**Forest Society Grants: Applicant Guidance**

The Forest Society Grant scheme will fund new ways to engage with National Forest residents and communities and those within the immediate surrounding area.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of people being able to access woodlands and green spaces close to where they live, particularly during difficult times. A few years on it is apparent that, now more than ever, these spaces can provide invaluable opportunities for time outdoors: for quiet reflection, exercise, learning new skills and gaining new experiences.

Your projects should support 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 to improve our wellbeing.

**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 residents and communities (from all backgrounds, ages, and abilities) within the National Forest and/or introduce new audiences from immediately beyond its boundary. We want projects to reach people who may face barriers to accessing the outdoors, may not currently connect with nature, or to broaden the experience of those that do.

We are specifically interested in projects that support one or more 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. We would welcome projects that strive to reduce barriers to engagement, helping individuals access and benefit from these spaces.
	2. **Encourage participation** – find imaginative and engaging ways to inspire people to access the natural environment, gain new skills and knowledge, and benefit from new experiences outdoors.

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

**Grant Criteria**

Applicants will need to meet the following criteria:

* Demonstrate how the project will meet either or both 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.
* Projects will need to be completed between 1st April 2024 and Friday 7th March 2025.

**Who can apply?**

These grants are intended to attract 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 what positive impact(s) their project will have and be prepared to show these impacts through monitoring and evaluation.

Organisations eligible to apply for this grant include:

* Voluntary groups
* Businesses
* Community Groups
* 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 2022-23 *and* 2023-24 you will not be eligible to apply in 2024-25. You will be eligible to apply again in 2025-26.

All claim payments are made in arrears. The National Forest Company will aim to process claims within 5 - 10 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](https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/components/downloads/files/National%20Forest%20Boundary%20Map_1.pdf) and must be returned to the National Forest team by 19th February 2024.

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 (i.e. quantitative and qualitative outcomes).
* The expected impacts, and how any benefits resulting from 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:** **enquiries@nationalforest.org** **or call 01283 551211.**

The deadline for submission of applications is **5pm on Monday 19th February 2024**. Applications should be emailed to **enquiries@nationalforest.org** or posted to the National Forest Company Office (address on application form), FAO: Community and Wellbeing Manager.

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

**What happens next?**

Applications will be reviewed during the period 19th February to 1st March. All applicants will be notified of our decision via email no later than noon on Monday 4th March. 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 (using 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 (including images) and simple evaluation, evidencing project outcomes and achievements. Organisations may also be asked for further information and images that would support the production of a case study.