



MINISTRY FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Environmental Funding Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations

Funding Guidelines

2016

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Environmental Funding: Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations

Funding Guidelines 2016-2017

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change, on behalf of the Government, is offering financial support to non-Government, not-for-profit organisations engaged in environmental conservation and its promotion, in recognition and support of the valid and effective effort and contribution they make in the sector, and to incentivate further environmentally-beneficial initiatives.
- 1.2 Government's electoral manifesto explicitly identifies the setting up of a fund to assist voluntary organisations that are active in this field. The **Environmental Funding (Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations)** has been purposely set up to implement this measure.

2.0 Objectives

- 2.1 The Environmental Funding (Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations) is aimed to support non-Government, non-profit voluntary organisations to undertake tangible environmental conservation projects and initiatives that have the potential to:
- (i) improve the state of conservation of the environment;
 - (ii) promote responsible environmental management and raise awareness about environmental conservation and protection;
 - (iii) assist in progressing good environmental management practices;
 - (iv) restore degraded environments to their pristine condition;
 - (v) combat, and if possible, reverse environmental degradation and habitat deterioration;
 - (vi) protect, rescue or rehabilitate indigenous wildlife (both terrestrial and marine);
 - (vii) develop and foster closer collaboration on environmental initiatives between these organizations and the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change;
 - (viii) strengthen the set-ups engaged in environmental conservation, environmental restoration and provision of environmentally-beneficial services;
 - (ix) enhance the provision of community education programmes, including development of educational material, regarding the environment, its appreciation and its conservation; and/or
 - (x) otherwise contribute to any of the above-listed objectives, *inter alia* by serving as pilot initiatives for eventual environmental projects, or by catalysing or kick-starting any such project.

3.0 Targeted Actions

- 3.1 The Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change has identified various environmentally-beneficial actions that would merit support through funding. These

actions will be further explored in consultation with the Environment and Resources Authority and will be advertised each year as part of the funding application process. A list of actions falling within the scope of the current scheme is included in **Appendix 1**.

4.0 Management and administration of the Scheme

4.1 The grant support scheme will be managed by the Environmental Funding (Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations) Committee, composed as follows:

- (i) The Ministry's Director General of Operations as Chair;
- (ii) Representative of the Ministry's Directorate for the Environment and Climate Change as member;
- (iii) Representative of the Environment and Resources Authority as member;
- (iv) Representative of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector as member; and
- (v) Representative of the Office of the Permanent Secretary as member.

In the exercise of its functions, the Committee shall be assisted as necessary by the Office of the Permanent Secretary, which shall also provide secretarial support. The Committee may also request additional expert advice as may be relevant, particularly in relation to any specialised case merits (e.g. methodological specifications).

4.2 The Committee shall be entrusted with:

- (i) managing the scheme on an ongoing basis in an effective and efficient manner in accordance with the established objectives and criteria, and in line with good conservation and environmental management practice;
- (ii) establishing requirements, procedures, and ancillary documentation and application forms;
- (iii) ensuring fair, transparent and equitable selection procedures, and ensure compliance with all applicable rules, regulations and good practice standards;
- (iv) assessing applications against the objectives, parameters and criteria set out herein and prioritise them accordingly, and request any required clarifications from applicants for purposes of assessment;
- (v) submitting recommendations to the Minister for approval including, in special circumstances, any recommendations for any specific waiver of administrative limitations where this would be in the interest of effective environmental conservation. The Committee shall also have the prerogative to retain (and not allocate) part of the Fund for contingency purposes;
- (vi) informing applicants with the outcome of their application, and liaising with successful applicants for signing of the grant agreement;
- (vii) authorising payments in respect of approved grants;
- (viii) monitoring the implementation of funded projects to ensure compliance with the grant conditions and with environmental good practice, as well as to ensure full accountability by applicants for their initiatives, actions and deliverables; and
- (ix) ensuring compliance with these guidelines, and taking any initiative or action in line with these guidelines.

