

# Environment Fund - Water Quality Improvement Strand

Environmental Priorities 2023-  
24

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

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## 1.0 Introduction

This is a grant competition, funding projects to deliver water quality improvements, help connect people with the water environment and bring about behaviour change. Applicants can apply for projects which are ready to deliver and are able to spend the grant fully by the end March 2024. The fund is aimed at local communities and voluntary organisations to run projects to bring about improvements in their local water environment.

## 2.0 Priorities for Funding

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. However, it should be made clear how the elements that are being bid for go beyond that which has already been committed / delivered. The Water Quality Improvement Grant should not be used as a replacement source of funding.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to view the current Water Framework Directive status of their chosen water body using the NIEA Catchment Data Map Viewer and Water Information Request Map Viewer: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/daera-map-viewers>

Projects which have a strong link with one or more of the following will be looked at favourably if they are located within;

- Local Management Areas; Belfast, Lagan, Roe, South Down and Strule which have been prioritised in the River Basin Management Plan 2021 - 2027. You can download the shapefile from <https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/@northern-ireland-environment-agency-water-management-unit/northern-ireland-local-management-areas>
- Protected areas dependent on water (Drinking Water Protected Areas, bathing waters, shellfish water protected areas, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Protected areas can be viewed on <https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/search-global?q=water+protected+areas>
- Water, nutrient and sediment retention related to Areas of Potential Significant Flood Risk (APFSR). A map of the APFSR sites can be viewed on page 4

(Figure 1-3)

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/second-cycle-ni-flood-risk-management-plan-may-2022.pdf>

Detailed descriptions of each APFSR site can be viewed on

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/second-cycle-northern-ireland-flood-risk-management-plan-2021-2027>

The fund will support up to 85 % of the total project cost, with the maximum of grant aid awarded to a single project limited to £30k and no less than £5k. You will need to demonstrate how your project delivers against at least one of the Fund's themes.

All on the ground project activity must take place in Northern Ireland.

Your local NIEA Catchment Officer can help interested groups through the application process to ensure they are addressing appropriate water issues, in line with the themes below and the priority areas.

Further information on the Water Quality Improvement Strand can be requested by e-mailing the Integrated Catchment Planning Team at [catchmentplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:catchmentplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk) you can get further details from your Catchment Officer ([RiverBasinPlanning@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:RiverBasinPlanning@daera-ni.gov.uk)).

### 3.0 Themes for Funding

The key themes for funding under this Water Quality Improvement strand of the Challenge Fund Competition are:

- **Connecting people with the aquatic environment to achieve behavioural change**
- **Conservation, protection and restoration of our aquatic environments**
- **Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation**

#### 3.1 Connecting people with the aquatic environment to achieve behavioural change

These projects will seek to increase the public's appreciation, understanding of and behaviour towards their water environment. Including, but not limited to, an

understanding of water quality pressures, how to reduce their impact on the water environment and how they can get involved and make improvements.

For example, projects may include actions contributing to:

- Volunteering, including the establishment of new local groups or greater public involvement within existing groups, to improve the water environment e.g. adopt a “local water body”, host a river day.
- Community engagement and citizen science for aquatic/ marine conservation, protection and improvement e.g. Anglers’ Riverfly Monitoring Initiative, Invasive non-native species identification and training, outfall safari training, litter picking (can include purchase of specialist equipment)
- Engaging and empowering the community to support to increase understanding of the water environment or develop citizen science skills, such as species identification or water quality monitoring, water conservation and development of digital/social media and webinars that tie in with behavioural change and raise awareness of key issues
- Local Pollution Prevention campaigns e.g. drainage misconnections, workshops, signage, leaflets

### **3.2 Conservation, Protection and Restoration of our Aquatic environments**

These projects should look to conserve, protect and restore our water environment.

