessment Criteria |
|-----|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Eligibility Statement | This is a mandated question. Failure to agree to the statement will prevent you from continuing with your application. |
| | Your Details | Failure to complete this mandated question will result in a ‘fail’ and elimination from the Application Process. |
| | Funding | Failure to complete this mandated question will result in a ‘fail’ and elimination from the Application Process. Note the mandatory question ‘Where will this funding be spent’ is included to provide information to the Cabinet Office. The National River Walks – Eligibility question below requires you to indicate the region of England that your proposed walk will be located in. |
| | National River Walks Eligibility | Failure to complete this mandated question will result in a ‘fail’ and elimination from the Application Process. |
| SQ1 | Lead Applicant | All information requested must be provided. |

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | Failure to provide all information will constitute a 'fail' and elimination from the Application Process. |
| SQ2 | Application Model | All information requested, if applicable, must be provided. Information used for due diligence purposes. |
| SQ3 | Financial Information | Financial information is assessed to determine the economic and financial standing of the organisation. |
| SQ4 | Grant Recipient Code of Conduct | Failure to answer 'Yes' to this question may constitute a 'fail' and elimination from the Application Process. Information is assessed to determine whether the application may proceed. |
| SQ5 | Conflict of Interest | The identification of an actual/ potential conflict of interest will be assessed to determine whether it will result in elimination from this Application Process. |
| SQ6 | Legal Obligations | Information is assessed and due diligence undertaken to determine whether the application may proceed. |
| SQ7 | Explanation to any negative responses | Information is assessed to determine whether the application may proceed. |

Stage 2 – Technical assessment (Scored)

If your application passes Stage 1, it will move to Stage 2. At this stage, technical assessors will score your responses against the published criteria and weightings below. Scores are moderated through a panel process to agree final scores.

C2.3 Scoring scale (applies to scored technical questions)

Each scored technical question is marked using the following scale:

0 – Unacceptable: nil or inadequate response

20 – Poor: partially relevant and/or insufficient detail

50 – Adequate: relevant and acceptable; meets basic requirements

70 – Good: good understanding; clear detail on delivery

100 – Excellent: comprehensive, unambiguous, thorough response

For the Value for Money question, assessors will consider the quality and relevance of the budget information provided and how clearly costs relate to the project described.

C2.4 Minimum score expectation

Applications are expected to achieve a minimum score of 50 in each scored technical question (TQ1–TQ6). Applications scoring below 50 in any question will normally not be considered for funding, unless there are exceptional reasons identified during moderation.

C2.5 Weightings and overall score

Each technical question is scored, then weightings are applied. The weighted scores are totalled to give an overall score out of 100 for each application.

| Question Ref | Assessment Criteria | Weighting |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| TQ0 | Project Summary | 0% (not scored) |
| TQ1 | Access to Nature | 15% |
| TQ2 | Engagement with Nature | 15% |
| TQ3 | Route Usage | 15% |
| TQ4 | Nature, Flooding and Water Quality | 10% |
| TQ5 | Value for Money | 25% |
| TQ6 | Project Management | 20% |

Stage 3 – Funding decision (portfolio balancing)

After Stage 2 scoring and moderation, applications will be considered alongside other applications received. Final funding decisions will be made by the Programme Delivery Board and any required departmental approvals, taking account of:

- moderated scores and overall weighted scores;
- geographic coverage;
- portfolio balance (including avoiding unnecessary duplication and maximising outcomes).

This means the highest scoring application may not automatically be funded if this would not result in a balanced portfolio.

C3. Technical questions (what you must answer)

Any sections left blank will be considered incomplete and are likely to result in the application being rejected

Across your technical responses, you should provide clear and proportionate evidence where relevant, including route maps and/or spatial data, costs assumptions, letters of support, delivery plans, risk information and evidence of permissions or approvals where these are available.