5.0 Eligibility for funding and Project selection

5.1 Eligibility pre-requisites

- (i) Applicants must be non-Government, non-profit voluntary organizations, with a clear primary focus on environmental conservation.
- (ii) At the date of application, applicants must be duly enrolled with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organizations and must also be compliant with the Voluntary Organizations Act, 2007 and its subsidiary legislation.
- (iii) Funds shall only be granted for projects that are in line with the terms of these guidelines.
- (iv) The project deliverables should have a definite completion timeframe of not more than 24 months from the date of the grant agreement, subject to **clause 4.2(v)** above.
- (v) Applicants involved in any relevant breach of environment protection regulations or other relevant infringements, such as illegal development in the countryside or non-compliance with environmental conditions of any permit, shall not be eligible for funding.
- (vi) Projects which explicitly or implicitly involve or entail any endorsement, sanctioning or facilitation of any malpractice (including: introduction or aggravation of on-site hazards, unauthorised access to private property, environmentally-relevant infringements, illegal interventions or activities, or any breach or circumvention of relevant permits or existing environmental obligations) shall be ineligible for funding.

5.2 Assessment criteria

Each application shall be assessed by the Committee against the following criteria:

- (i) the extent to which the project meets the objectives, parameters, requirements and criteria set out in these guidelines and in the call for applications;
- (ii) the assessed relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness and reliability of the proposal in meeting and addressing environmental needs and providing tangible environmental benefits;
- (iii) the wider implications of the project, particularly any other benefits, adverse impacts or consequences on the environment;
- (iv) comprehensiveness of the project plans, soundness of budget and value for money;
- (v) clarity of focus on achieving the declared outcomes in the most effective way and securing net long-term benefit;
- (vi) the demonstrated need, feasibility and sustainability of the project, as well as complementarity with other environmental projects and deliverables;
- (vii) strategic value in achieving the longer-term purposes of the Fund, and the extent to which the project can act as a catalyst for further environmental improvement or for the uptake of good environmental practice;
- (viii) the suitability, effectiveness and reliability of proposed methodologies, including any associated safeguards;
- (ix) the compatibility of the any site-specific interventions with their environmental context;
- (x) the demonstrated ability and capacity of the applicant to successfully and lawfully implement the project in a timely and effective manner, and to meet appropriate environmental standards, and the applicant's track record in this regard; and
- (xi) the budget available under the Fund, and evaluation of the proposal relative to the merits of other eligible applications for the purpose of prioritisation or apportionment of available funds.

Proposals may be approved wholly or partly, or rejected, on the basis of the above criteria. The Committee shall also have the prerogative to request further information, amendments or clarifications as it deems appropriate at any stage, and/or to leave as reserved matters any details that may be premature vis-a-vis the in-principle decision on the project but which would need to be addressed at a later stage before implementation.

6.0 Other funding parameters

6.1 Funding limitations

- (i) Funding shall only cover costs that are reasonably necessary for the implementation of the chosen project and, unless otherwise authorised, included in the proposed budget for the project. Eligible costs must be identifiable as specific costs directly linked to the performance and implementation of the project.
- (ii) The grant shall not exceed 80% of the total estimated cost of the project, and the maximum allocation for each project shall not exceed €10,000 unless otherwise deemed advisable by the Committee and approved by the Minister.
- (iii) No double financing of any intervention, work, activity or purchase is allowed. In the interest of encouraging complementarity with other environmental programmes, projects that have already been granted Government or European Union funds may be eligible for funding as long as such funding is not directed to any project component in respect of which any such grant has been issued.
- (iv) Funding may be granted to finance projects that also involve commercial elements which, in the Committee's opinion, are of a reasonable and limited nature, are strictly ancillary to the overriding environmental deliverables of the project, and do not constitute the primary consideration behind the project.
- (v) No finances shall be awarded retrospectively for already-completed projects, unless otherwise deemed appropriate by the Committee in line with the overriding environmental objectives of this funding scheme.
- (vi) Funding may be awarded for an already-started project, if the applicant can demonstrate a reasonable and overriding need to start the project before the funding agreement has been signed. Any such funding would be dependent on whether the nature, quality and extent of the already-initiated works are considered acceptable by the Committee, and the Committee shall not be bound to retroactively endorse or sanction any *fait accompli*.

