



Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION

Pre-application Q&A

5 February 2026, 2.00pm to 3.15pm

Panel

- Alison Holdom, Funding Manager Lead – Creative, Confident Communities
- Laura Lines, Funding Manager Lead – A Fairer Future
- Simon Wightman, Funding Manager Lead – Our Natural World
- Luna Dizon, Communications Manager (Q&A support)

Welcome and plan for the session

- Quick introduction to Esmée
- What we don't fund and what we look for
- How we make decisions
- Application process
- Q&A
- Further information and resources

About Esmée

We aim to improve our natural world, secure a fairer future and strengthen the bonds in communities in the UK.

We want to play an active role ourselves, using our **range of tools** to effect change.

As well as **grants**, we also make **social investments**, **convene** and **broker alliances**, **commission research**, and use our **influence** to achieve our goals.

A bit about social investment

What is it?

- Repayable finance e.g. loan, equity, community shares, bond
- Organisations often use it to increase their sustainability and impact – e.g. purchasing an asset, developing a product, expanding their team or growing revenue
- [Good Finance](#) offers tools and resources to help you understand whether it's right for you

What we offer

- We invest in organisations, funds and projects creating impact towards our funding priorities. Financial returns from our investments are recycled into new investments.
- We work with applicants to find the type and terms of investment that will best help them to achieve their mission
- [Learn more and how to apply](#)

Grants – in numbers

£50m yearly grant budget

200 main grants awarded a year (roughly) across **13** funding priorities

44 Esmée staff including **19** in our grant funding team

67% grants awarded in 2025 for core or unrestricted costs

3 to 5 years term for the majority of grants (we have no minimum/maximum)

£204,363 / £195,000 average / median grant amount in 2025

What we don't fund

These types of organisations:

- ✗ Organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100,000 (see our [FAQs](#) on [how we assess turnover](#)).
- ✗ Organisations that aren't constituted. Note that if your organisation is not a registered charity, we will assess governance and the risk of disproportionate 'personal benefit' (see our [FAQs](#) on [kinds of organisations we support](#)).

These types of costs:

- ✗ Capital costs including building work, renovations, and equipment (the exclusion applies to grants only, we may make social investments for these).
- ✗ Grants for less than £30,000.
- ✗ Grants to individuals.

These types of work:

- ✗ Work that is not legally charitable – defined as work that falls within one of [13 descriptions of charitable purposes](#).
- ✗ Work that does not have a direct benefit in the UK.
- ✗ Academic research – unless it can demonstrate real potential for practical outcomes.
- ✗ Healthcare with a clinical basis, including medical research, hospices, counselling and therapy, arts therapy, education about and treatment for drug and alcohol misuse.
- ✗ Independent education – work that takes place or is delivered by fee-paying schools.
- ✗ Work that is primarily the responsibility of statutory authorities.
- ✗ The advancement of religion.

Strategic framework

Funding priorities to the end of 2027

Aims

Our Natural World



A Fairer Future



Creative, Confident Communities



Peat

Space for nature

Nature-friendly farming

Fishing in tandem with nature

Freshwater

Art and creativity making change

Children and young people's rights

Racial justice

Gender justice

Migrant justice

Communities working together for change

Community driven enterprise and regeneration

Community-led art and creativity

Migrant justice



We have three long-term outcomes:

1. Migrants have improved access to legal help to exercise their rights.
2. Legislation and support ensure that migrants' rights are protected, and reflects their needs.
3. Public understanding and discussion of migration issues is better informed, particularly by those with lived experience of the migration system.

Guidance on applying, along with case studies, are below. You can also explore recent [grants made in Migrant justice](#).

Example priority in
A Fairer Future

The long-term outcomes we're focusing our support on. In applications, we'll consider how the work could contribute to these.

