

Review of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funding for restoring habitats and species 2026: Invitation to tender

1. Summary

We are looking to work with an external consultant from March 2026, to carry out a rapid review to inform our work on our “[Space for Nature](#)” priority. We estimate the work will take 35 days, and have a budget of around £28,000. We’re looking for an organisation or pair/group of consultants with experience in evaluation and research, who are good at listening and facilitation, comfortable working with varied sources of information, and can summarise their findings clearly and simply. Knowledge of the environment sector is essential.

If you are available to commit to this, beginning in March 2026, please send a CV (including day rates) and links to your work to communications@esmefairbairn.org.uk by 14:00 on Monday 2 March 2026.

2. Background and context

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation’s strategy was launched in October 2020, setting out ten-year impact goals and five-year priorities. In 2023 we decided to extend the strategy and the funding priorities to the end of 2027. We want to: look back at where we started, understand what progress our work and funding has made so far, to inform our future work.

The focus and scope of the review will be our first outcome under our Space for Nature priority “*Space for nature, and biodiversity, is restored at scale on land and at sea*”

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation’s Space for Nature Priority

Protecting and creating more space for nature enables the restoration of damaged ecosystems and degraded landscapes. It's also important that the benefits of being close to nature are accessible to all. The scale of nature’s decline in the UK cannot be addressed by our existing nature reserves, nor without fundamentally changing the way we use land. Fortunately, this decline is mirrored by a growing movement for connecting with nature and for finding and creating more wild spaces for nature - enabling natural processes to shape land and sea, repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes.

This is a good time to encourage people’s enthusiasm for achieving better land use, and to build the evidence for policy makers. As well as supporting restoration of nature across the UK, we also want to engage communities to lead change so that nature is accessible to all.

What we want to achieve

We're working towards two long-term outcomes:

1. Space for nature, and biodiversity, is restored at scale on land and at sea.
2. More nature rich spaces for people to access and enjoy, particularly those facing barriers to doing so.

We have ~120 grants under the scope of this review, although we would only expect a sample of c30 to be looked at in detail. For grants, we do not cover the capital costs of restoration work but do support organisations and partnerships working to develop programmes, engage communities, improve use of data and evidence, advocate for better policy, undertaking public campaigns, and exploring ways of leveraging new models of influencing investment and finance for nature. Much of our funding goes to support the core costs of an organisations rather than project focused work.

- [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's strategy](#)
- [Space for Nature priority](#)

3. Review questions

We know that our actions and funding are only one part of a complex process of change. So, our review will cover the context for our work, as well as its progress so far in relation to our long-term outcome “*Space for nature, and biodiversity, is restored at scale on land and at sea.*” Our key review questions are:

1. The changing context for our goals focused on a brief and high-level overview of:
 - a. What was the external context for restoring habitats and species in 2020?
 - b. In what ways is it better or worse in 2026?
2. The need for our support: what’s changed in the funding situation in this work area from 2020 to 2026?
3. The opportunities for progress – what are the levers for change in 2026?
4. What are the blockers for progress in 2026?
5. What difference has our work and funding made since 2020, and where is it struggling?
6. What feedback is there on the way Esmée is working in this area, including in relation to other funders.

4. Audience and use

Esmée wants to use what we learn from this review to make changes in how we deliver our strategy, so the main audience is our staff and trustees. We also want to share the review with the organisations we fund, and the wider sector, so they are an important secondary audience.

5. Method and approach

We commissioned a [review of our Nature Friendly Farming work](#) in 2023 and a [Freshwater Review](#) in 2024/25. Like these, we want this review to bring external challenge and perspective by working with an independent consultant/organisation, and going beyond the organisations we support to get the thoughts of people who share our goals but may have different views of how to get there.

