Securing funding for your group is likely to be key to achieving your aims. It is very difficult to run an active group without funding, and membership subscriptions (if you charge any) often only cover the bare essentials. This guide gives advice on potential sources of funding, and tips on writing a good funding application. It covers the common sources of funding but is by no means comprehensive - be as creative as you can! The guide covers:

- Membership subscriptions
- Gift Aid
- Grant schemes
- Local council grants
- Commercial sponsorship
- Specific fundraising activities
- Online shopping fundraising websites for charities
- Tips for writing good funding applications

Membership subscriptions

There are pros and cons to charging a subscription to joining your group. If the sum is too large it may be a barrier to joining, however you also need to cover costs. Possible options include charging an annual subscription fee or a one off joining fee followed by a small payment for each activity attended (e.g. a charge of £2 for each talk attended). It is very difficult to run an active group of more than a few people without membership fees, although it isn’t impossible and there are groups out there that prove it! Charging a membership fee is the norm, and members are usually happy to pay if it is a reasonable sum.

Gift Aid

The Charities Aid Foundation has estimated that approximately £750m in Gift Aid goes unclaimed each year\(^1\). Gift Aid is an easy way to help your group maximise the value of its donations, as you can claim tax back from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Currently, for every £1 donated to your charity you could claim back a further 28p. This is at no cost to the group or the person making the donation. The donor must be a UK taxpayer for their donation to be eligible for Gift Aid and they must sign a declaration when they make the donation.

Gift Aid is for charities only. Both registered and unregistered charities can claim Gift Aid. Your charity must be recognised by HMRC for tax purposes, which involves completing a form available on the Charities Commission website. Recognition by HMRC as a charity is a separate process from registering with the Charity Commission for charitable status.

Find out more about Gift Aid on the [Charities Commission](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charities-commission) website.

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Grant Schemes

Which grant schemes are available at a given time will vary as each runs for a specific length of time or distributes a fixed amount of funding before closing to applications. Below are details of grants schemes that are applicable to natural history groups and are currently open to applications. We will try to keep this list regularly updated.

- The Big Lottery Fund’s Awards for All programme offers grants of £300-£10,000 to local community projects that develop skills, promote healthy and active lifestyles, develop strong community partnerships or improve rural and urban environments.

- The Heritage Lottery Fund’s Your Heritage programme offers grants of £3000 - £50,000 to support projects that relate to the local, regional or national heritage of the UK. It may not seem immediately applicable to natural history groups, but their application details state that heritage projects include ‘natural and designed landscapes and gardens’ and ‘wildlife, including special habitats and species’. Your Heritage is a rolling programme and there are no deadlines for applications. You will receive a decision on your application within 10 weeks from the date they receive your fully filled-in application.

- Another Heritage Lottery Fund programme is Young Roots; very similar to the Your Heritage programme, but designed specifically to engage young people aged 11-25 with their heritage. The programme also offers grants of £3000 - £50,000 and includes projects centred around ‘natural and designed landscapes and gardens’ and ‘wildlife, including special habitats and species’.

The following websites list a wide range of sources of funding. Although they are not all written with natural history groups in mind, many of the sources of funding and tips on writing good applications are still applicable. Make sure you check the details before applying to ensure you are eligible.

The Community Woodland Network website lists current sources of grant funding.

The Sustrans website includes tips on funding, sponsorship and writing a good application.

The GreenSpace website holds a database of funding sources that you can search by region and topic.

The Countryside Jobs Service website lists current sources of funding for environment and countryside projects.

Local council grants

Many district and county councils award small grants to local community groups. Check your council’s website, or contact them to find out what may be available.

Commercial sponsorship

It is increasingly difficult, but not impossible to get commercial sponsorship. Remember that businesses would often rather give away goods than funds, so approach local organisations that sell the equipment/goods you need. Large DIY stores and
supermarkets often run small grants schemes, so check their websites. When applying, make it clear how they will benefit (in terms of publicity and public image) and how the project is locally relevant to them.

Specific fundraising activities

There are unlimited ways in which you can fundraise for your group and we are not going to list all the possibilities here! Often it’s best to fundraise for a specific target e.g. an event or piece of new equipment so that there is a fixed amount you are trying to raise and a clear finishing point. If you are holding a competition or raffle, see if local businesses will donate the prizes.

Online shopping fundraising websites

There are a number of websites that offer a facility to raise money for a good cause through shopping online. It’s completely free to both the group and the individual who is shopping. All you need to do is register your group on the site (you must have a bank account in the name of the group) then encourage your members, friends and family to use that site when they buy items online. The buyer logs on to the fundraising site, chooses their favourite good cause, then links through to the site they wish to buy from. A percentage of each purchase is then given to the group. These websites can be found by typing ‘online shopping fundraising’ into a search engine. Read the details carefully though, as some sites charge shoppers a one off joining fee.

Tips for writing grant applications or letters

Writing a grant application can be tricky, especially if you haven’t done it before. Application forms often have word limits, so you have to really sell your project and get your message across in a very concise manner. Below are our top 10 tips to help you when writing grant applications.

1. Read all the application materials carefully before you begin to ensure your group is eligible to apply and your project is suitable, otherwise you may waste valuable time on an application which they cannot fund.

2. If possible contact the funder to check your idea is suitable before investing time in an application.

3. If there is a theme to the funding scheme, ensure your project matches this and explain how in your application.

4. Be enthusiastic when writing your application – it will show through!

5. Give as much detail as possible and include relevant background information. The size of the box on the application form (or the word limit if there is one) is an indication of how much you should write.

6. Don’t assume that the assessor will visit your website as they probably won’t have time.
7. Make sure your objectives and outputs are clear and measurable so that the funders will be able to see when you have achieved them.

8. Don’t overstretch or over commit yourself – ensure your targets and costings are realistic and achievable.

9. Sell your project and the benefits it will bring. Funders are often very interested in the impact and benefits your project will bring to your group or wider society, so think about this carefully and make sure you include it in your application.

10. Get someone else, preferably not involved in the project, to proof read your application before you submit it. They will be able to point out if you have assumed previous knowledge or not explained things well enough. Remember that the person assessing your application may not be familiar with your subject matter.

GRANTfinder’s detailed guide to successfully securing grant funding may be useful, and the Sustrans website also includes tips on applying for funding.