

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

ENVIRONMENT FUND CHALLENGE FUND COMPETITION Water Quality Improvement Strand 2020-21 Guidance notes.

CONTENTS

	Page No
1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. ELIGIBILITY – APPLICANTS AND PROJECTS	3
2.1 Who can apply?	3
2.2 Which Projects are eligible?	3
2.3 Match Funding	4
2.4 What type of project will the grant be awarded to?	4
3. ELIGIBILITY – COSTS	5
Project Costs	5
3.1 Which costs are eligible?	6
3.2 Projects and costs not funded by the Grant	7
4. MAKING AN APPLICATION	8
4.1 Before you apply	8
4.2 Demonstrating Value for Money	8
4.3 Application Submission	9
4.4 Compliance with Legislation	9
4.5 Grant Levels	9
5. ASSESSING APPLICATIONS	10
5.1 Stage 1 - Eligibility Assessment	10
5.2 Stage 2 – Technical Assessment	11
5.3 Final Decision	11
5.4 Notification of Final Decision	12
6. CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT OFFICER CONTACT DETAILS	13
Annex 1	14
NIEA Authorisations	14
Water Management Unit Authorisations	14
Waste Management Authorisations	14
Built Heritage Authorisations	15
Natural Heritage Authorisations	16

1. INTRODUCTION

Our aquatic environment is an important natural resource as it provides our drinking water and supports a wide range of economic activities for industry, agriculture, fisheries as well as recreational usage. It supports ecological habitats and species of national and international importance including some of the largest lakes in these islands, in Lough Neagh and Lough Erne.

The main rivers and lakes in Northern Ireland have been monitored regularly, both chemically and biologically, for more than 30 years. Since 2008 our river and lake water quality has been classified under a piece of European Union legislation called the Water Framework Directive (WFD). WFD classification is based around water bodies which are specific units of area calculated using river confluences and larger lakes. Biological, chemical and physical quality elements are monitored and combined to produce an overall classification for each waterbody. Water bodies can be classified as High, Good, Moderate, Poor or Bad status.

Within Northern Ireland, the WFD is the main driver for assessing our local waters and pushing us towards achieving good ecological status for our water environment

In the 2018 interim WFD classification of Northern Ireland's 450 water bodies 31% were classified as 'good' or better. This compares with 33% classified as 'good' or better in 2015. The WFD objective is to get 70% of water bodies to good status by 2021 with 99% at good or better status by 2027.

More information on the WFD is available at the link below:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/water-framework-directive>

The aim of the Water Quality Improvement Strand of the Environment Fund is to help communities deliver projects focused on improving water quality and work towards achieving good status. This fund is delivered through the Strategic Environment Programme (SEP). NIEA are using the Environment Fund as a mechanism for delivery of this programme. The funding is aimed towards resource funding and not capital funding, although small items of capital spend may be delivered as part of a wider resource project.

Priorities for Funding

Eligible projects must have a clear objective to improve the water quality. Those that address elements that are failing to reach Good status as defined under the Water Framework Directive will be looked upon more favourably. In making this funding available the Department will focus on supporting Projects which would not ordinarily be taking place. Project bids can be made that build on existing Projects and actions but it should be made clear how the elements that are being bid for go beyond that which has already been committed. The Water Quality Improvement Grant should not be used as a replacement source of funding.

The funding will be used to deliver Projects that improve any water quality in rivers, lakes, ground waters, estuaries, coastal waters, protected areas and heavily modified water bodies. Projects

that will benefit cross border water bodies can be considered but funding will only be eligible for those parts of the project which will be carried out in Northern Ireland and this should be made clear in the application.

2. ELIGIBILITY – APPLICANTS AND PROJECTS

2.1 Who can apply?

The grant scheme is open to a broad range of groups and organisations, including community groups, schools, Rivers Trusts, environmental charities, other interested not-for-profit organisations and local councils.

The organisation applying for the grant may have partners which are not eligible to apply directly or may sub-contract provision of services to such organisations.