With this review we would like to take a more thematic approach to answering the questions in section 3 above, because our work covers a range of thematic areas, interventions, and levers for change. These areas are:

- Policy change and advocacy.
- Practical restoration at scale.
- Evidence and data.
- Nature and Finance.
- Chemicals

The review will involve:

- **Group workshops.** We would like the bulk of the insights to be generated through facilitated discussions with grantees and some non-grantees. We anticipate up to 8 online workshops of approximately 2 – 2.5 hours. The scope and design of these will be agreed with the Esmée team.
- **Desk research:** this should begin with the situation in 2020, and be updated for 2026 as the review progresses. Themes will be agreed with the consultant, but should include:
 - a summary of the policy situation affecting nature in each nation of the UK;
 - key nature quality and biodiversity information;
 - significant changes in context since 2020 e.g. key changes to policy and regulation, to data availability and collection.

We would expect desk research to be no more than c15% of the consultant’s project time.

- **A review of key learning** from Esmée’s funding (both grants and social investments). We will work with the consultants to ensure there is a manageable sample to review. For planning purposes, we would anticipate a sample of up to 30 grants to review.
- **A validation workshop** to test initial findings with a smaller group of stakeholders, and Esmée.
- **Report writing.**

6. Esmée’s role

The review will be managed by Liam McAleese, with support and involvement of other colleagues. The communications and learning team at Esmée will provide mid- and end-of- grant learning from grants and social investments, along with funding recommendation documents and progress reports, where useful. We will identify the key stakeholders as part of the project inception process, make introductions, and help with setting up meetings.

We will hold a kick-off meeting with relevant Esmée staff. We would like to review the findings after the initial writing stage, giving time for edits. We will share the report internally, and we will work with our designers to prepare a version for publication. If there are substantial edits needed for an external audience, we would agree this with the consultant as an additional cost to this contract.

7. Deliverables and budget

We estimate the work will take a c35days

- Report for our staff and trustees (c. 20 pages)
- PowerPoint deck or executive summary giving key learning points for Trustees (6-10 slides, or 2-4 pages of A4)
- Anonymised notes from interviews, and other relevant useful research shared in rough form

8. Suggested timetable

We plan to share headline findings of the review at our Trustee board meeting in July 2025, so although the exact plan can be flexible, we will need a draft report by 1 July.

Week beginning	
9 February	Invitation to Tender out
Monday 2 nd March (14:00).	Deadline for responses
Thursday 12 March	Interviews & Reviewer appointed

Week beginning	
Tuesday 17 March	Kick off meeting and document sharing
April	Desk research/workshops
May	Workshops
1 st July	Draft submitted for review by Esmée
24 July	Final report due

9. Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

As Esmée wants to learn as much as possible from the interviews or group discussions with stakeholders, we will need to agree a suitable format so that interviewees can respond honestly (e.g. Chatham house rules), but Esmée can fully understand the detail of progress being made. We would discuss this with the reviewer at the kick-off meeting.

If you have any involvement in any work funded by Esmée, let us know so that we can think about how any conflicts of interest can be managed.

10. Experience

We are looking for consultants/organisations with:

- Relevant experience in evaluation and research.
- Knowledge of the environment sector, which may include environmental policy and practical delivery of habitat restoration.
- Strong communication and listening skills.
- Analytical skills, including the ability to work with varied sources of information, a diverse portfolio of grants and summarise findings clearly and simply.
- We are unlikely to appoint individual consultants working on their own but are open to tenders from pairs/groups of consultants as well as organisations.

11. Registering your interest

If you are available for this project from March to July, please email us

- A short note of **no more than 2 A4 pages** outlining your relevant experience for the work, links to examples of your work and a budget breakdown with staff day rates. Please include any reflections on how you might approach the brief, but please don't just repeat what we've asked for in the tender document.
- In addition, please also attach short and relevant CVs of the individuals who will be undertaking the work, their day rates and any potential conflicts of interest.
- Contact details for the main contact.
- It would be really helpful if you can combine the above into one attachment, but we understand that this might not be possible and it won't be a factor in our decision making!
- Please send these to communications@esmeefairbairn.org.uk by 2pm Monday 2nd March.