6.2 Non-eligible costs

The following projects/interventions and their costs shall *not* be considered as eligible for funding:

- (i) Projects designed for personal or commercial profit;
- (ii) Return on capital, debt, debt service charges, as well as any interest owed or paid;
- (iii) Provision for losses or potential future liabilities, provisions for doubtful debts, exchange rate losses, as well as insurance premium against risk of such losses;
- (iv) Value Added Tax, unless the organisation which incurred the cost can demonstrate (by means of a certificate issued by the VAT Department stating that the beneficiary in question cannot recuperate VAT) that it is unable to recover it;
- (v) Costs declared in connection with another activity or programme receiving grants from other National or European Union schemes, as well as indirect costs declared by any organisation receiving an operating grant from the National or EU budget;

- (vi) Indirect costs exceeding the percentage or value agreed in the grant agreement, as well as costs in any budget heading that exceed the respective budgeted amount, and any expenditure of whatever nature that is excessive, reckless or unjustified;
- (vii) Costs incurred in relation to activities not foreseen in the project or in modifications of the action, which are not approved by the Committee;
- (viii) Recreational activities, travel, gifts and presents;
- (ix) Costs incurred on education campaigns or communication material (including notice boards and websites) which are wholly or partly political in nature, or which fail to acknowledge the funding obtained through this Scheme;
- (x) Expenditure that is illegal per se, or which is in any way connected with activities, practices, processes or interventions that are in breach of law or which infringe the terms, conditions or approved specifications of any permit or licence;
- (xi) Expenditure on construction of new buildings, extension of built structures, topographical alterations in the countryside or on the coast, new or extended roads, site formalisation on undeveloped rural/coastal land, and hard-surfacing of rural tracks/pathways; and
- (xii) Anything which, in the Committee's opinion, would: constitute a misuse of public funds, entail a net negative impact on the environment, or be in conflict with or irrelevant to the environmental objectives and purpose of the scheme.

6.3 Other terms and conditions

- (i) Applicants are to ensure that they have stable and sufficient resources and finances to sustain the portion of the project that is not supported by the grant, such that the integrity and viability of the project can be guaranteed. Applicants must also have the necessary operational capacity, expertise, competence and motivation to undertake and complete the project within the proposed time frame whilst meeting the appropriate technical, environmental and administrative standards.
- (ii) Projects, interventions and activities must be covered by all necessary regulatory and other permits and must be carried out in full conformity with all applicable laws and permits. The Committee shall have the right to withhold or cancel any letter of acceptance or grant agreement, or to impose additional terms and safeguards, if the applicant fails to obtain any required authorisation within a reasonable timeframe as decided by the Committee. Potential eligibility for funding under this scheme shall not per se constitute sufficient justification for: the granting of any permit which would otherwise not be issued; circumventing or influencing any assessment; or non-application or relaxation of any appropriate conditions or quality standards.
- (iii) Wherever relevant (e.g. in case of physical interventions on a building or site), the beneficiary must provide sufficient evidence of ownership, title, right of use or consent to intervene, and must subsequently keep any structural/physical improvements in good order for a minimum period of 3 years from completion.
- (iv) Non-disclosure of any required information (including any details required for processing of the application or for subsequent administration, verification or monitoring), or submission of misleading information, shall invalidate the application and may also constitute grounds for judicial or other proceedings against the applicant.

7.0 Post-selection procedures

7.1 Funding agreement

- 7.1.1 Successful applicants shall enter into a funding agreement with the Committee (acting on behalf of Government). The funding agreement shall be subject to the conditions set out in these guidelines as well as those contained in the call for applications, and shall also include any specific conditions and arrangements as necessary to ensure proper governance and enforcement of the grant conditions as well as effective implementation, achievement and durability of environmental benefits.
- 7.1.2 In cases where project implementation requires subcontracting or procurement contracts, grant beneficiaries shall award the contract to the bidders who offer best value for money, and shall adopt all reasonable safeguards to avoid any conflict of interest and other risks to the project and its deliverables as well as to the environment in general. The Committee shall have the right to review any documentation pertaining to the beneficiary organization with regard to subcontracting and/or procurement contracts, and to take any action as it considers appropriate in the event that the relevant procedures and safeguards are not observed.
- 7.1.3 In accepting a grant, a beneficiary is expected to:
- (i) Ensure that the project commences promptly and progresses steadily;
 - (ii) Submit performance reports to the satisfaction of the Committee;
 - (iii) Provide due acknowledgement to the Fund in all publications and reports, all informative signage, and all public communications relating to the approved project; and
 - (iv) Ensure that all funds are used in line with the grant conditions.
- 7.1.4 50% of the grant will be given to the beneficiary upon signing of the grant agreement, and the remaining 50% will be given upon certified completion of the project to the Committee's satisfaction. For this purpose the beneficiary shall, within one month following project completion, submit to the Committee a final progress report and a completion certificate, also including documentary evidence and photographs to confirm that all project components have been successfully implemented to the required standards.
- 7.1.5 Any unspent funds of the approved grant may be used for another purpose that fits within the funding guidelines, subject to the prior approval of the Committee. Otherwise, any unspent funds shall be returned back within one month of project completion, failing which these will be considered as a public debt (due to the Fund) on which commercial interest will be charged.
- 7.1.6 Should an organisation benefitting from a grant wish to dispose, within a period of 5 years from such grant, of any asset that had been purchased through such grant funds and had a value exceeding €2,000 at that time, it must submit a written application to the Committee requesting consent to the disposal. The Committee shall have sole and final discretion on the matter.

