

Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund: making it happen on the ground



Cairngorms
National Park
Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



Programme vision

“

By 2030, The Cairngorms National Park will be an exemplar of **people and nature thriving together** in a rapidly changing world.

”



Our vision

Our ambition is to focus on the **innovative, collaborative and transformational** changes required to tackle the nature and climate crisis.

Cairngorms 2030, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to **inspire rural and urban communities** throughout Scotland and beyond.



Four core themes underpinning the fund:



Transform the way land is managed and used to **benefit nature**



Empower communities to **shape the future** of their local area



Make getting around the Cairngorms **easier, safer and greener**



Foster **healthier, happier communities** with wellbeing at their heart

Priorities

What we heard from the panel:

- ✓ The fund should be **accessible to someone who has never applied before** and should support the people we're most trying to reach
- ✓ Applicants should be given **time (and support) to develop and work up ideas** before applying
- ✓ **Feedback loops** should be included between funding rounds so potential applicants can see clearly that the **fund is for people like them** and can plan ahead

What we're taking forward:

- ✓ A **two-year fund timetable** with three specific tiers
- ✓ An **'always on' small grants fund**, **medium grants** awarded three times per year and **large grants** awarded in two stages (Mar and Aug '27)
- ✓ A **programme of engagement and communications** to support the fund's delivery and outreach



Decision-making forum



We will recruit a **single, diverse forum** with a balance of geographic, demographic and EDI representation.



This forum will make decisions on the **medium and large grants** and will be in place for the full fund term.



The paid forum will be made up of **11 individuals**. Current panel members are welcome to apply.



We will use a **similar approach to recruit the forum** as was used for the current panel.



Support looks like:

- Training and capacity building built into timetable
- Park Authority grants team as ongoing advisors
- Option for forum to request specific expertise (eg legal, financial) in an advisory capacity



Forum members recruited for **who they are**, not based on their experience of similar funding processes.

