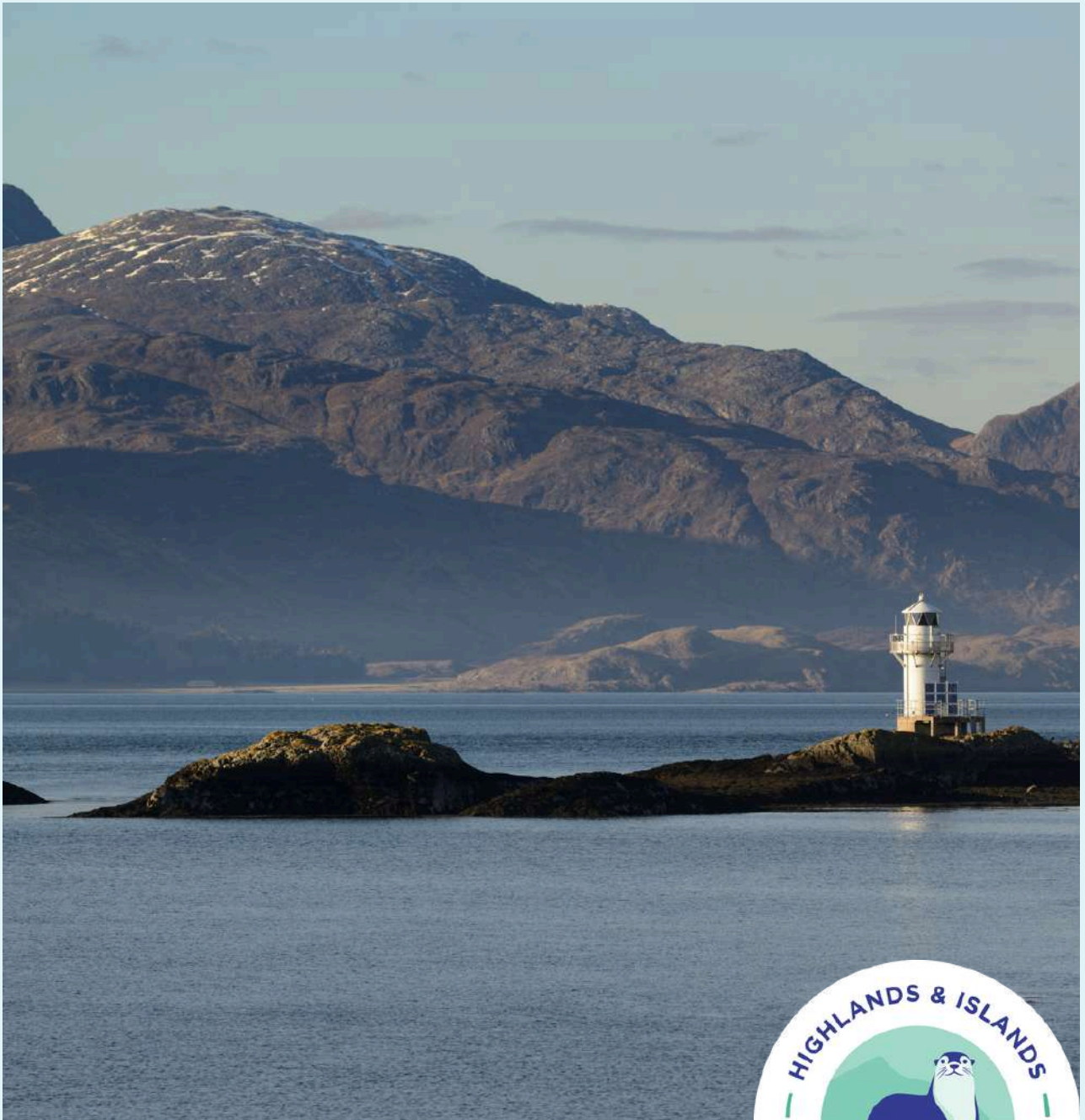


# **HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION**



**FUNDING GUIDANCE**  
**FEBRUARY 2026**



# INTRODUCTION

The Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation offers grants between £5,000 and £20,000 to grassroots, community-centred projects aiming to protect and restore nature.

There are three application rounds a year, usually in February, June, and September. Dates will be shown on the HIEF website from early January each year.

Individuals and groups interested in applying are strongly encouraged to get in touch prior to submitting an application.



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# ELIGIBILITY

## WHERE?

HIEF will support projects throughout the Scottish Highlands & Islands. Projects taking place in areas that fall slightly outside the boundary may still be eligible; please get in touch if in doubt.

## WHO?

Local non-profit organisations, associations, clubs or unions, social co-operative enterprises &/or other local bodies, including research centres, are encouraged to apply for grants.