7.2 Auditing, monitoring, and enforcement

- 7.2.1 Grant beneficiaries may be subjected to auditing, monitoring and/or inspection by the Committee or its delegates.
- 7.2.2 Beneficiaries will be required to provide proof that the grant has been used correctly and in accordance with the provisions of the grant agreement. Beneficiaries must also retain all documentation pertaining to the funded project, as well as original fiscal invoices and receipts, and submit them to the Committee or its delegate when and as requested.
- 7.2.3 If the beneficiary does not meet all requirements set out in the grant agreement, or is found to have defaulted on the conditions of the grant, the Committee may decide to recover all of the grant, or any proportionate amount, at its sole discretion. The beneficiary shall repay any such amount within 15 days from being intimated by the Committee. Monies due shall be deemed to constitute public debt and the applicable measures may be taken or enforced to recover such debt.
- 7.2.4 The Committee reserves the right to rescind any funding agreement at any time if any of the conditions set out therein are not properly observed. Furthermore, if at any point it results that an application, or any terms of agreement (or the inclusion or omission of any such terms), were vitiated or influenced by incorrect, misleading or fraudulent information or assurance, or by a breach of rules or regulations, the Committee shall have the right to revoke the agreement or parts thereof, or to amend its terms, as it deems appropriate, as well as to recover any funds or seek any other appropriate redress. The Committee shall not be liable for any ensuing damage or inconvenience suffered by the beneficiary. The Committee shall also have the right to take further action in the event of fraud or other malicious circumstance.

8.0 How to apply

- 8.1 A Call for Applications will be issued and advertised in the media. The respective application form will be available online from www.environment.gov.mt or can be requested by sending an e-mail to environmentalfunding.msdec@gov.mt. Any related enquiries can also be communicated via this e-mail address or by calling telephone number 22926231.
- 8.2 Applicants are to submit a fully completed application on the prescribed form, duly signed by an authorised representative and clearly describing the project and its objectives, and are to append thereto the following documentation:
- (i) a detailed project plan and budget, including: the amount of funding being applied for; how the project will achieve its goals (including outline method statements for works wherever relevant); how project effectiveness will be monitored, evaluated and reported; and how the project will be self-sustaining after the funding ends;
 - (ii) documentation clearly demonstrating the capability to duly and diligently implement the project;
 - (iii) financial statements of the last operating financial year of the organisation and which have been presented to the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations;
 - (iv) a declaration that the project has not benefitted from other public or EU funding; and

- (v) a copy of all applicable regulatory permits and, where such permits are still being obtained, a commitment to providing such permits to the Committee's satisfaction in line with the above-prescribed requirements.

8.3 Applications, conforming to these guidelines, are to be sent as follows:

(i) Either: via email, to environmentalfunding.msdec@gov.mt

(ii) Or: via registered mail, or delivery by hand, to:

*Environment Funding (Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations) Committee
Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change
6, Triq Hal Qormi
Santa Venera*

8.4 Applications are to reach the Committee by not later than **31st October 2016**. Late, incomplete or ambiguous applications will be deemed invalid and will not be accepted.