Such projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Creation, protection or restoration of aquatic, coastal or marine habitat
- Creation of blue and associated green spaces
- Recovery of threatened aquatic and marine species
- Improving and maintaining fish passage
- Tackling invasive non-native species e.g. removal and biosecurity planning
- Preventing, removing or cleaning up pollution e.g. litter picking, wetlands, buffer zones, awareness raising
- Water quality surveying and monitoring e.g. Anglers’ Riverfly Monitoring Initiative, baseline surveys and post project surveys
- The development of restoration plans
- Action that aids the improvement of water quality e.g. tackling diffuse pollution

### 3.3 Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation

These projects should seek to work sustainably with the water environment to address socio-environmental issues, particularly in reference to climate change and flood risk management.

For example, projects may include, but are not limited to, action contributing to:

- Peatland and other wetland restoration to reduce pollution and flooding
- Natural flood management e.g. silt trapping including woody debris to drains, swales, attenuation ponds, measures to prevent soil erosion and nutrient run off
- Creating, enhancing or connecting blue and green infrastructure
- River or waterways bank stabilization and in-stream improvements
- Riparian management / tree planting, planting of native species/hedgerows, de-tunneling, etc.

### 3.4 Examples of Projects

Table 1 demonstrates some examples of the type of work or projects that are relevant to the three themes of this fund. Note that this list is not exhaustive and projects of all scales will be considered (within funding allowances). Further advice and information on setting out what your project will seek to deliver against the themes is provided within the Guidance Notes also available on the fund webpage:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/environment-fund-water-quality-improvement-strand>

**Table 1: Examples of Projects/ Activities**

Bank Stabilisation	Litter Picking	Bog Restoration e.g. drain blocking	Reports/Plans	Citizen Science, Awareness and Training
Signage/Water Literacy	Tackling diffuse pollution from land e.g. farm water quality restoration plan	Tree Planting	Feasibility studies	Rain Gardens and Nature based SuDS
Fish Passage	Invasive Non-Native Species prevention, treatment and removal	Fish habitat improvement e.g. gravel installation	Wetland creation, restoration and/or protection	Slow the Flow Measures e.g. hard surface removal, woody debris
Natural Flood Management	Education / Awareness	Programme of events linked to your project	Rainwater Harvesting and Water re-use e.g. water butt	Measures to prevent soil erosion and nutrient run off

## 4.0 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria and Overarching Factors that will be taken into account in assessing the project and allocating funding are:

- a) Applicants:** Applications may be submitted by constituted not for profit organisations or councils which will deliver measurable key environmental outcomes.

- b) Capital funding:** Capital projects include instream works, land purchase, creation of a product including data and plans. The product/item must have a value over £5,000 and an expected usage/ life of greater than 3 years.
- c) Minimum and Maximum grant:** The minimum overall project cost is £5,000. The maximum grant awarded will be £30,000 in 2023/24, except in exceptional circumstances. The maximum amount of Government funding available under the competition will be 85 % of eligible project costs.
- d) Value for money:** You must demonstrate that government funding is essential to enable the delivery of the outcome and that the project will be delivered in a cost efficient manner. The application must show how you will lever match funding which may include volunteer action.
- e) Full grant spend by 31/3/2024:** You must supply evidence that you will be able to achieve full spend of the grant by 31/3/2024. This evidence may include a project work plan, evidence of experience of completion of similar projects, planning permission or other permission required or clear proposals for match funding sources.
- f) Evidence of the need for the project and its outputs:** Applicants must outline how the project has been identified, why it is needed and how it will help ensure measurable improvement of water quality or the public appreciation of the water environment.
- g) Environmental Impact Priorities/ Criteria:** The project's positive environmental impact and how this will be measured and monitored.
- h) Scale:** Where the resources for allocation exceed the budget available for allocation to high priority projects, the scale of the impact of the proposed project will form a part in the decision-making process.
- i) Sustainable impact:** Projects that will not cause adverse impact to the environment and must show how the outcomes will be sustained and monitored after the funding period.



The following documents are available to download from the webpage:

- Application Form
- Guidance notes
- Environmental Statement Guidance Notes
- Indicative conditions of offer 2023/2024

For further information:

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