



EMPOWER Rivers

Community Grant Information



EMPOWER Rivers Community Grant

Thames21 recognises the fantastic work being done by volunteers and community groups to improve the health of London's rivers. To support this work, Thames21 will be awarding grants of up to £20,000 for small-scale volunteer-led river restoration works and water quality monitoring initiatives. Thames21 has a total of £290,000 for this grant scheme to be awarded over the next 5 years.

This grant scheme is awarded as part of EMPOWER Rivers, a Thames21 project funded by the Lund Trust.

What does this grant fund?

1. Water Quality Monitoring Projects

Gathering reliable data on water quality is crucial for building understanding of river health. These data can be used to identify sources of pollution; to find solutions to combat pollution; and to monitor the effectiveness of these solutions.

Some water quality monitoring is carried out by professionals from organisations like the Environment Agency (EA), Thames Water, Thames21, and other river trusts. However, resources are limited, and the role of dedicated volunteer citizen scientists is becoming increasingly important.

Robust citizen science data can be used to influence change. There have been many cases across the UK where monitoring by trained citizen scientists has allowed early detection of pollution incidents that otherwise would have been missed, leading to vital intervention by the Environment Agency. In other cases, monitoring by citizen scientists has identified sewage pollution, leading to water companies, including Thames Water, addressing issues with sewage infrastructure. In still other cases, citizen science data has been used to inform decisions about where to create nature-based solutions such as wetlands, which improve water quality and create valuable freshwater habitats.

This grant will support volunteers to gather crucial data that will be used to inform action on river pollution. All successful applicants will be supported by Thames21 to develop suitable survey methodologies and trained in the appropriate survey techniques.

Thames21 would like to support the following water quality monitoring activities¹:

- Monthly Urban Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (RMI) surveys
- Regular monitoring of chemicals (like ammonia and dissolved phosphate) and physical parameters (like temperature, conductivity, pH and turbidity) at particular sites, for instance upstream and downstream of known polluting outfalls, at an RMI site, or upstream and downstream of wetlands or other nature-based solutions.
- Water sample testing by an accredited lab to investigate the concentration of priority pollutants (for example bacteria, nitrate, or road runoff pollutants like heavy metals)
- Other survey techniques will be considered if applicants can show that data collected will be robust and useful

¹ Thames21 offers training in all these water quality sampling methods.

Eligible costs:

Equipment for water quality monitoring:

- [Riverfly Partnership-approved RMI monitoring kits](#) from NHBS (includes net, bucket and trays)
- Handheld water quality monitoring devices and reagent ([mid-range ammonia](#) and [low-range phosphate](#) Hanna checkers and [Hanna meters](#))
- Lab analysis costs
- PPE and health and safety equipment such as waders, wellies, gloves, throw ropes, wading poles and first aid kits

Thames21 will consider funding equipment not listed above if applicants can show that data collected will be robust and useful.

A condition of the EMPOWER Rivers Community Grant for water quality monitoring activities is that data are collected and submitted using agreed methods which allow for all data to be made publicly available. Training will be provided to support this process. This is so that robust data are collected and can be used to influence action. More information will be provided to applicants upon request.

Water quality monitoring projects will be planned in collaboration with relevant catchment partnerships² to ensure data are collected in a coherent way and are used to influence action and decision making. Thames21 can help make the necessary connections between your project and the local catchment partnership.

If applicants wish to discontinue monitoring activities, Thames21 may ask you to return your equipment, so it can be used by others.

2. River Restoration Projects

Most of London's waterways are highly modified; they have been shaped by urbanisation and human interventions that have compromised their ecological integrity and reduced the benefits they can provide for people and wildlife. Thames21 is supporting community groups to help return London's rivers to a more dynamic and ecologically diverse state that will boost biodiversity and increase resilience to climate change.

This grant is intended for small-scale river restoration projects led by voluntary community groups and small charities. The [EMPOWER Rivers Large Grant](#) is intended for larger river restoration schemes led by landowners, local authorities and larger charities.