Appendix 1 – List of potentially fundable items

CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF SITES

1. Restoration of degraded land, habitats or environmental features to their pristine state.
2. Clean-up of land from dumped material, rubble, scrap or refuse.
3. Reversal, mitigation or stabilisation of ongoing degradation (e.g. trampling, artificially-accelerated erosion), to prevent further damage and facilitate recovery or natural regeneration.
4. Planting of indigenous or archaeophytic trees or shrubs in appropriate locations, including new or replacement planting.
5. Rehabilitation of degraded routes into informal, non-intrusive nature/heritage trails.
6. Installation or improvement of context-appropriate protective measures to prevent or minimise damage/degradation caused by vehicular access and trampling.
7. Removal of environmentally-incompatible or landscape-intrusive structures, unsightly boundary walls or redundant infrastructure.
8. Replacement of existing structures/infrastructure with more environmentally-compatible alternatives (e.g. relocation of overhead wiring underground, replacement of ashlar walls in the countryside with proper dry-stone rubble walls, etc.).
9. Repair of damaged soil-retaining rubble walls, or like-with-like reconstruction of damaged soil-retaining rubble walls in line with traditional good practice.
10. Acquisition of land for the purpose of environmental conservation.
11. Other initiatives aimed at protection, conservation and appreciation of the countryside, the rural landscape and the natural environment.
12. Replacement of artificial hard-surfacing or hard landscaping with soft landscaping.
13. Undoing of existing environmental damage, including damage or disfigurement of sites caused by vandalism.

CONSERVATION OF FAUNA & FLORA

14. Curing and rehabilitation of injured or diseased indigenous trees, flora or fauna (both terrestrial and marine) for subsequent re-establishment/release in the wild, and ancillary equipment or material (e.g. medicines, endoscopes to help facilitate removal of embedded hooks or ingested objects, etc.)
15. Protection, rescue or rehabilitation of indigenous wildlife (both terrestrial and marine), or conduction of ancillary educational and awareness programmes.
16. Propagation of native species of flora and fauna, for preservation of native stock and/or restocking of depleted/threatened wild populations, and ancillary equipment.
17. Installation of reversible irrigation systems for initial maintenance of plantations of native trees/shrubs.
18. Removal or eradication of ecological pests and invasive species.

ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE

19. Provision, repair, maintenance or improvement of waste separation facilities, and recycling facilities.
20. Installation, repair, maintenance or improvement of sewage/wastewater treatment facilities.
21. Installation, repair, maintenance or improvement of greywater re-use facilities.
22. Installation, repair, maintenance or improvement of photovoltaic panels.

23. Installation, repair, maintenance or improvement of rainwater collection facilities other than the construction of new reservoirs above ground level.
24. Installation, repair, maintenance or improvement of surveillance infrastructure (e.g. CCTV systems) for protected areas, dumping sites, and other environmentally-relevant contexts.
25. Fire fighting equipment for wooded areas, protected areas, habitats prone to arson/vandalism and other environmentally-relevant contexts.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

26. Installation, repair, maintenance or improvement of environmental information boards, heritage interpretation facilities, and informative signage.
27. Environmental education publications and their dissemination.
28. Media documentaries and educational campaigns for environmental education and environmental awareness, including campaigns for environmental protection and for environmental initiatives such as promotion of organic agriculture, permaculture, eco-tourism, or rural/urban sustainability.
29. Repairs, maintenance and improvements to existing environmental education facilities.
30. Restoration, re-use, repair, maintenance or conversion of old historic buildings for environmental education.
31. Environment-related training courses for volunteers, site wardens, employed staff, targeted sectors, or the general public, including overseas training where adequate courses are not reasonably available locally.
32. Education programs on environmental conservation and environmentally-friendly behaviour patterns.
33. Provision of facilities necessary to conduct environmental education programs, and advertising.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND GUIDANCE

34. Preparation of specialist reports to guide/support specific conservation efforts.
35. Conduction of controlled experiments/trials in preparation for specific conservation efforts.
36. Pilot projects/trials for testing the feasibility or effectiveness of potential environmental initiatives.
37. Development of innovative solutions to pre-empt, alleviate or remedy environmental impacts.
38. Schemes to promote green procurement (including stimulation of green public or private procurement) and environmentally-friendly business/household practices.
39. Implementation of green procurement practices, including installation of environmentally-friendly consumables and appliances, and upgrading/replacement of other equipment to enable or facilitate their use.

OTHER

40. Continuation of already-ongoing projects/initiatives falling within the above-listed categories.
41. Widening or extension of successfully established projects/initiatives falling within the above-listed categories, onto adjacent areas.
42. Hiring of duly qualified persons to manage and operate sites or facilities falling within the above-listed categories.