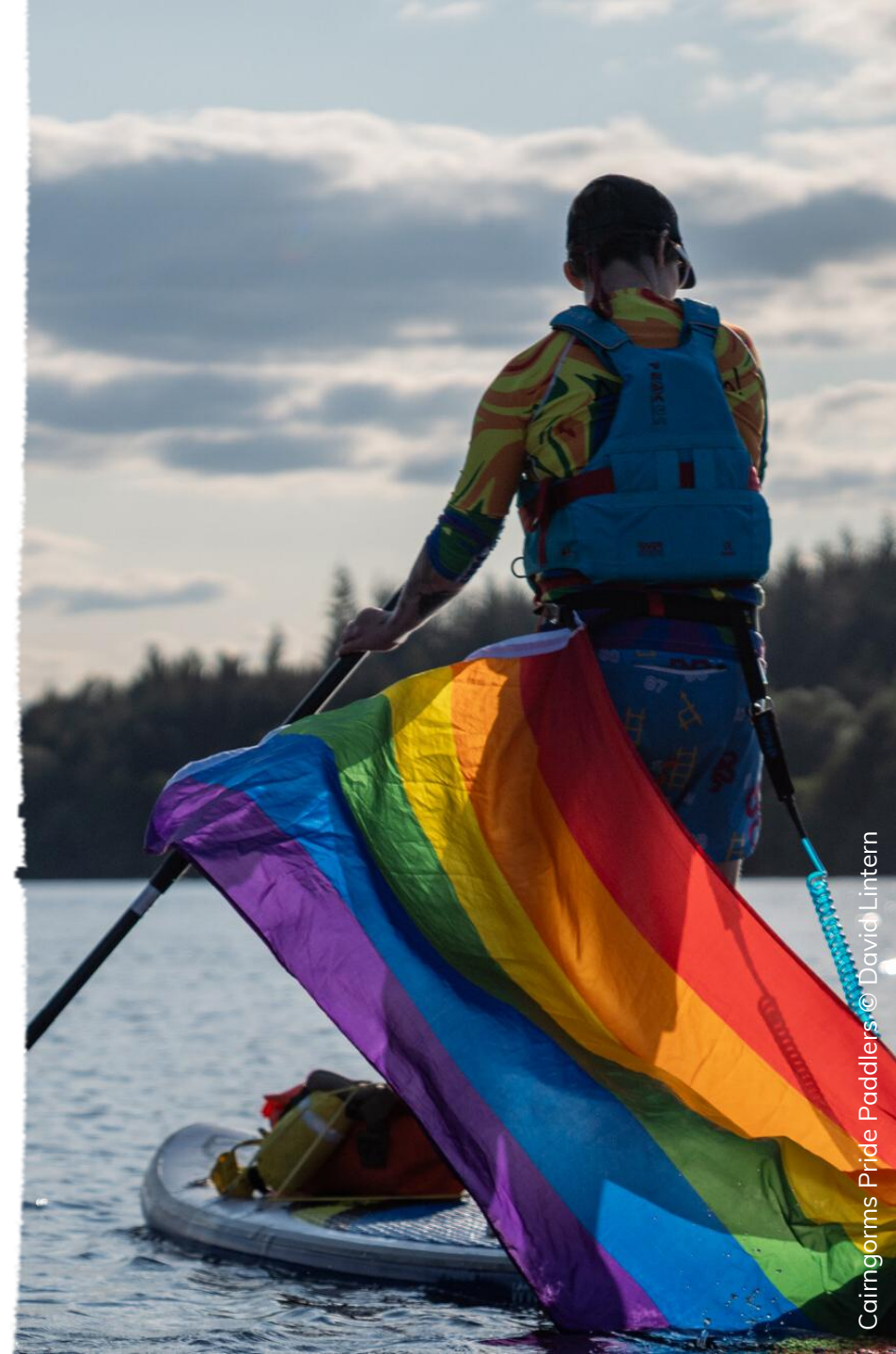
Equity, diversity and inclusion

What we heard from the panel:

- The fund will direct **a minimum of 10% of its total value** toward projects whose primary beneficiaries are people and communities least likely to benefit from standard funding processes – because of who they are, where they live, or barriers they face.
- This is not about ticking boxes. It's about **making sure the fund reaches people it would otherwise miss**.
- Equity recognises that **some people need more targeted support** to have a fair chance. Reaching those people requires **active promotion** and **practical support** to apply.

What we're taking forward:

- **Key application question:** “Is this project primarily aimed at people who face barriers to participation, or who are under-represented in the Cairngorms?” (Yes / Partly / No)
- **Monitoring:** Establishes what actually happened vs what was intended to happen



Eligibility

- Eligibility criteria will be **in place for all applications**, regardless of grant size.
- Eligibility criteria will be **pass / fail** rather than a scored process.
- Applications will be reviewed by Park Authority grants team, with **forum check-in at every meeting**. This will include any applications that are pending.
- An application **must meet all three** of the following to proceed:
 - ✓ The project fits within a Cairngorms 2030 theme
 - ✓ The activity takes place within the National Park
 - ✓ The project delivers community benefit
- All else being equal, **first-time applicants will be prioritised** to deliver on our programme ambition to widen participation.
- If the Grants team believe a project to be **undeliverable**, it will be deferred to the next decision-making forum.



How we propose scoring grant applications

- **Two-stage process**

The same two-stage structure applies for medium and large grants: a hard eligibility / deliverability check, then weighted scoring. Assessment is a filter for eligibility and not a quality judgement.

- **Weighted scoring**

A points system will help guide the forum's decision-making and provide evidence to support their conclusions. Criteria include geography, degree of benefit, legacy and deliverability.

- **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

A project designed around an EDI group should be weighted more heavily in the scoring system than one that incidentally benefits under-represented groups. This distinction will be made explicit in the assessment criteria and communicated clearly to applicants.

- **Scoring against criteria**

Applications that pass eligibility are then scored against criteria, such as: (a.) the project benefits the community; (b.) the project is in a geographical area where less is currently happening; (c.) the project benefits equity, diversity and inclusion; and (d.) the project demonstrates capacity building (skills and legacy).