Supporting information to confirm the status and financial standing of the organisation will be required.

2.2 Which Projects are eligible?

Central Principals

- Projects must be consistent with the aims and objectives of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency
- Grant applications will not be supported where work is targeted by other government grant schemes such as the *Environmental Farming Scheme* or the *Woodland Grant Scheme*
- Projects must have a clearly identified need
- Partnerships are encouraged where this will enhance the outcomes
- Grants are discretionary
- Grants will be awarded up to a value of 75% of the total project cost
- Grants are capped at £20k
- The Project must be completed by 31 March 2021
- A Letter of Offer must be formally accepted in advance of any expenditure on the project
- Grants are paid in arrears in up to two instalments and subject to the Conditions of Offer
- The Northern Ireland Environment Agency may publish details of all projects applying to and supported by the Water Quality Improvement Grant
- Complete application forms should be received by **noon on 31st August 2020**.

2.3 Match Funding

Grant Applicants must be able to demonstrate that sufficient match funding is available to complete their project. We can take account of contributions in-kind, including labour or donations of materials. When calculating the value of volunteer time please use the following standard rates below (as published by the Heritage Lottery Fund):

- unskilled tasks can be costed at up to £50 per day. This might include removal of aquatic invasive alien species, riparian planting;
- skilled tasks can be costed at up to £150 per day. This might include training in identification of aquatic alien species or verifying data in a species identification project; and
- professional tasks can be costed at up to £350 per day. This might include carrying out an ecological impact assessment or designing a river restoration scheme.

2.4 Granted Projects

This Water Quality Improvement Strand of the Environment Fund scheme seeks to support projects that address pressures affecting the water environment.

Projects can be as simple as planting native bank side vegetation or as complex as a catchment scale process restoration schemes.

Examples of potential projects may include:

Water Quality Actions:

- Creation of habitat
- Preparation of River restoration plans
- Fish passage improvement
- Riparian management
- Pollution management / prevention measures
- Natural flood management measures
- Wetland creation to improve water quality/flooding resilience

Public education / awareness:

- Community led awareness events with a water based theme
- Local waterbody leaflet / signage/ guide development
- Citizen science based river surveys
- Training workshops
- Local Pollution Prevention campaigns

The aim of the project must be to improve or help maintain the ecological status of the water environment.

For further information on all aspects of river restoration projects you may find this web link helpful: <https://www.therrc.co.uk/rrc>

If you have identified a project which will address water quality issues you should discuss the proposal with your local Catchment Management Officer before submitting your application. You can contact your Catchment Management Officer on RiverBasinPlanning@daera-ni.gov.uk.

You will also need to secure match funding as this scheme will only fund up to 75% of the Project cost.

3. ELIGIBILITY – COSTS

Project Costs

Project funding will be limited to the current financial year. Projects requiring repeat funding for an issue, campaign or area of work are not eligible for this grant. Projects should therefore clearly identify the area of need, resource requirements and scheme of work.

The project costs, staff and other resources required must be assessed carefully when preparing the application as there are limited opportunities for making amendments once the bid has been submitted and approved. Sufficient resources must be allocated to ensure the Project is being managed properly, keeping complete financial records and supporting documents.

Problems may be experienced if projects slip in relation to their expected financial spending profile, potentially leading to a loss of grant.

3.1 Which costs are eligible?

Administration and Overheads

The administration costs and day-to-day running expenses of an organisation will not be grant aided. These include accommodation and related costs, insurance charges, legal and other professional costs.

Costs should be identifiable and verifiable. General apportionment of costs as overheads is not acceptable as eligible costs. Only actual overheads relating to the Project are eligible costs. A reasonable apportionment basis such as a percentage of direct staff costs or a fixed hourly rate of time charged should be used.

