

Information guide

Category A grants: Programme-supported dam removals



Programme-supported removal of the Ritakowski Dam © South Karelia Recreation Area Foundation

The European Open Rivers Programme was created with funding from [Arcadia](#). Arcadia is a charitable foundation that works to protect nature, preserve cultural heritage and promote open access to knowledge.

About this information guide

We appreciate the time and effort required to prepare projects and apply for funding. Therefore, we aim to be clear about what we support, how to apply, and how your application will be assessed.

Please read these guidelines carefully before applying.

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1. Category A grants: programme-supported dam removals

1.1 Introduction

These grants will support a range of interventions that lead to the removal of small dams in catchments that offer the highest potential for river restoration and ecosystem recovery.

Category A is divided into four subcategories. Please ensure that you apply for the grant most applicable to your project.

Category A1 Barrier identification and prioritisation

Supporting the identification and strategic selection of small dams that could later be removed via a grant (A4) from the programme. If it does not exist already, an important output of the grant should be an inventory of barriers (including location, height, width, photos, field verification). These grants may also support outreach to the local community to explore removal potential. Identification and prioritisation projects must demonstrate a direct connection between the activities included in the grant and the future removal of priority barriers.

Important note:

Barrier identification and prioritisation grants are intended for areas that offer very high potential for the restoration of river flow and biodiversity (ecologically valuable areas) but where there is currently low capacity, resources, and attention to dam removal. This means that these grants are not available in countries with a history of dam removal and/or with more advanced inventories and support for dam removal. The following countries are excluded from applying for catchment development grants: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Category A2 Pre-demolition work

Supporting the development of essential work required to prepare for removing a small dam supported by the programme, for example, feasibility studies, preparation of technical design documents, and securing permissions and permits.

Category A3 Dam removal (demolition)

Demolition of a barrier. No pre-demolition work is required / pre-demolition work is already funded by a third party.

Category A4 Dam removal (demolition)

Demolition of a barrier. Pre-demolition work previously funded by the

programme.

1.2 Application stages and timing

The programme runs a 9-month grant cycle for category A1, A2 and A3 grants. Occasionally, the programme may run additional calls for applications for specific categories or countries. Full details will always be available on our website. The process is as follows:

- Call for a short Expression of Interest (EoI).
- If your EoI is shortlisted, you will be invited to submit a more detailed Proposal.
- If your Proposal is accepted, you will be offered a grant.

The time between the call for EoI and the grant award is approximately 9 months. For A4 grants, the programme may run a 4-month cycle.

The process is as follows:

- Call for Proposal.
- If your Proposal is accepted, you will be offered a grant.

Please review our [Grant Calendar](#) for upcoming application dates.

1.3 What is not supported:

- Expensive projects that have low ecological significance. We aim to support projects that open up at least 10km of river and a minimum of 5km. This means that we are unlikely to support projects in highly fragmented areas.
- We are less likely to support projects in rivers with poor ecological status as the ecological gain following removal is likely to be low or take a long time to be realised.
- Post-dam removal restoration, unless it is expected that without mitigating restoration activities, the dam removal would result in negative impacts, e.g. changed hydrological regime that could cause flooding elsewhere, the release of invasive species, etc.
- Partial removal of a dam. The full vertical extent of the barrier must be removed to be eligible for funding. The programme is only interested in the complete removal of a barrier/the full removal of the 'barrier effect', so that rivers can flow naturally again.
- Barrier purchase.
- Barrier identification and prioritisation projects in countries where dam removal is already taking place and is already an established river restoration measure (see 1.1 for a list of excluded countries).

2. Eligibility criteria

2.1 Who can apply?

We recognise that projects often involve various partners and contributors, including NGOs, government, academia, the private sector, community groups and individuals. We welcome and encourage applications from diverse consortiums and collaborations. However, we have specific criteria for who can be a coordinating partner.

A coordinating partner is the applicant to the programme, and they will take the lead in managing the project. They will receive and manage the grant finances, sign a grant contract with the programme, and take responsibility for the effective delivery of the project. They will usually be based in the country of implementation. Non-resident coordinating organisations must justify their role as essential, e.g. there is no suitable national coordinating organisation in the implementing country.

The following organisations may apply to the programme for Category A:

- A charitable organisation. (ALL)
- An organisation with not-for-profit status. (ALL)
- Public sector entity (**A3 ONLY**)

Charitable organisations and organisations with a not-for-profit status can apply to all grant types. We expect most applicants will be organisations with an environmental focus and a track record of restoring rivers / ecological work. We recognise that public and private organisations and community groups may wish to apply, and we encourage their participation in projects as partners but will not accept unsolicited applications from these groups. These groups may contact the programme to explore options if they cannot identify a suitable NGO coordinator for a project.