Non-local applicants already active in the area, or relevant experts, may also be eligible for grants, if they show that they have the support of local communities, they can offer capacity building to local communities &/or significant impact through their work on the ground.

Organisations previously supported should get in touch to discuss a new application before submitting an Expression of Interest (EoI) form, as there may be additional requirements for repeat-funding requests.

## WHAT?

HIEF supports a variety of projects, including baseline surveys, species reintroductions, natural regeneration, education initiatives, and policy & advocacy work. Projects must fit into one of HIEF's Areas of Interest on Page 3, and are considered against the criteria on Page 4.

If you are unsure about whether your proposed project would meet the HIEF criteria, please contact Louis ([louis@hief.scot](mailto:louis@hief.scot)) for an informal discussion before completing an EoI.

# AREAS OF INTEREST

HIEF grants focus primarily on these four areas of interest, but applications may be accepted for projects that fall outwith these areas.

## TACKLING ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

Supporting projects that confront the root causes of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, or pollution. This includes addressing, or challenging, threats such as:

- Plastic pollution & waste
- Destructive fishing & intensive fish farming
- Barriers to natural regeneration (e.g. overgrazing)
- Invasive non-native species



## PROTECTING HABITATS AND SPECIES

Projects that proactively protect, monitor, or safeguard valuable ecosystems and at-risk species. This includes:

- Research & monitoring to inform conservation
- Habitat protection initiatives (e.g. woodland ranger)
- Species protection initiatives (e.g. whale & dolphin rescue)
- Creating stronger, more effective conservation & protection (e.g. MPA enforcement)



## RESTORING ECOSYSTEMS

Supporting nature's recovery by restoring damaged, degraded, or missing habitats & species. This includes:

- Woodland restoration
- Marine restoration (e.g. seagrass & oysters)
- Freshwater restoration (e.g. riparian woodlands)
- Coastal restoration (e.g. saltmarsh, dunes)
- Reintroduction of keystone species (e.g. water voles)
- Rewilding & nature-based solutions (e.g. rewetting)



## EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR NATURE

Building the capacity, confidence, & leadership of communities to steward their local environment. This includes:

- Environmental education connected to place
- Capacity building, training & skills provision for community groups aiming to protect & restore nature