Overhead items relating to the Project which may be included in the calculation are:

- Rent of building and plant
- Utilities such as water and electricity
- Maintenance, public liability insurance and office equipment or supplies

- Communication and postage costs

Overhead items which cannot be included in the calculation are financial management, human resources, training or legal advice unless they can be directly attributed to the Project. In this case the incurred cost should be charged to the Project directly and not included in the overheads.

Overheads, administration and on-costs should be no more than 20% of direct costs. The overall calculation method or percentage used should be specified on the application form.

Costs unrelated to the Project will not receive grant unless the Project could not proceed without incurring them, or where they were for reasonable environmental improvements. Examples might be:

- Reasonable extra costs for environmental enhancements and biodiversity gains.
- Reasonable costs to make a solution less environmentally intrusive or to sustain existing amenities.
- Where the Project reveals finds of such archaeological importance that approved works cannot continue without first securing the finds, additional costs may be considered for grant, but only at the minimum level to allow work to continue.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is prepared to consider, for grant aid, the salaries, national insurance and superannuation of an applicant's workforce who are solely engaged on the delivery of approved Projects, provided that these costs have not been included in any other public funding application. Records in respect of staff engaged on a Project, salaries paid and associated costs should be kept and made available for audit inspection.

Where appropriate public liability insurance costs relating to the Project are necessary, these will be eligible for the grant.

Any match funding which applicants receive from other funding bodies for the Project must be disclosed.

3.2 Projects and costs that cannot be funded by the Water Quality Improvement Strand

Funding will not be provided to those who have a duty to undertake specific work and cannot be used to ensure compliance with a legal obligation. Projects that duplicate work undertaken by other funding will not be grant aided.

All VAT must be excluded from budgets and claims if the VAT is recoverable by the beneficiaries. If the applicant cannot recover its VAT it can include a line item into the budget and claim form. VAT must be stated separately from other costs.

Water Quality Improvement Strand support will not normally be considered for the following:

- The purchase of vehicles and other mobile equipment
- Work which is targeted by other government grant schemes for specific work areas such as agri-environment schemes
- VAT, if the Grant Applicant can reclaim VAT
- Actions by individuals or businesses as part of a planning consent
- Projects which could progress without support from Government funding
- Work which is the statutory responsibility of another body
- The purchase of land or the purchase and construction of buildings
- Gifts or entertaining

Applicants also need to ensure that if they receive a Water Quality Improvement Grant, they do not contravene EU State Aid Rules. If you require further information please contact the Grant Administrators by e-mailing riverbasinplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk

4. MAKING AN APPLICATION

4.1 Before you apply

You are strongly encouraged to discuss your proposals with your local Northern Ireland Environment Agency Catchment Management Officer prior to submitting an application form. They will be able to give you an INDICATION of what elements of a project MAY be eligible for grant aid. You can make contact with your Catchment Officer via riverbasinplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk. You can find out the relevant Water body name, Identification Codes and WFD status for the locations of your work on the NIEA interactive web mapping tool: <https://apps.d.daera-ni.gov.uk/RiverBasinViewer/>

The final decision will be carried out by the Water Quality Improvement Grant Decision Panel and will depend upon the assessment of the completed grant application form and the availability of finance.

4.2 Demonstrating Value for Money

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency must ensure that the project represents value for money – that is, to weigh up the quality of the proposed activity against the cost of its provision.

At all stages of the assessment process consideration will be given as to how an organisation is minimising costs, sharing resources and maximising value for money.

Match funding is required to be secured for the Project. Projects will have a higher likelihood of success if the amount sought from NIEA is less than 75% of the Project cost. Match funding can be secured from a variety of sources such as other grants, membership fees, and donations or in-kind.

The Applicant shall implement the procurement procedures as set out in the table below. The actions related in the table should be implemented by the Applicant based on the estimated value (excl. VAT) of each contract at pre-tender stage. Procurement decisions must demonstrate best value for money and the Applicant must keep records, which support its decisions.