TQ0 – Project Summary (not scored)

Provide a short description of the project including its location, length, English region, and delivery partners involved. Please, use no more than 100 words.

TQ1 – Access to Nature (15%)

Objective: Provide improved, more inclusive access to nature targeted to areas of higher deprivation.

Question: Explain how the proposed work will deliver new or upgraded continuous, linear access that supports multi-user access, including walking and wheeling as a minimum, and cycling and horse riding where appropriate to the location.

What we are looking for

We are looking for proposals that clearly show:

- the works represent a material step-change compared with the current state (new access and/or substantial upgrades);
- the route is in an area where there is a clear need for improved access to green/blue space (with reference to what access currently exists locally);
- strong efforts have been made to deliver multi-user and inclusive access where possible;
- access onto/along the water has been considered and improved where appropriate;
- the route connects well to existing and planned networks (Public Rights of Way, trails, crossings, public transport etc, or to country parks, open access land or other land where there are existing public access rights);
- the land alongside the route is managed in a way that supports thriving nature and enhances the user experience.

We will also assess the route's potential to improve household walking access to green/blue space using [Defra access to nature statistics](#) and take this into account in scoring. In particular, we will make an assessment of:

- a) The total number of households who will be able to access the new river walk.
- b) The number of households in the highest 30% of deprivation (according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation) who will be able to access the new river walk.
- c) The number of households for whom the new river walk would be the only green or blue space they can access.
- d) The number of households in the highest 30% of deprivation (according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation) for whom the new river walk would be the only green or blue space they can access

You must include:

- a clear description of the location (for example town/county area);
- a detailed description of the proposed works;
- total route length;
- what is new vs upgraded, and current condition/status (including photos where relevant);
- lengths accessible to different user types;
- If the path is not completely cattle free, specify the percentage which is not and explain how the risk will be managed.
- spatial route data showing the line of the route and any key points (provide data in one of the following formats GPX, KML, GeoJSON, Geopackage, Shapefile)*.

You may score higher if you:

- improve access onto and/or along the water;
- link effectively with existing Public Rights of Way, National Trails, Sustrans routes, public transport, or river crossings.

Page Limit:

Your response must not exceed 3 A4 pages using a minimum font size Arial 11. The spatial route data does not contribute to the page limit.

* To help us understand where your proposed river walk is, please include spatial data (map data) showing the location of the route and any key points of interest (for example: start/end points, access points, links with other existing paths, other features along the route). We recognise that applicants may not be familiar with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), so a wide range of formats are acceptable. Typical accepted formats include **KML or KMZ** (from [Google Earth](#)), **GPX, GeoJSON, Shapefiles, and GeoPackage (GPKG)**. If you are unsure which format to use, [Google Earth](#) and [QGIS](#) (a free desktop mapping tool) both provide simple ways to draw routes (lines) and locations (points) and export them in these formats.

If possible, please ensure your data clearly represents **one continuous walking route** (as a line) and any **important locations** (as points). Do not worry about map styling or colours – we only need the geometry and basic location information. Please avoid sharing the spatial data as static images such as JPEG, PNG or PDF.

Find a Grant allows attachments in the following formats: .DOC, .DOCX, .ODT, .PDF, .XLS, .XLSX or .ZIP.

Some useful videos/guides that might help you create spatial data:

Using Google Earth in your web browser (no software installation)

Google Earth can be used directly in a browser at: <https://earth.google.com/web>

Creating paths (routes) and placemarks in Google Earth (Web)

[How to Create Paths and Polygons in Google Earth](#)

Official Google written guide (Web version)

[Create a map or story in Google Earth Web](#)

Outputs from Google Earth Web are typically saved as **KML or KMZ**, which are perfectly acceptable for this application.