Note for public sector entities wishing to apply: The eligibility criteria for application by a public entity is more restrictive than that for NGO applicants. The programme considers a public sector entity as a department, agency, authority, commission, or other entity established under a legal act for public purpose/good. To apply for a dam removal (demolition) grant (A3) as a publicly funded entity, you must manage water resources with proven experience in restoring rivers and/or dam removal.

Public entities must demonstrate that the staff managing the grant have the relevant river restoration and dam removal experience to implement the project. Agency experience alone is not enough. Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to a partnership involving NGOs and stakeholders in implementing a selected project.

Public entities applying as leading project partners may only apply for an A3

Dam Removal grant (or Category B grant – see separate Category B application eligibility). A public entity applying as a lead partner must provide at least 50% of project costs i.e. **the programme will contribute up to 50% of project costs**. Total funding for the project must be included in the project budget. Applicants must also describe the availability of public funding for river restoration and dam removal in the implementing country and demonstrate the need for resources provided by the Open Rivers Programme.

Projects must be implemented in Greater Europe, and coordinating partners must be registered in Greater Europe.

Countries of Greater Europe: Overseas territories are not included.

Albania	Germany	Netherlands
Andorra	Greece	Norway
Armenia	Hungary	Poland
Austria	Iceland	Portugal
Azerbaijan	Ireland	Romania
Belarus	Italy	Russia (as far east as Urals)
Belgium	Kazakhstan (West of River Ural)	San Marino
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Kosovo	Serbia
Bulgaria	Latvia	Slovakia
Croatia	Liechtenstein	Slovenia
Cyprus	Macedonia	Spain
Czechia	Moldova	Sweden
Denmark	Monaco	Switzerland
Estonia	Montenegro	Turkey
Finland	Lithuania	United Kingdom
France	Luxembourg	Ukraine
Georgia	Malta	Vatican City

Important note for coordinating partners who are awarded a grant

If you successfully secure a grant at the end of the application process, you will receive a Grant Award Letter (GAL) from us, which is our contract with you. The contract will require the activities outlined in your proposal to be delivered within the timeframe and budget set. The GAL will be signed by both the programme and the coordinating partner. There are several important points to note about implementing a grant from the programme.

- We require all materials from the grant to be made publicly available for free via the Internet, including text, images, audio, and video.
- You should hold public liability insurance that covers the period of implementation. These costs can be budgeted in your application if

needed.

For dam removal (demolition) projects only (A3 or A4)

We will require you to confirm that no known issues might jeopardise the river from remaining free-flowing once the dam(s) have been removed.

2.2 Basic criteria that need to be met

Projects focus on the removal of small dams.

Our rationale is that focusing on small barrier removals is the most cost-effective river restoration method. Generally, they are easier to remove and lower risk than higher structures. We generally select projects with barriers of around 1 – 3 metres in height, but higher barriers will be considered. When assessing your application, we will compare your submission against all other submissions and shortlist those projects that maximise the value for money, i.e. the amount of ecological restoration that can be achieved against the amount spent by the programme. Please note that barriers higher than five metres will occasionally be considered but will need to demonstrate exceptional ecological gain against the project's total cost.

The barrier(s) will be removed to the full vertical extent.

We require that all small dam removal projects remove the full vertical extent of the dam (i.e. the height of the dam). Fishway projects, including nature-like bypass structures, rock ramps, and projects that retain a sill, will not be eligible. For barrier removal to qualify as successful, it must have been removed through its full vertical extent, allowing natural and hydraulic connectivity, hydrologic conditions, sediment transport, and fish migration.

The project can be completed within one year.

We aim to support projects that can be completed within 12 months. We will accept applications for projects that take longer to deliver, but the assessment process will be stricter, and clear justifications will need to be expressed.

If you wish to discuss your case with us before applying, please contact us applications@openrivers.eu

Local stakeholders and public administrations broadly support the proposed removal(s).

We require that all small dam removal projects have support from local stakeholders and public administrations.

2.3 Eligible costs and expected timeframes

- Applicants must submit a budget and schedule of activities spreadsheet which explains activities and costs in detail. The budget and schedule of activities should be final and cannot be changed by

the applicant after submitting your proposal. A [template example](#) is provided, which you can adapt for your application.

- All costs should be relevant and necessary to complete the project.
- All costs should be in Euros, and the programme will transfer funds in Euros.

3. Application Assessment

Please review our [top tips](#) for a successful application. These tips will make the difference in deciding whether to proceed with an application.