Estimated Value	Tender Action Required
Up to £5,000	2 Oral quotations – with fax or email confirmation. Every attempt should be made to obtain more than one quotation.
£5,001 - £20,000	4 Selected Tenders
>£ 30,000 < EU thresholds	Contact Grant Team for detailed requirements

It may not always be possible to obtain the required number of quotations, although reasonable effort to do so must be demonstrated. For procurements over £5,000 where only one supplier is available Departmental approval for the procurement must be obtained in advance.

4.3 Application Submission

Interested organisations with well developed project plans should submit their application for grant aid by downloading and completing the Water Quality Improvement Grant form available on the NIEA website <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/water-quality-improvement-strand-2020-21-application-form>. Instructions for submission are provided on the application form.

All sections of the Application Form must be completed. The completed form must be signed by an authorised senior member of the organisation to confirm that the information supplied is correct and that there is support from within the organisation.

The completed application should be accompanied by relevant supplementary information detailed in Section 6 of the Application Form.

Complete application forms should be received by **noon on 31th August 2020**.

4.4 Compliance with Legislation

In carrying out any project supported by the Water Quality Improvement Grant, the grant recipient must comply with the provisions of all the enactments, statutory provisions and other laws operating in Northern Ireland including, but not restricted to, those relating to planning, nature conservation, pollution, access, equal opportunities, fair employment and health and safety. European law, where applicable should also be followed. In cases of non-compliance, the Department reserves the right to suspend, defer, withhold or claw back any or all of the payments

and/or require the grant recipient to repay part or all the financial assistance. Details of NIEA authorisations which may be required are found in Annex 1 of this document.

4.5 Grant Levels

The Water Quality Improvement Grant budget is limited. Scoring against the assessment themes and criteria only determines the potential of a project to support the delivery of the River Basin Planning objectives. Additional factors will be assessed, alongside the outputs of other projects, before the final selection of projects to be supported is chosen.

The overarching factors the Northern Ireland Environment Agency will also consider include:

- Evidence of the need for the project and its outputs
- Value for money
- Your organisation's ability to manage and deliver the project
- How you will measure the progress and success of the project
- Environmental Impact
- Community Involvement

Grant applications may be refused or offered at a lower level of grant if there is insufficient budget or there are concerns about value for money or risks in delivering the outputs.

Grant Applicants must be able to demonstrate that sufficient match funding is available to complete their project. We can take account of contributions in-kind, including labour or donations of materials.

5. ASSESSING APPLICATIONS

5.1 Stage 1 - Eligibility Assessment

Based only on the information submitted, there will be an initial screening to assess if the application is from an eligible organisation and whether the core objectives of the proposed project are in line with the aims of the Water Quality Improvement Grant and fit within the scope of the River Basin Management Plans.

The assessment will consider how well each application:

- addresses the priority issues affecting water management within the water body or catchment area where the proposed Project will be carried out
- provides support to other initiatives within a catchment, avoiding duplication and conflict
- extends community involvement or the involvement of other organisations in delivering Water Framework objectives within the catchment.

You should aim to achieve project objectives by encouraging community involvement.

Similarly, you should try to show how projects form part of a wider consideration/awareness of the surrounding landscape. We particularly need to see how a proposed Project will fit in with the range of issues and actions being undertaken in the catchment as a whole. Projects that simultaneously deliver multiple benefits e.g. protection or improvement of Protected Areas as well as achieving clear sustainable improvements to water body ecological status are to be encouraged.

It is important you ensure that your proposals are compatible with other existing or planned initiatives in the Local Management Area and you show how your Project is integrated with that work. You should discuss potential overlaps with your local Catchment Management Officer.

Applications which do not pass this initial screening will not proceed to the Technical Assessment stage. Applicants unsuccessful at this stage will be informed within 10 days of the application closing date.

Projects which meet the Stage 1 criteria will then progress to Stage 2 - the technical assessment.

5.2 Stage 2 - Technical Assessment

Applications that have met the eligibility conditions will undergo a technical assessment from the Water Quality Improvement Grant Decision Panel using validation techniques to ensure objectivity. This panel will be made up from experts within the DAERA, and other independent technical experts.