Small grants

What we heard from the panel:

- ✓ Presumption to say 'yes' to applications
- ✓ Minimum 10% ringfenced for EDI projects, but question asked of all applicants to increase this
- ✓ Allow time for applicants to develop and work up ideas before applying
- ✓ Regular comms using case studies to highlight 'this fund is for you'
- ✓ Interactive map showing successful projects across the National Park

What we're implementing:

- ✓ Applicants can apply for up to £5,000 at any one time (across multiple bids)
- ✓ Priority given to first time applicants
- ✓ Simple reporting process, eg three basic questions, with video and written formats welcome
- ✓ Maximum 50 awards per year (150 total)



Value: £500 – £5,000



Open from: autumn 2026



Awarded: on a rolling basis

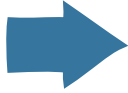


Scoring: not applicable

Small grants process



Chat with staff member and/or community champion



Simple online application form, questions based on panel suggestions



Application sense-checked (but not scored) by Grants team



Feedback given to all applicants, successful and unsuccessful



Forum reviews list of funded projects each meeting, amends future approach if required



Simple reporting process, with written or video feedback option



Set time period for projects to be delivered on the ground



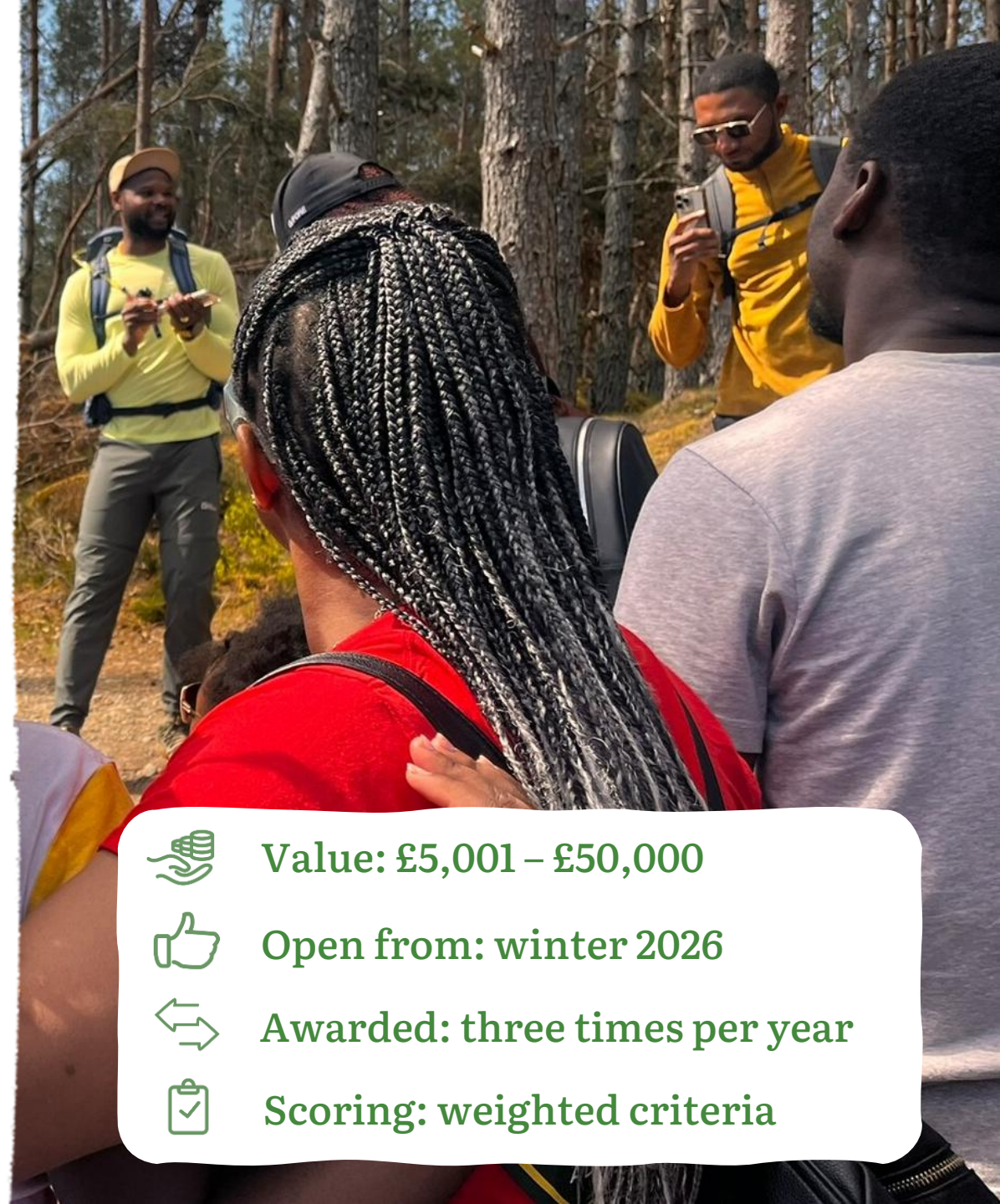
Medium grants

What we heard from the panel:

- ✓ More detailed application than small grants, but still straightforward to complete
- ✓ Support available to help work up applications
- ✓ Initial pass/fail criteria, checked by Bridget et al
- ✓ Encourage partnership where duplication occurs
- ✓ Paid forum drawn from across the National Park and a range of backgrounds makes decisions
- ✓ Grants paid in instalments (unless time is too tight)

What we're implementing:

- ✓ Applicants can apply for up to £50,000 at any one time (across multiple bids), priority to first timers
- ✓ Paid forum of 11, meeting three times per year. Same forum throughout process
- ✓ Forum independently scores applications, deliberates and, if consensus isn't reached, a 2/3rds majority vote
- ✓ Project update required at halfway point and at end