3.1 What we are looking for

The fundamental aim of the programme is to remove small dams from rivers and to make rivers free-flowing again. The desired outcome is ecological restoration – to restore the diversity and abundance of life in rivers and their surrounding ecosystems. Category A projects will be scored on their potential to achieve the following:

Maximise the potential for ecological gain

This is the number one goal of the programme, and our approach will be to take every possible step to select projects that achieve this. This means that we are more likely to select projects in areas of low fragmentation where it will be cost-effective to achieve ecological restoration. We encourage projects that demonstrate the following criteria:

- Potential to open up large areas of previously fragmented river – kilometres gained upstream of the next barrier (natural or artificial).
- Potential to restore rare, threatened, or endangered habitats or species, i.e. rivers of significant ecological importance.
- Restore ecological and hydromorphological processes.
- Restore connectivity between habitats (importance of considering longitudinal, lateral, and vertical connectivity).
- Help ensure rivers are more resilient to short- and long-term changes (such as climate fluctuations).
- Consider whole river basins and justify the relevance of each proposed dam removal(s) in opening up a catchment.
- The extent to which the removal contributes to a wider restoration plan at the catchment level and Good Ecological Status.
- Demonstration that River Basin Management Plans have been consulted and have informed the dam removal approach.
- How will the project contribute to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030? EC guidance on the Biodiversity Strategy river restoration targets was published late in 2021.
- Provide other benefits to riparian ecology.

The programme is more likely to support multiple dam removals that open up large stretches of river and impact whole river basins than isolated single removals. The value/rationale behind each proposed removal within a catchment should be articulated in applications.

Single dam removals should demonstrate that they will have a significant

ecological impact/open up a large area of river; there is no justification to remove other dams in the catchment or that the removal of other barriers in the catchment will be addressed in subsequent phases of work.

For help selecting barriers within a catchment, see the following [report](#), written for the Open Rivers Programme.

Demonstrate a clear pathway to dam removal

(A1 and A2 applications)

Pre-demolition projects should demonstrate that their successful completion will result in the dam(s) being ready for removal, i.e. we are unlikely to support pre-demolition projects if there is uncertainty that the dam(s) can be removed. Stand-out projects will clarify how the project activities will lead to dam removal.

Achievable in short timeframes and relatively low risk

The programme is unlikely to support controversial or risky projects. Most dam removals will likely be obsolete or abandoned structures.

The programme aims to support projects that can be implemented within a year, and which have the support of local administrations and communities. Ideally, consents and authorisations will have been secured or will be able to be secured within a year. Projects that take longer than one year could be considered if they are exceptional in terms of their potential for ecological restoration. Applicants should demonstrate that they have consulted with river basin managers in the project's design.

Stands out as unique and important

- Exceptional projects that have wider catalysing impacts.
- Helps to embed dam removal and dam prevention into policies, planning, research, implementation guidelines, best practices, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Encourages others to fund dam removal.
- Encourages others to remove dams.
- Demonstrates a new or innovative technique.
- Has a strong positive economic and/or social impact.

Demonstrate value for money

We wish to remain flexible and support the most compelling projects that demonstrate the best potential to meet the programme's aims.

Therefore, we do not publicise minimum and maximum funding amounts, but we expect applicants to demonstrate value for money, e.g. projects that have a low cost but a high ecological benefit or where co-funding is secured.

Demonstrate the need for funding

The programme will prioritise support for dam removals and pre-demolition work when it is shown that it is not the responsibility of other entities/local governments to support the proposed work. For areas where a significant amount of existing data and information exists, such as countries included in the Water Framework Directive, please describe how existing information will be utilised, avoid duplicating efforts, and justify that pre-demolition work activities are essential to the successful future removal of barriers.

3.2 How applications will be assessed

Every EoI and Proposal will be reviewed by the programme's independent Grant Selection Panel (GSP), which is composed of experienced professionals with technical expertise in various fields including, but not limited to, dam removal specialists, engineers, geomorphologists, ecologists, legal experts, advocacy, and communications specialists. The assessment process is as follows:

1. Eligibility checks

All projects will be checked to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria. This will include checks on coordinating partners to confirm their legitimacy and their ability to coordinate the proposed project.

2. Scoring by GSP members

Scores are assigned to applicant answers according to the strength of the answer against the criteria presented in the application form and the programme's overall goals. All answers must be clear, specific and concise. Scores from all reviewers are added together, and a final average score is obtained. The main scoring areas include:

- Ecological potential/length of river made free-flowing.
- Cost-benefit – the cost against the expected ecological outcomes.
- Viability – the ease of the project being completed/degree of risk.
- Best practices – unique or showcase examples, the 'wow factor'.
- Likelihood that the pre-demolition work will lead to dam removal that can later be supported by the programme (A1 and A2 applications).

3. Final assessment

The highest-scoring projects that fit within our budget will be shortlisted. Several additional factors are considered including:

- Supporting a balance of projects across Europe to ensure that at least 50% of funds are directed to less economically developed regions and not limited to countries that are more advanced in preparing projects for funding. Gross Domestic Product figures are used to assist this analysis.

- Several broad environmental indicators such as the National Biodiversity Index, and the area of land within a protected area.