The assessment will focus on three areas:

- Feasibility and effectiveness – the degree of confidence that the proposed project can be delivered within the time and cost estimated, and the certainty that the proposed benefits will ensue in terms of progressing towards ‘good’ water quality. The long term benefits of the project will also be considered.
- Community Involvement – the degree to which the project builds or extends community involvement or the involvement of other organisations in delivering Water Framework objectives in the catchment or provision of services to society.
- Wider Environmental benefits - the value of the project in terms of delivering enhanced biodiversity.

The Water Quality Improvement Grant Decision Panel are keen to ensure that Projects deliver value for money; with Project funding costs assessed against their likelihood of helping waters achieve the water quality objective of ‘good’ ecological status as set out in the River Basin Management Plans.

5.3 Final Decision

The decision of the Water Quality Improvement Grant Decision Panel is final.

In general the panel will give most weight to the assessment ratings that apply to feasibility and effectiveness and fit in with River Basin Management Plan objectives.

Whilst we look to ensure a good geographical spread of Projects across Northern Ireland there will be no upper or lower limit to the number of projects within a River Basin District.

5.4 Notification of Final Decision

Successful Applications

For successful applications the Northern Ireland Environment Agency will confirm to applicants the amount of funding to be awarded through an award letter and a Contract with the standard Grant Conditions and any other special conditions in the Contract Schedule. This will need to be signed and returned to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency before the Project can begin.

Unsuccessful Applications

Basic feedback will be given to each unsuccessful applicant as part of dialogue to enable potential Projects to be better aligned with future catchment goals.

Reserve List

In the event of a successful applicant withdrawing from the scheme, a prioritised reserve list of projects will be drawn up.

Annex 1

In carrying out any project supported by the Water Quality Improvement Grant, the grant recipient must comply with the provisions of all the enactments, statutory provisions and other laws operating in Northern Ireland including, but not restricted to, those relating to planning, nature conservation, pollution, access, equal opportunities, fair employment and health and safety. European law, where applicable should also be followed. In cases of non-compliance, the Department reserves the right to suspend, defer, withhold or claw back any or all of the payments and/or require the grant recipient to repay part or all the financial assistance. Details of some examples of Northern Ireland Environment Agency authorisations which may be required are found below.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency Authorisations

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency are the responsible body for granting authorisations relating to activities which impact the built and natural environment. The applicant should use the contact details below if the proposed project is likely to require any of the authorisations listed.

Water Management Unit Authorisations

Regulation of Discharges - Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, the consent of DAERA is required to discharge any trade or sewage effluent to any waterway, or any water contained in underground strata. This includes effluent from any commercial, industrial or domestic premises. For more information Telephone 028 9262 3127.

Abstraction and Impoundment Licensing - In order to protect plants, animals and to manage the use of this resource, the licensing of abstractions and impoundments is necessary. For more information Telephone 028 9263 3482.

Waste Management Authorisations

Under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, all activities involving the treatment, keeping or disposal of waste must be authorised by NIEA and must be carried out in accordance with that authorisation. For more information contact Gary Tate.

E-mail: WRU.Queries@daera-ni.gov.uk

Built Heritage Authorisations

Under Article 4 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects Order (NI) 1995 **Scheduled Monument Consent** is required for -

- (a) Any works resulting in the demolition, destruction or disturbance of, or any damage to, a scheduled monument;

- (b) Any works for the purpose of removing or repairing a scheduled monument or any part of it or of making any alterations or additions thereto; and
- (c) Any flooding or tipping operations on land in, on or under which there is a scheduled monument.

The HM Enquiries section (historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk) of Historic Monuments Unit should be contacted in the first instance.

Under Article 41 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects Order (NI) 1995 **a licence to excavate** is required for -

Excavation in or under any land (whether or not such excavation involves the removal of the surface of the land) for the purpose of searching generally for archaeological objects or of searching for, exposing or examining any particular structure or thing of archaeological interest.

