



# EMPOWER Rivers

## Community Grant 2025



# 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 volunteer-led river restoration works and water quality monitoring initiatives. In this round of the grant there is £60,000 - £80,000 to be awarded. Subsequent rounds of the grant will be available in 2026 and 2027.

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

## What does this grant fund?

### 1. River Restoration Projects

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 has developed a course called An Introduction to River Restoration that enables volunteers to recognise issues that are impacting rivers, consider solutions and understand constraints. Check out our [What's On](#) page to see if there are any upcoming courses.

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

- creating berms
- adding large wood habitat
- 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 to refine 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 should be planned in collaboration with the relevant catchment partnership<sup>1</sup>. Thames21 can help make the necessary connections between your project and the local catchment partnership.

## 2. 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. Citizen science data has also 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.

### Training and Monitoring Strategies:

The EMPOWER Rivers Community Grant strongly prefers applications in which water quality monitoring activities are conducted as part of a coordinated monitoring strategy planned in collaboration with the relevant catchment partnership. This is to ensure that data collected are aligned with catchment-level objectives and can be used to influence action.

Please note that the main way EMPOWER Rivers is supplying individual citizen scientists with water quality monitoring equipment is via our Become an AquaTracker and Urban Riverfly training courses. This is so that citizen scientists can be trained in the different survey techniques before receiving equipment, and we can work with them on a strategic catchment-wide monitoring strategy.

Please contact [citizenscience@thames21.org.uk](mailto:citizenscience@thames21.org.uk) to find out if Thames21 has an active or upcoming citizen science monitoring strategy in your area.

We welcome applications for any London-based citizen science projects that include a coordinated water quality monitoring strategy with specific aims and a plan for how to analyse and use data. For example, this might look like a programme of road runoff monitoring or bacterial sampling in areas identified within a targeted monitoring strategy, with the community grant covering lab costs.

### Suggested water quality monitoring methods:

- Monthly [Urban Riverfly](#) Monitoring Initiative surveys
- Regular monitoring of chemicals (like ammonia and dissolved phosphate) and physical parameters (like temperature, conductivity, and turbidity) at particular sites, for instance

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<sup>1</sup> You can find your local catchment partnership at <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/get-involved/?postcode>

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

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

## Eligible Costs

**The following costs 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
- Materials such as: 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
- Channel re-profiling
- Backwater creation and restoration
- Surveys

Water quality monitoring equipment:

- 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)
- Conductivity and temperature probes
- Secchi tubes for measuring turbidity (cloudiness)
- 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.



**The following costs 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 for water quality monitoring projects must be part of a coordinated monitoring strategy.

Projects must take place in Greater London, defined for the purposes of this grant as within the boundary of one of the London Boroughs.

**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 paid?

In most cases grants will be paid in arrears on receipt of an invoice and proof of expenditure. In some circumstances it may be possible to pay grants in advance.

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

## Key dates

- Open for applications from March 10th 2025
- Application deadline – 10am June 2nd 2025
- Applicants will be made aware of outcome by 27th June 2025

Please note, these dates are indicative and may be subject to change.

## How to apply?

Email [empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk](mailto:empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk) to request an application form and budget spreadsheet. Please complete and return these to [empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk](mailto:empowerrivers@thames21.org.uk) along with any supporting documents or photos.