4. Application procedure

a) Logon to our application portal

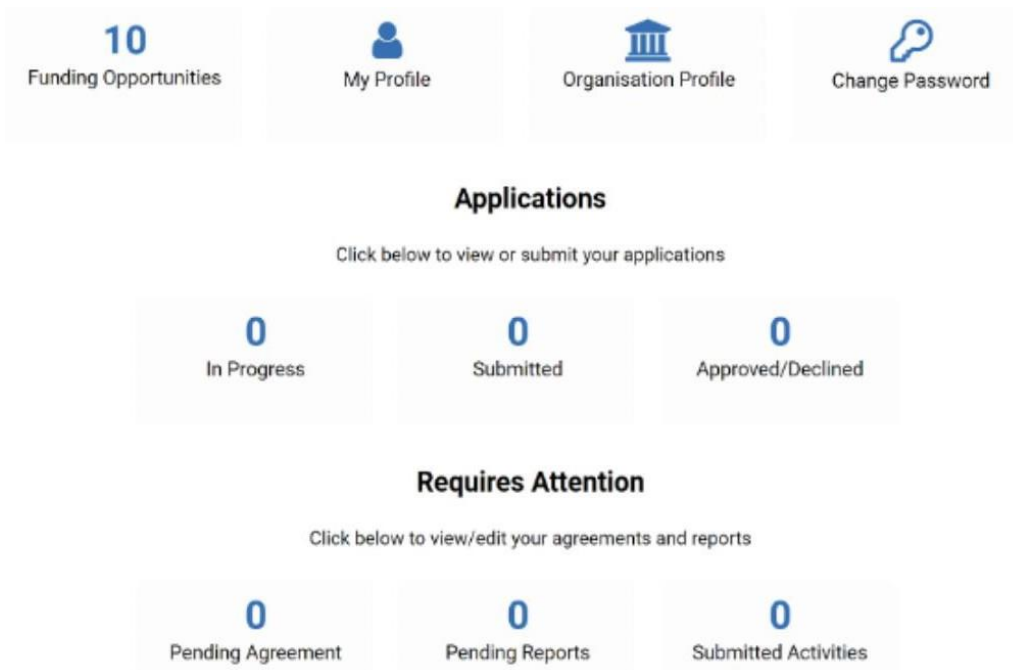
All applications should be made online via our [application portal](#).

New users

Click the 'register here' button and complete all the required fields. You will then receive an email with a link to create a password.

Existing users

Log in with the email and password you selected when you signed up. Your application portal starts with a homepage like the example below:



From this page, you can click on any of the blue text as follows:

Funding Opportunities

Apply for a grant and see all the grant types currently inviting applications.

My Profile / Organisation profile

Access and edit your own profile or that of your organisation.

Change Password

In progress / submitted / approved / declined

Contains applications that are currently being drafted, have been submitted, and have been approved/declined by the programme.

Requires attention

This section applies to grantees and highlights when an action needs to be taken to sign a contract and submit a progress report. It includes a record of previously submitted activities.

b) Click on 'Funding Opportunities' to apply and then '**Apply Now**' under grant **category A**.

Please note:

- Every question will explain what is required and provide useful information to guide your answer.
- You cannot apply for multiple grants in different categories (e.g. A, B and C) in one application. You must use separate applications to apply for multiple grants in different categories.
- You can save incomplete applications and return them later. The GMS will allow for a draft application to be saved, and you can review it later before submitting it.
- You cannot submit your application until all sections are completed, and mandatory uploads are created.

Review your application before submitting it. Consider asking someone external to review your application. Does it make sense? Can they remember the key points? Please remember that the proposal will form part of your final contract with the Open Rivers Programme. You should ensure that all information, activities, and budgets are accurate and final

c) Submit your application

- Press the submit button at the bottom of the application before the advertised deadline. The GMS will not allow you to submit once the deadline has passed!
- After submitting your application, you will receive an automated response from the programme management team acknowledging receipt of your application.
- Once your application has been submitted for review, you cannot make any adjustments.

d) Download a PDF of your application

If you would like to download a version of your application locally to your computer, follow these steps:

1. Create a login for the Grant Management System or log in using your existing credentials.
2. Click on the grant category you want to apply for to start the application.
3. Once in the application, you may start filling in answers to the questions or click save draft right away. This will save the current draft of your application and allow you to finish it at your convenience.
4. Once you have saved a draft, a blue button that says "EoI Summary" or

"Application Summary" appears at the top of the application. If you click this, it will download a PDF of the saved version of your application so you may view the questions offline and share them between project partners.

e) Please remember to complete your application via the application portal, as this is the only way that you can apply to the programme.

If you have any queries, please contact us: applications@openrivers.eu

Thank you for reading this guide, and we look forward to receiving your application.