As part of the EMPOWER Rivers programme Thames21 will be developing a River Restoration Course that will enable volunteers to recognise issues that are impacting rivers, consider solutions and understand constraints. Thames21 will trial this course in later summer 2024. Some applicants may wish to consider completing this course before submitting an application.

Examples of river restoration activities that Thames21 would like to support with the EMPOWER Rivers Community Grant:

- creating berms
- adding large wood habitat

² You can find your local catchment partnership at <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/get-involved/?postcode>

- toe-board removal
- small-scale concrete and stone channel reinforcement removal
- small-scale weir removal and fish passage
- small-scale channel reprofiling
- backwater creation and restoration
- leaky dams
- installation of reedbeds including floating reedbeds
- planting (as part of wider improvements)
- invasive species control and removal (Himalayan balsam, floating pennywort, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed)

Thames21 will support successful applicants in the development of their river restoration proposals. All river restoration activities will require landowner approval; some will require permits such as a Flood Risk Activity Permit. Thames21 will support successful applicants to obtain the necessary permissions and permits.

All river restoration activities will be planned in collaboration with the relevant catchment partnership. Thames21 can help make the necessary connections between your project and the local catchment partnership.

Costs that can be supported using the EMPOWER Rivers Community Grant

Equipment, tools and materials for river restoration projects:

- PPE such as gloves, hard hats, high vis, life jackets, steel toe cap wellies and waders
- First aid kits, throw ropes, wading poles
- Tools including but not limited to: spades, mattocks, wheelbarrows, mallets, digging bars, litter pickers
- Hazel bundles, coir rolls, stakes
- Plants and small trees
- Storage boxes for equipment
- Equipment hire
- Equipment for events such as gazebos, tables, hot water flasks, etc...

We recognise that some river restoration activities will require help from contractors. We will also consider funding the following contractor activities:

- Invasive species removal (Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed)
- Vegetation management specialists
- Small-scale concrete bank reinforcement removal
- Weir removal
- Chanel re-profiling
- Backwater creation and restoration
- Surveys

Costs that cannot be supported using the EMPOWER Rivers Community Grant

- Staff costs
- Organisational overheads

Who can apply?

This grant scheme is intended for projects that are instigated, led and largely delivered by volunteers and community groups. We will also accept applications from smaller charities (annual income of less than £1 million).

Applications from projects that involve physical river improvements must be submitted by recognised community groups such as River Action Groups or Friends groups, or by registered charities. Find out more about how to set-up a River Action Group [here](#).

Applications from projects that involve physical river improvements must take place in Greater London, defined for the purposes of this grant as within the boundary of one of the London Boroughs.

Applications for water quality monitoring projects can be submitted by individuals and unofficial groups as well as recognised community groups.

Applications for water quality monitoring projects outside of the boundary of Greater London will be considered if applicants can show that the data obtained will be relevant to watercourses within the boundary of Greater London.

Applications will not be accepted from:

- Local authorities
- Businesses
- Larger charities (annual income of more than £1 million)

However, Thames21 will consider applications from organisations of the types listed above if made jointly with voluntary community groups or small charities.

How will grants be received?

Where possible, Thames21 will purchase equipment, tools and materials directly and deliver them to successful applicants.

For applicants that are recognised community groups or small charities and have an official group bank account, Thames21 may in some cases be able to transfer the award by bank transfer. In this case we will require proof of expenditure.

Successful applicants will be required to sign a grant agreement which will define the terms of the grant, including reporting requirements.

Grant timeline

Thames21 will accept applications for the first round of the grant scheme from April 30th 2024 until September 30th 2024.

Grants for under £2K will be assessed monthly and Thames21 will aim to inform you if you have been successful within two months of your submission.

Grants for over £2K will be assessed on the following dates:

- July 18th

- October 10th

Thames21 will let you know whether you have been successful or whether additional information is needed approximately a week after each of these dates.

More complex projects that are seeking larger grants will likely require a site visit so that Thames21 can assess feasibility.

On September 30th 2024 the scheme will close to applications. It will be relaunched in Autumn/Winter 2024 and will run until 2028.

How to apply?

Email empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk to request an application form and budget spreadsheet. Please complete and return these to the same address along with any supporting documents or photos.