Using QGIS (free, open-source GIS software)

Creating point and line layers in QGIS (beginner-friendly)

[QGIS Tutorials: Creating Point, Line and Polygon Layers \(Beginners\)](#)

Very short digitising walkthrough

[QGIS Digitising Tutorial – Add Points, Lines and Polygons](#)

TQ2 – Engagement with Nature (15%)

Objective: Increase engagement with nature through community participation and increased opportunities to enjoy and learn about nature.

Question: Provide your community engagement plan including who you will engage, how and when engagement will take place, what activities or outputs you will deliver, and how you will measure impact.

What we are looking for:

- evidence of engagement (both planned and already undertaken) with local communities and businesses, including those least likely to access nature;
- inclusive approaches that reach people of different ages, abilities and backgrounds, especially communities experiencing deprivation;
- credible plans to promote activities online and in person through local networks/hubs (schools, libraries, cafes, health centres, leisure centres etc.);
- evidence that consultation and co-design has shaped the proposal;
- a good range of activities/outputs appropriate to the place and audiences;
- measurable targets and a clear approach to monitoring engagement.

You must include:

- who will be engaged (including groups least likely to access nature);
- how engagement will be delivered (channels, partners, local hubs);
- when engagement will take place (including evidence of consultation informing design);
- Planned activities / outputs (for example: guided walks, volunteering, school visits, interpretation guides)
- measurable targets (for example volunteer hours, number of organisations engaged).

Page Limit:

Your response must not exceed 2 A4 pages using a minimum font size Arial 11. Supporting evidence does not contribute to the page limit.

TQ3 – Route Usage (15%)

Objective: Work in partnership with the local community to drive increasing usage of the route

Question: Explain how the work will increase use of the route and how you will evidence this, including how you will establish a baseline and measure change over time.

What we are looking for

- a clearly articulated plan to drive increasing usage, with evidence of buy-in from local businesses and/or community representatives;
- ambitious but realistic targets for footfall growth, taking into account any environmental protection requirements;
- a robust approach to establishing a baseline and measuring change (before/after);
- a credible plan for ongoing data collection and sharing where required.

You must include:

- how you will evidence increased usage (for example footfall counters and/or other robust data sources);
- Baseline approach (measured or estimated), and how sustainable growth will be demonstrated.
- how local businesses have been engaged and will be involved in delivery/promotion, with measures of that engagement.
- How you have taken into account any environmental sensitivities specific to the location.

Page Limit:

Your response must not exceed 2 A4 pages using a minimum font size Arial 11.

TQ4 – Nature, Flooding and Water Quality (10%)

Objective: Improve or restore nature and/or water quality through nature recovery projects.

Question:

Part A – Site baseline: Describe the proposed River Walk site. This should include any relevant designated sites or environmental constraints, for example Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Ramsar sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk Zones, National Landscapes, National Parks or Local Nature Reserves. You should also describe the main habitats and any notable or priority species present. Optionally, if feasible, present the current position on water quality and flood risk. Please check if you need to apply for flood risk activity environmental permit here: [Flood risk activities: environmental permits - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits)

In your answer you should make use of and reference outputs from the following tools:

- Magic Maps: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.html>
- Living England Habitat Map: <https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/Defra::living-england-habitat-map-phase-4/explore>
- Flood risk for planning: <https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/>
- Environmental permits: [Flood risk activities: environmental permits - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits)

Part B – Referencing the baseline described in Part A, explain what your project will do to improve protected habitats or species, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk. Where relevant, explain how delivery of these improvements could involve the local community.

What we are looking for:

- Evidence that applicants understand the environmental baseline for the site and have considered how this should shape the project. Responses should show identification of relevant environmental constraints and opportunities, and an understanding of how the proposal could improve habitats, biodiversity and/or water quality and/or flood resilience.
- Responses should be proportionate to the scale of the project and clearly linked to the site. Where relevant, application sets out how the local community could be involved in delivering these improvements, for example through planting, habitat management or other forms of practical participation. Specific or measurable commitments should be included where possible.

Page Limit:

Your response must not exceed x2 A4 pages using a minimum font size Arial 11. Supporting evidence does not contribute to the page limit.