Value: £5,001 – £50,000



Open from: winter 2026



Awarded: three times per year



Scoring: weighted criteria

Medium grants process



Chat with staff member and/or community champion



Simple online application form, with bit more detail than small grants



Application sense-checked (but not scored) by Grants team



Forum meets three times per year to review applications and make awards



Simple reporting process, with written or video feedback option



Set time period for delivery, update required halfway through project



Feedback given to all applicants, successful and unsuccessful



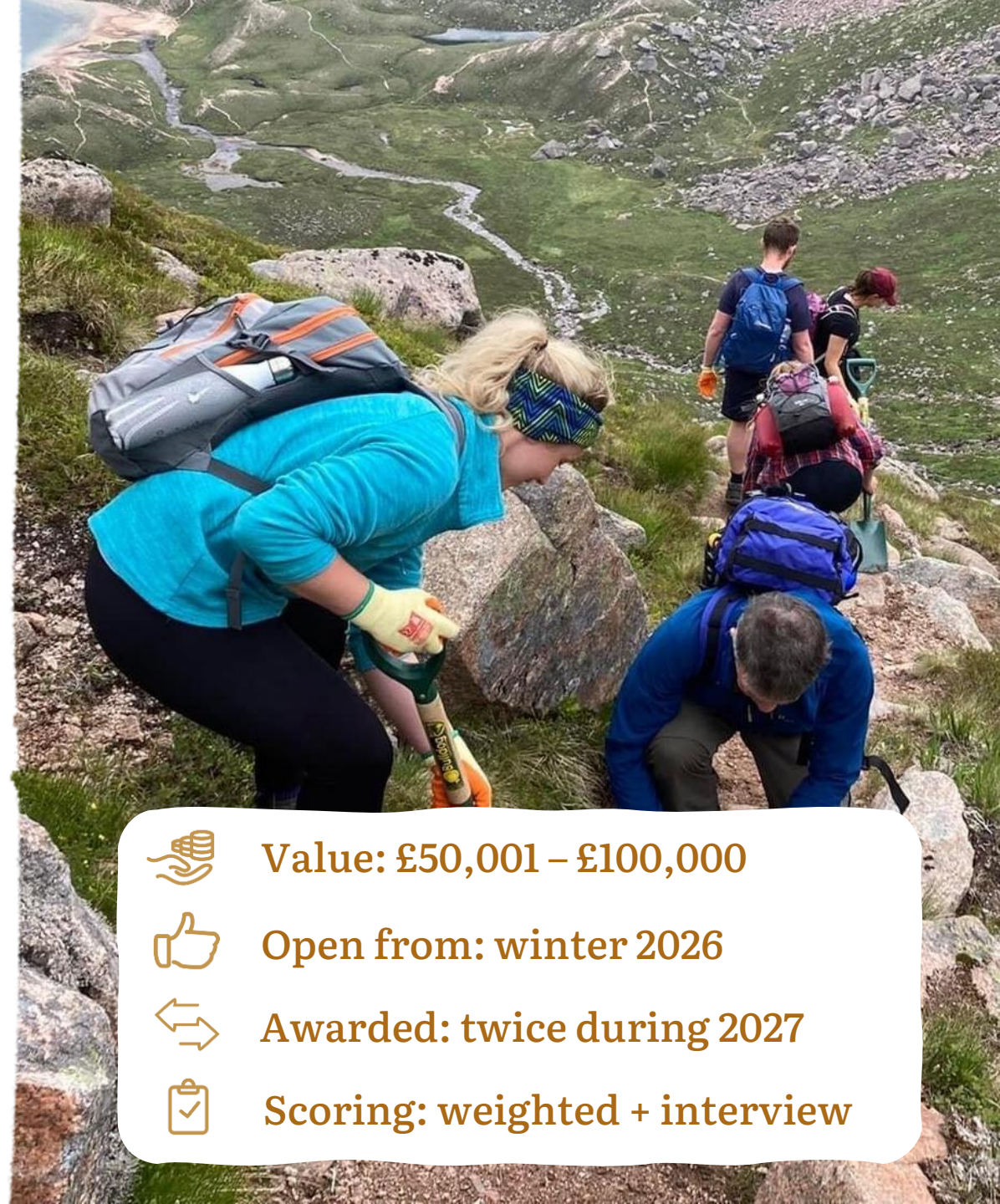
Large grants

What we heard from the panel:

- ✓ Showcase for applicants develop ideas, form teams, gather materials etc. Linked to roadshow events
- ✓ Applicants made aware they can apply for small / medium grants first and progress to large later on
- ✓ Forum retains ability to interview applicants, with this communicated clearly at the application stage
- ✓ Element of general public feedback in final decision
- ✓ Public presentation (on and offline) to highlight work of successful projects

What we're implementing:

- ✓ Applicants can apply for up to £100,000 at any one time (across multiple bids)
- ✓ Match funding is welcomed but not required
- ✓ Project updates required at three-month intervals
- ✓ Public invited to comment / potentially help longlist applications ahead of forum decisions



Value: £50,001 – £100,000



Open from: winter 2026



Awarded: twice during 2027



Scoring: weighted + interview

Large grants process



Ideas generated via discussion with public, staff, other projects etc



More detailed online application form, questions based on panel suggestions



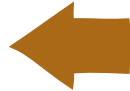
Application sense-checked (but not scored) by Grants team



Forum review list of projects ahead of public being invited to input



Simple reporting process, updates required at regular intervals



Feedback given to all applicants, successful and unsuccessful



Forum meets twice during 2027 to make final decisions



Engagement and events

What we heard from the panel:

- ✓ **Public roadshow** and **showcase events** across the National Park throughout the fund's lifespan
- ✓ Option to **apply to the fund** at the event itself
- ✓ **Clear signposting** to available grant support
- ✓ Opportunity to **showcase projects** previously supported by the fund and **close the loop**

What we're taking forward:

- ✓ Regular programme of events, **aligned to key decision-making points** for the fund
- ✓ Support of **four dedicated engagement staff**
- ✓ Potential to recruit **community champions** to bring the fund to life for specific groups, eg EDI, farmers etc
- ✓ **Innovative techniques** from elsewhere in the programme, from gamification to virtual reality





A massive thank you to our panellists

