**Forest Society Grants: Applicant Guidance**

The Forest Society Grant scheme will fund new ways to support the health and wellbeing of residents and communities within the National Forest. It will engage new and diverse audiences, increase participation, and use local woodlands and linked greenspaces to harness the benefits of spending time outdoors and connecting with nature.

The National Forest 25-year vision is for a forest environment, forest society and forest economy that can work together to create a greener and healthier future. Our vision is for a National Forest society that reflects a strong Forest identity, fosters sustainable living, and promotes thriving communities. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of people being able to access woodlands and green spaces close to where they live. These spaces provided places for exercise, play, quiet reflection, and meeting others outdoors safely, whilst helping to strengthen our relationship with nature. The more recent cost of living rise, which has impacted essentials such as food and fuel, has only further increased the importance of the Forest for our health and wellbeing.

Through this grant programme we want to find new ways to support people as we continue to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and face increasing cost of living challenges; we want to demonstrate how the Forest can be a tonic for our wellbeing, to engage new and diverse audiences, and increase the range of activities on offer. These activities must benefit residents and communities living within the National Forest boundary.

**What’s on offer?**

We are looking to award no more than 4- 5 grants to projects within a rough budget range of **£2000 - £4,000.** It is not essential to have match funding to apply, but it may add support to your application. This includes any in-kind support.

**What sort of projects are we looking to support?**

We are looking to support new and innovative projects that will engage with local residents and communities (from all backgrounds, ages, and abilities) within the National Forest. We want to reach people who aren’t currently engaging with the outdoors, and are specifically interested in projects that support at least one of the following themes:

* 1. **Improve health and wellbeing** – promote and support health and wellbeing by connecting people with nature through local woodlands and greenspaces. Although not exclusive, we would welcome projects that support health professionals, social prescribers and green providers to work together, helping individuals access and benefit from these spaces, with a particular focus on mental health resilience.
  2. **Encourage participation** – engage and inspire National Forest residents and their wider communities to access the natural environment, learn new skills and benefit from new experiences outdoors. We are particularly interested in intergenerational projects that offer opportunities for young people aged 11 – 18 to engage with nature outside of mainstream education.

Projects will need to demonstrate how they have taken inspiration from the Forest (which may include its natural and/or built heritage).

**Grant Criteria**

Applicants will need to meet the following criteria:

* Demonstrate how the project will meet either of the two themes identified above.
* Describe who will benefit, considering any applicable target audiences from the themes above.
* Explain how the project will test new and innovative ideas/approaches to either wellbeing or participation in the environment.
* Evidence how you intend to sustain the activities and associated benefits beyond the life of the project.
* Ensure that activity is delivered within the National Forest boundary and benefits National Forest residents and communities.
* Projects will need to be completed between 1st April 2023 and Friday 8th March 2024.

**Who can apply?**

These grants are intended to attract new organisations and practitioners to trial innovative ways of working with us in the National Forest. Those who wish to apply to the fund must be able to demonstrate that their activity will have a positive impact on local communities within the Forest and will need to show clear commitment to supporting the priorities of this grant.

Organisations eligible to apply for this grant include:

* Voluntary groups
* Businesses
* Community Groups
* Creative organisations/Artists/Facilitators
* Charities/Social Enterprises/CICs

Other constituted organisations that work with community groups, but do not fall within the list above may be considered – please discuss this with the NFC team before applying.

The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the Midlands, including parts of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire – please see: <https://www.nationalforest.org/>

While we expect projects funded by these grants to be delivered within the National Forest boundary, organisations who apply need not be based in the Forest.

**Additional Considerations**

To ensure grants are allocated across a wide range of individuals/organisations each year, if you/your organisation received a Forest Society Grant in both 2021-22 *and* 2022-23 you will not be eligible to apply in 2023-24. You will be eligible to apply again in 2024-25.

All claim payments are made in arrears. The National Forest Company will aim to process claims within 5 working days, commencing from the date on which receipt of your claim and accompanying activity report has been confirmed. Confirmation will be sent to grant recipients via email.

**How to Apply**

You will need to complete an application form, which can be downloaded here and must be returned to the National Forest team by 13th February 2023.

Please complete the form carefully, making sure to include:

* A clear explanation of the project, its aims and the methods used to engage people.
* How you will measure success and demonstrate the benefits for participants.
* The expected impacts and legacy of the project, identifying how benefits created during the project may continue in the future.

**If you require further information or would like to have an informal discussion prior to submitting your application, please contact Hollie Davison at** [**hdavison@nationalforest.org**](mailto:hdavison@nationalforest.org) **or call 07816364775.**

The deadline for the submission of applications is **5pm on Monday 13th February 2023**. Applications need to be emailed to Hollie Davison at [hdavison@nationalforest.org](mailto:hdavison@nationalforest.org) or posted to the National Forest Company Office (address on application form).

If you need to submit your application or require further information in another format, please contact Hollie Davison using the details above.

**What happens next?**

Applications will be reviewed during the period 14th February to 24th February and all applicants will be notified of our decisions via email by the end of the day on Friday 24th February. If your application is successful, you will be sent a formal offer letter. We will then require written confirmation of your acceptance of the grant (on the “Acceptance of Grant Aid” form emailed to you with the offer letter) within one month of the grant offer. If you would prefer your grant to be paid by BACS transfer, please ensure that you have filled out the BACS information on the “Acceptance of Grant Aid” form before returning it. If your application is unsuccessful, you will be given feedback.

**Grant Conditions**

Please refer to the full ‘Conditions of grant Aid’ on the application form. In summary:

* The applicant agrees not to dispose of an asset purchased with grant aid without the prior approval of the National Forest Company.
* The grant does not cover ‘Capital’ items such as vehicles, computers, and office equipment; or items such as video-cameras. Consideration will be given to the temporary hire of such items, if relevant.
* The National Forest Company should be given credit for their support on all publicity material, including press releases if issued, applying the National Forest Company’s brand guidelines, and using the National Forest logo.
* On project completion the National Forest Company will require a short, written project summary and simple evaluation, evidencing project outcomes and achievements. Organisations may also be asked for information and images that would support the production of a case study.