For all three long-term outcomes, we're looking to support work that:

- Is driven and shaped by migrants, so that they can themselves have a direct impact on changing the system.
- Builds and uses evidence to design a better migration system.
- Changes legislation, policy and practice to meet the needs of migrants.
- Brings to light and challenges injustice in the migration system, countering misinformation.
- Builds understanding of the issues with local communities, the wider public, and decision-makers.
- Supports and amplifies the voices of migrants, enabling more stories of migration to be told and heard.
- Takes a collaborative approach that enables and supports a movement for change, ensuring the voices of smaller and grassroots organisations are represented and amplified.

Additional guidance for all
three long-term outcomes.

What we look for

- ✓ **A strong fit for our strategy:** contributes towards the long-term outcomes in our strategy.
- ✓ **Ambitious and/or doing something new to create systemic change,** with a solid understanding of the context and plans for a lasting impact.
- ✓ **Wider influence or spread:** going beyond service delivery to influence policy, practice, attitudes, and behaviour; and/or has the potential to be scaled up, replicated or scope to spread.
- ✓ **Centres lived experience, justice, and equity:** driven and shaped by those with lived experience of the issues or is community-led, and centres equity and justice in how they work.
- ✓ **A collaborative approach:** has a good understanding of their role and has good connections to their communities, relevant networks and grassroots groups.
- ✓ **Governance and leadership:** the organisation is governed accountably and well; and has the relevant skills and experience.

How we make decisions

To help us make a decision about what applications to take forward, we look at a range of factors based on:

- **How strong a fit the work is to our strategy**
- **How well-placed the organisation is to do the work**

Throughout the assessment process, we take into account other work we're funding and our own plans so we can consider potential opportunities. This helps us make a judgement about what's the most effective use of our resources.

[Learn more about how we make decisions.](#)

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

To help us make progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, we gather DEI data from all applicants:

- **Expression of Interest:** applicants complete a DEI monitoring form about their organisation – using the [DEI data standard](#).
- **Assessment call:** we ask applicants to tell us about their approach to DEI within their organisation and through their work.

How we use the information:

- Helps us understand who our funding is reaching as well as identify and address structural inequity in our funding.
- Part of our assessment of applications.
- We're interested in how people and communities most impacted by the issues shape the work.

[Learn more about how we use your information](#)

Watch a short video on how to apply



**Are we the right
funder for you?**

If you can't see the video, you can [watch the video on YouTube](#).



Behind the scenes



Expressions of Interest (EOI) reviewed

EOIs are reviewed against our criteria and the outcomes we're working to in our strategy.

We get many more requests than we can fund so the EOI is intended to be quick – to avoid people investing more time applying if it is unlikely we will fund the work.

[Learn more about each stage of the application process](#)