The HM Enquiries section (historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk) of Historic Monuments Unit should be contacted in the first instance.

Article 44 of the Planning (NI) Order provides that **Listed Building Consent is required** for the demolition of a listed building and for any works of alteration or extension which would in any manner affect the character of a Listed building. **Planning permission is also required** in addition to Listed Building Consent if the works involve 'development'. In such cases, it will generally be preferable if both applications are considered concurrently.

Should you have a query about any such application or proposal then Historic Buildings Unit can be contacted at historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk.

Planning permission is normally also required through the planning process for any development proposal that would affect the physical remains or setting of an archaeological site or monument.

Should you have a query about any application or proposal then the HM Enquiries section of Historic Monuments Unit can be contacted at historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk.

Natural Heritage Authorisations

Designated sites - ASSIs, SACs and SPAs

The scheme must adhere to the statutory requirements associated with designations, Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for N2K sites and Assents for Councils and other public bodies for work within an ASSI as outlined in the table below:

Grant Applicant	ASSIs	SACs and SPAs
Councils and other Competent Authorities	The Competent Authority must notify NIEA Conservation Designations and Protection (CDP) unit if the project could affect an ASSI feature. CDP will decide whether they will issue Assent, with or without conditions, prior to any work commencing on a site.	The Competent Authority applying must undertake an HRA. Standard assessment pro-forma for an HRA is on the NIEA website https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/assi-guidance-public-bodiescompetent-authorities
Landowners and Community Groups	Consent must be received for the project. This must be issued by NIEA and can only be issued to the landowner – a 3 rd party can coordinate the application but it must be signed by the landowner.	The Competent Authority must undertake an HRA https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/assi-guidance-public-bodiescompetent-authorities

(National) Nature Reserves ((N)NRs)

If a project is proposed on a Nature Reserve or National Nature Reserve permission must be granted from the reserve manager

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/land-and-landscapes/nature-reserves>

Habitats and Species

There are a number of species protected on a European and National level. These are listed in the Schedules of the relevant legislation:

- Habitats Regulations – European protected species – particularly in your case bats and otters - The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 Schedule 2 & 3
www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1995/380/contents/made

- The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1985/171/contents
Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/15/contents

In addition, applicants are required to comply with legal requirements to prevent the introduction or spread of non-native invasive species.

For more information on protected species, priority habitats, priority species and invasive species contact Anne Murray

Telephone: 028 9054 6508

E-mail: anne.murray@daera-ni.gov.uk

The Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 (as amended) is equivalent to Part I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England and Wales and the Wildlife Act 1976 as amended by the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 in the Republic of Ireland.

This order gives us the power to issue licences to permit otherwise prohibited action to be taken to resolve problems where there is no other satisfactory solution.

The licensing system safeguards the conservation and welfare of wild animals but provides a way to allow action to be taken when necessary.

Telephone: 028 9056 9602

E-mail: Declan.Looney@daera-ni.gov.uk

Planning Permission

Planning Permission may be required before the Project can begin.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/making-a-planning-application>

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB)

If the project is within an AONB it would be useful to notify the AONB body in case a similar project is already being undertaken in the area. The AONB maps and contacts can be found at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/land-and-landscapes/areas-outstanding-natural-beauty>

Marine Division Authorisations

Details of when and how to apply for a marine licence, application forms and guidance documents can be found at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/marine-licensing>

Department of Infrastructure – Rivers Agency

If you plan to discharge to a watercourse or intend to carry out works that will impact on the free flow of a watercourse; approval is required from DfI Rivers.

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/schedule-6-application-consent-undertake-works-watercourse>

Lough Agency

Anyone wishing to artificial propagation of salmon or freshwater fish, scientific research or the improvement, remove river bed material from the freshwater portion of any river within the Loughs Agency's area or movement of fish within and into the waters of Foyle and Carlingford must also obtain a permit.

<https://www.loughs-agency.org/managing-our-loughs/conservation/river-permits/>