



EMPOWER Rivers

Large Grant Information



EMPOWER Rivers Large Grant

Healthy rivers are a vital part of the natural environment, but London's rivers are far from reaching their ecological potential. None are classed as having good ecological status under the EU Water Framework Directive. Most are highly modified, shaped by urbanisation, and human intervention that has compromised their ecological integrity and reduced the benefits they can provide for people and wildlife. London's rivers suffer from a range of pollution issues including sewage pollution, road run-off and agricultural pollution which can have disastrous consequences for river ecosystems. Climate change is increasing the frequency of extreme rainfall events and as a result flooding is becoming a problem of increasing magnitude.

To address these issues, Thames21 is supporting the adoption of Nature-based Solutions (NbS). River restoration and wetland creation can help create rivers that are resilient to the impacts of climate change, with cleaner water, thriving ecosystems and vibrant communities who come to enjoy them.

Thames21 is awarding four grants of £100k to fund four large river restoration and/or wetland creation schemes in Greater London over the next four years. The charity is looking for schemes that have demonstrable benefits for river ecosystems and the communities that surround them. One grant will be awarded each year from 2024 – 2027.

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

Purpose of the grant

This grant is intended for large-scale river restoration and wetland creation projects led by landowners, local authorities, and larger charities.

River restoration aims to reinstate natural processes and restore biodiversity through a range of interventions and management techniques. Successful river restoration projects create dynamic and interesting blue/green spaces that have multiple benefits for people and wildlife.

Wetlands make space for water in the landscape, reducing the risk of flooding downstream. They treat polluted surface water before it reaches rivers, and they create vital freshwater habitats and beautiful spaces for people to enjoy.

Successful applicants must demonstrate how they plan to maximise the social benefits of their project and how they plan to involve communities at all stages of their project from design to implementation and beyond.

Thames21 also administers the [EMPOWER Rivers Community](#) Grant which is intended for smaller schemes led by community groups and smaller charities.

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

- constructed wetlands
- floodplain reconnection
- channel realignment (re-meandering)
- channel resectioning (reprofiling banks)
- de-culverting
- concrete and stone channel reinforcement removal

- weir removal and fish passage
- stage zero restoration

Examples of smaller scale restoration activities that could be included as a part of a larger scheme:

- backwater creation
- planting in-channel, on the riverbank or on the bank-top
- creating berms
- adding wood deflectors
- toe-board removal
- leaky dams
- installation of floating reedbeds
- invasive species removal (floating pennywort, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed)

Eligible costs

Costs that can be supported by the EMPOWER Rivers Large Grant:

- equipment and materials
- plant hire
- contractor and consultant costs
 - construction
 - surveys – ecological, underground utilities, topological, hydromorphological, river condition assessment, post construction monitoring, flood risk assessments
 - design of interventions
 - community engagement
- project-specific staff costs – salaries of staff who are essential to the project and whose salaries aren't already covered by other funding

NB: This grant is intended to fund the design and delivery of projects, applications that focus on development of projects are unlikely to be successful.

Costs that can be supported with restrictions:

- a maximum of 10% of the total grant can be used to contribute towards organisational overheads necessary for project delivery (for example, rent, bills, administration)
- a maximum of 7% cent of the total grant can be used for contingency.

The grant cannot be used towards the following costs:

- purchasing land
- activities that already been funded from other sources (this grant can be used to expand existing projects)
- routine maintenance activities
- non-project specific staff costs
- activities outside London (i.e. not within the boundary of a London borough)
- activities that have taken place or are due to take place before a grant decision is made
- profit-making activities

Funding terms

Award of this grant is subject to a formal decision-making process. You must not place any reliance on this grant until formally notified in writing that your application has been successful, and a grant agreement has been signed by an authorised signatory.

There will be one successful applicant in each yearly round of the grant scheme. Each successful applicant will receive £100k which will be paid in arrears following project completion and on receipt of project evaluation report and proof of expenditure.

Match funding

Applicants must show that match funding has been secured or demonstrate a strategy for seeking match funding to support their projects. There may be opportunities for Thames21 to support successful applicants in obtaining match funding from a range of sources.

Who can apply?

Eligible organisations include:

- Local authorities
- Landowners
- Charities and other not-for-profit organisations
- Farmers

We will consider applications from formally constituted community groups if applying in partnership with any of the organisations or entities listed above.

Project must be situated within the boundary of one of the 32 London boroughs.

Application process and timings

You can request an application form and budget template by emailing empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk. To submit an application please return the following documents to empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk.

1. a completed application form,
2. a completed budget, milestones and risks spreadsheet and
3. any supporting documents

Following receipt of applications Thames21 will create a shortlist of projects and then arrange site visits to gain more information before making a final decision.

Key dates:

- Application open – May 7th 2024
- Clarification questions deadline – 5pm June 17th 2024
- Application deadline – 5pm July 3rd 2024
- Shortlisted applicants will be informed – 26th July 2024
- The project team will arrange site visits to gain more information about proposals of shortlisted applicants – 29th July – 16th September 2024
- Successful applicant will be informed – 20th September 2023
- Grant agreement signed – September/early October 2024

- Project delivery starts – November 2024
- Delivery of project complete, payment of grant on receipt of Evaluation Report – October 2025

Selection criteria

Environmental impact: the project must have significant benefits for river ecosystems which may include:

- reinstatement of natural hydromorphological processes
- increased biodiversity
- improved water quality
- improved drought resilience
- flood alleviation

Social impact: applicants must show how will maximise the positive impact of their project on the communities that surround it as well as how they intend to involve local communities at all stages of the project from design to implementation and beyond.

Deliverability: applicants must show that the project can be delivered within the grant timeline; key risks must be identified and mitigated.

Experience and expertise: applicants should be able to draw on relevant experience of delivering similar projects and/or demonstration of relevant expertise.

Value: projects should show good value for money.

Equal weighting is given to each criterion.