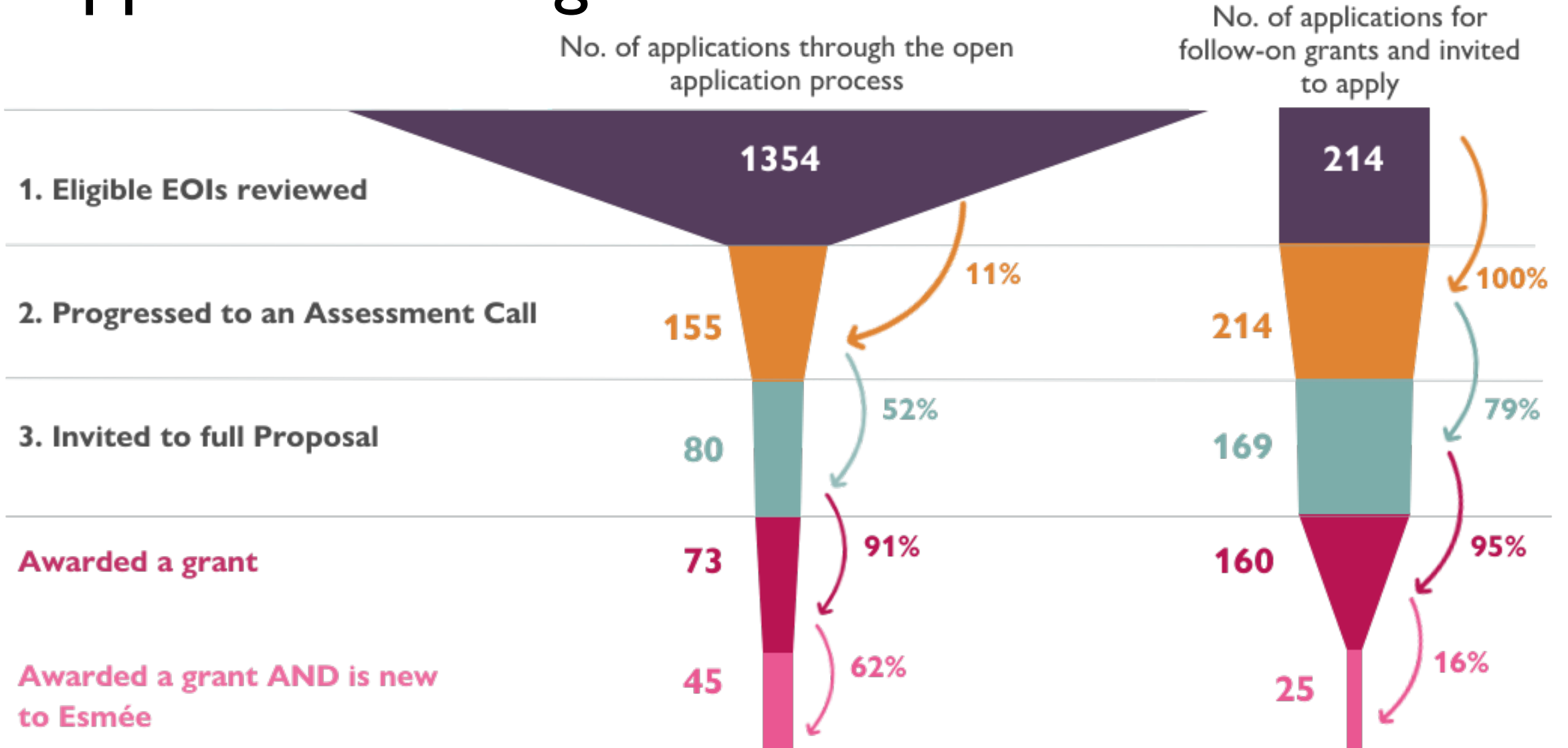


Applications considered at staff meetings

We invite applications we progress further for an **Assessment Call** to learn more.

These applications are considered at regular staff meetings. The team consider potential opportunities in line with our strategy and other work we fund, and whether to progress the application to full **Proposal**. This is based on what we believe is the most effective use of our resources.

Applications for grants* in 2025



* Excludes applications to our [infrastructure support programme](#), which is invite-only

How do you get on our radar?

We're being more proactive

- Attending sector and community events.
- Research into our areas of work: reports as well as what's in the news and social media.
- Recommendations from partners.

We're staying open

- The EOI stage is for you to tell us that you're interested in our funding and support.
- If we don't think your work is a strong fit for our strategy, we can let you know sooner and save you time working on a full application.

Support applying and further information



Our [guidance](#) has more detail about the types of work we're looking to support under each aim:



[Creative, Confident Communities](#)



[A Fairer Future](#)



[Our Natural World](#)



[Accessibility-related support](#)



[Download](#) the full guidance and a sample application form



[Grant funding overview](#) broken down by funding priority. We also share stories of work we've funded on our website under the relevant funding priority.



Our online [FAQs](#)

Other useful resources



Information on [other funding sources](#) including a comprehensive guide to fundraising for small organisations and links to funding directories. It includes a link to [GrantNav](#), a tool to search grants from over 300 funders including Esmée – see [tips for using GrantNav](#)



[Useful sector resources](#) on a range of topics including fundraising, legal, campaigning, digital and safeguarding.

For more information:
www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

Email: communications@esmeefairbairn.org.uk

Find us on social media