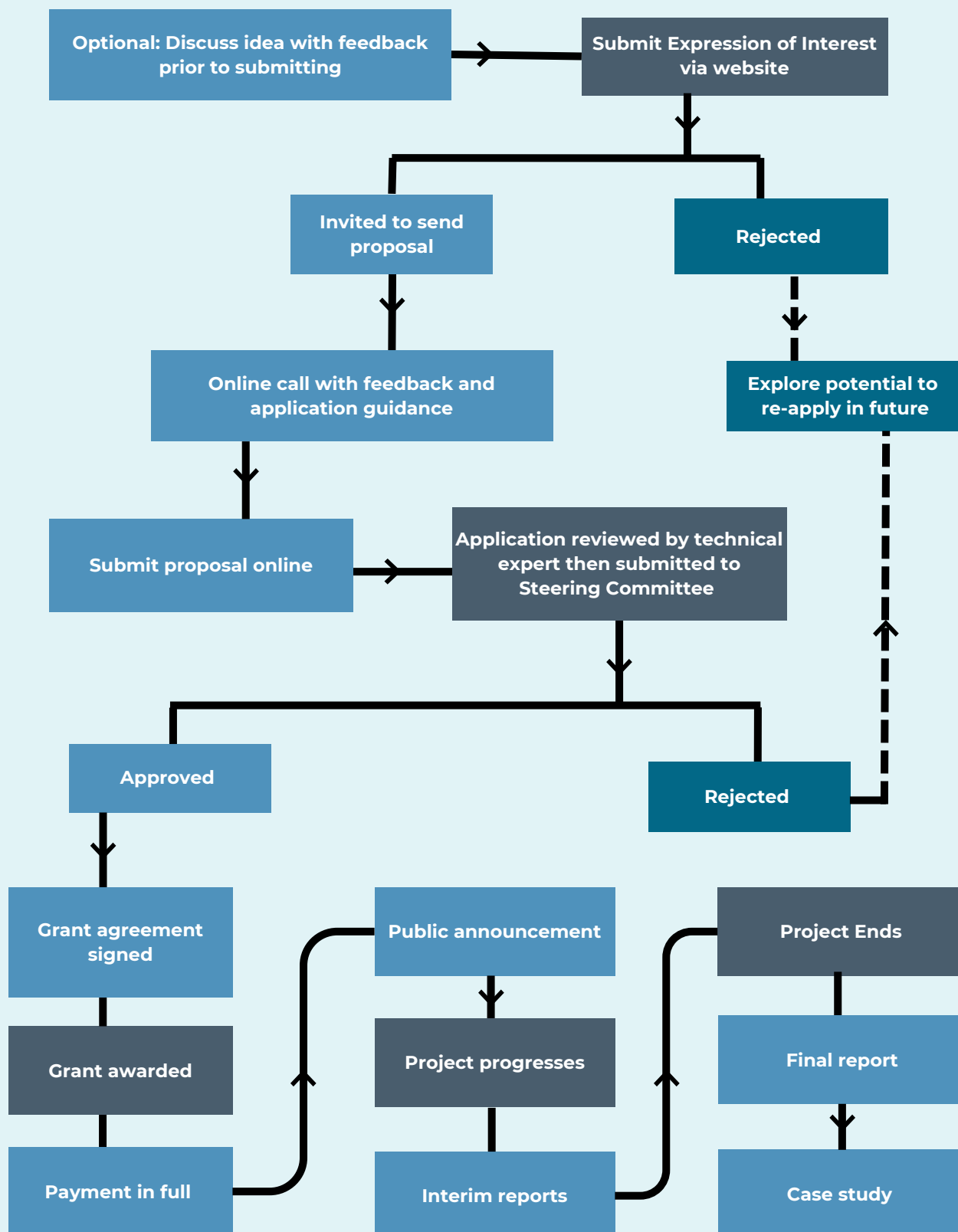
# WHAT WE LOOK FOR IN PROJECTS

Applications to HIEF should demonstrate environmental impact as the primary aim of the project, and also fit into at least one of HIEF's Areas of Interest. We also consider the following themes when assessing applications:

Theme	What we look for
Environmental impact	Clear and compelling environmental impact aligning with HIEF Areas of Interest
Social impact	Clear and compelling social impact through community involvement or leadership
Innovation	Uses new or alternative approaches to solving environmental problems
Replicability	Shares methods, data, or tools so others can copy or adapt the model, multiplying impact across the Highlands & Islands
Scalability	A grant will kickstart a project, or enable a 'step change' – expanding the project's scale & influence
Financial Sustainability	Has a credible path to continued funding or income after the grant period (follow-on funders, sustainable income)

NOTE: Rather than strict criteria, these are guiding principles used to compare applications. Projects are expected to be stronger in some areas than others.

# GRANT PROCESS FLOWCHART



# GRANT PROCESS EXPLAINED

## GRANT APPLICATIONS

- Presented to Steering Committee meetings three times a year and decided democratically
- HIEF communicates decisions to the grantee providing feedback

## TECHNICAL REVIEWERS

- Experts in the relevant field who review applications for HIEF on a pro-bono basis

## GRANT AGREEMENT includes:

- Conditions of grant
- Awarded amount
- Reporting requirements

## INTERIM REPORTS

- Three times a year
- Can be via email, word doc., zoom call, or video
- Allows HIEF to share updates publicly (as agreed) and at SC meetings

## CASE STUDY

- Shared on HIEF website, social media, newsletter and publications
- Content agreed between HIEF and grantee before publication

## FINAL REPORT

- Online form sent by HIEF
- Measures project impact by reporting main results against the outcomes and indicators selected in the grant application

## TIMELINE

Submit Expression of Interest

Invited to send proposal

Submit proposal online

Grant awarded

2 WEEKS

2 WEEKS

4 WEEKS

# CROWDFUNDER

Crowdfunding campaigns have the potential to be hugely impactful in raising not only funds, but also awareness, for your project and/or organisation. These campaigns are most successful when they offer match-funding to encourage people to donate by boosting the value of their donation at no additional cost to themselves.

HIEF offers pledges of up to £10,000 of matched funding for Crowdfunding projects so that every £1 donated by the public will be matched by £1 from HIEF up to the value of the pledge.

In September 2024, HIEF ran a pilot matched-fund crowdfunding campaign with Bute Forest raising £30,000 for the retention of their Forest Ranger. Of the £30,000 raised, £10,000 came from HIEF, £10,000 came from the Aviva Community Fund and Employee Giving (through their partnership with the Crowdfunder platform), and £10,000 came from individuals and businesses both locally and further afield.

## HOW IT WORKS

- Contact Louis (louis@hief.scot) to discuss your proposal
- Submit a Crowdfunder concept note (available [here](#)) ahead of the deadline
- Your proposal will be considered alongside EoIs via the Grant Process on page 5
- Successful proposals will have the opportunity to work with HIEF to plan and deliver the campaign (e.g. strategy, marketing)
- A grant agreement will state how the funds are transferred from HIEF to Crowdfunder, then released as match funding





## CONTACT

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