TQ5 – Value for Money (25%)

Principle: Proposals must demonstrate good value for money over a 10 year-time horizon.

Question: Explain how your proposal represents value for money over the next 10 years.

What we are looking for:

- a clear demonstration of appropriate use of funding aligned to the key activities needed to deliver the project;
- a detailed budget using the required template, with a clear explanation of cost assumptions;
- detailed information on total discounted costs and benefits, including maintenance costs, over the next 10 years. Alongside the economic benefits derived from an increased number of visits expected from the proposal, any additional environmental impacts, both benefits and disbenefits, will be assessed in accordance with the following ENCA guidance: Enabling a Natural Capital Approach guidance (accessible) - GOV.UK.
- match funding, where provided, that may strengthen value for money;
- additionality, meaning that national river walks funding enables, enhances or accelerates delivery and does not duplicate funding already in place for the same activity; and
- credible plans to maintain outcomes during the required obligation period

You must include:

- a budget using the required template (Annex B) and a clear explanation of how costs were derived;
- how procurement will deliver value for money, including quotes or tenders where appropriate;
- the role of any match funding, whether cash or in kind, and how it will be evidenced;
- how the grant enables, enhances or accelerates delivery and does not duplicate funding for the same activity; and
- your plans to sustain benefits after the funded period, including your maintenance approach.

Page Limit:

Your response must not exceed x3 A4 pages using a minimum font size Arial 11. Annex B (Budget Plan) does not contribute to the page limit.

TQ6 – Project Management (20%)

Principle: Proposals must demonstrate the project management skills needed for delivery.

Question: Provide evidence that your proposal is deliverable within the required timescales.

We are looking for:

- strong evidence of relevant delivery experience (lead and partners);
- clear governance and partnership arrangements, including roles/responsibilities;
- a credible permissions/consents pathway so grant awards are not delayed by unresolved access/approval issues;
- a realistic delivery plan with milestones and dependencies; a clear risk management approach, including mitigations for key delivery risks; a clear risk management approach, including mitigations for key delivery risks;
- a fully considered maintenance plan that supports safe, accessible, sustained benefits for at least 10 years.

You must include:

- relevant experience of the lead organisation and partners;
- partnership working approach and governance;
- approvals/permissions pathway (including what is already secured and what is pending);
- evidence that you have engaged the support of the relevant landowners, local highway authority or rights of way department. Acceptable forms of evidence include:
 - letters of support from local authorities;
 - landowner agreements or written confirmation (including in-principle agreements);
 - statements outlining approval pathways and timelines where permissions are pending.
- a delivery timeline and risk management plan (using the required templates Annexes C and D);
- engagement with Defra assurance processes where required (e.g. site visits or audits)
- a costed and funded maintenance plan for at least 10 years, including how the design reduces long-term maintenance risks.

Page Limit:

Your response must not exceed 3 A4 pages using a minimum font size Arial 11. Supporting evidence, Annex C (Project Delivery Planning Timetable) and Annex D (Risk Management Template) do not contribute to the page limit.

C4. What happens after you apply

C4.1 Notifications

We will notify successful and unsuccessful applicants of the outcome. Successful applicants will receive further information about issuing and managing the grant agreement (including registering on Authority's contract management system, Atamis, where required).

C4.2 Feedback

If your application is unsuccessful, we will notify you in writing and provide feedback.

C4.3 Clarifications during evaluation

We may contact applicants during evaluation to clarify aspects of an application to support a fair evaluation. Failure to respond, or to provide an adequate response within the timeframe given, may result in rejection.

Annexes

Located in the Find a Grant advert.

[Annex A – Terms and Conditions of Grant](#)

[Annex B – Budget Plan](#)

[Annex C – Project Delivery Planning Timetable](#)

[Annex D – Risk Management Template](#)

[Annex E – Partnership Form](#)