Esmée Fairbairn FOUNDATION

Pre-application Q&A

28 September 2026, 2.00pm to 3.15pm

Panel

- Alison Holdom, Funding Manager Lead – Creative, Confident Communities
- Stephanie Morren, Funding Manager – Our Natural World
- Tom Cowie, Funding Manager – A Fairer Future
- 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

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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.

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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

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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

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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.

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Strategic framework

Aims

Our Natural World



A Fairer Future



Creative, Confident Communities



Funding priorities to the end of 2027

- 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

Children and young people's rights



Involving young people

We want the views and voices of children and young people to be at the heart of our work in Children and young people's rights. To help us do this, we will use the Involving Young People Values to support our decision-making. These were developed by Esmée's Involving Young People Collective and offer guidance and learning for organisations on co-production with young people.

We have five long-term outcomes:

1. A shift in early years provision to ensure that young children (0-5) and their families facing barriers have quality support. ***(Closed to applications)***
2. Fewer young people, particularly those with SEND and/or experiencing racial inequity, in contact with the youth justice system, and excluded from school.
3. Children's rights are better met, with specialist legal support and better protection for marginalised groups.
4. Young people (14-25) with experience of injustice create and lead positive change, and shape decision making.
5. An end to the 'cliff edge' of support for young people leaving care. ***(Closed to applications)***

Guidance on applying, along with case studies, are below. You can also explore recent grants made in Children and young people's rights.

2. Fewer young people, particularly those with SEND and/or experiencing racial inequity, in contact with the youth justice system, and excluded from school.

We want to support work that:

- Is designed and driven by young people with lived experience of the youth justice, school exclusion and care systems
- Challenges injustice in systems for young people, particularly for those experiencing racial inequity, disabled young people and those with special educational needs.
- Goes beyond delivery of preventative programmes to share learning and spread effective approaches in statutory services.

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.

Additional guidance for the *second* long-term outcome. See our website for the full guidance and case studies

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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.

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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.

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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

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Watch a short video on how to apply



If you can't see the video, you can watch the video on YouTube.

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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



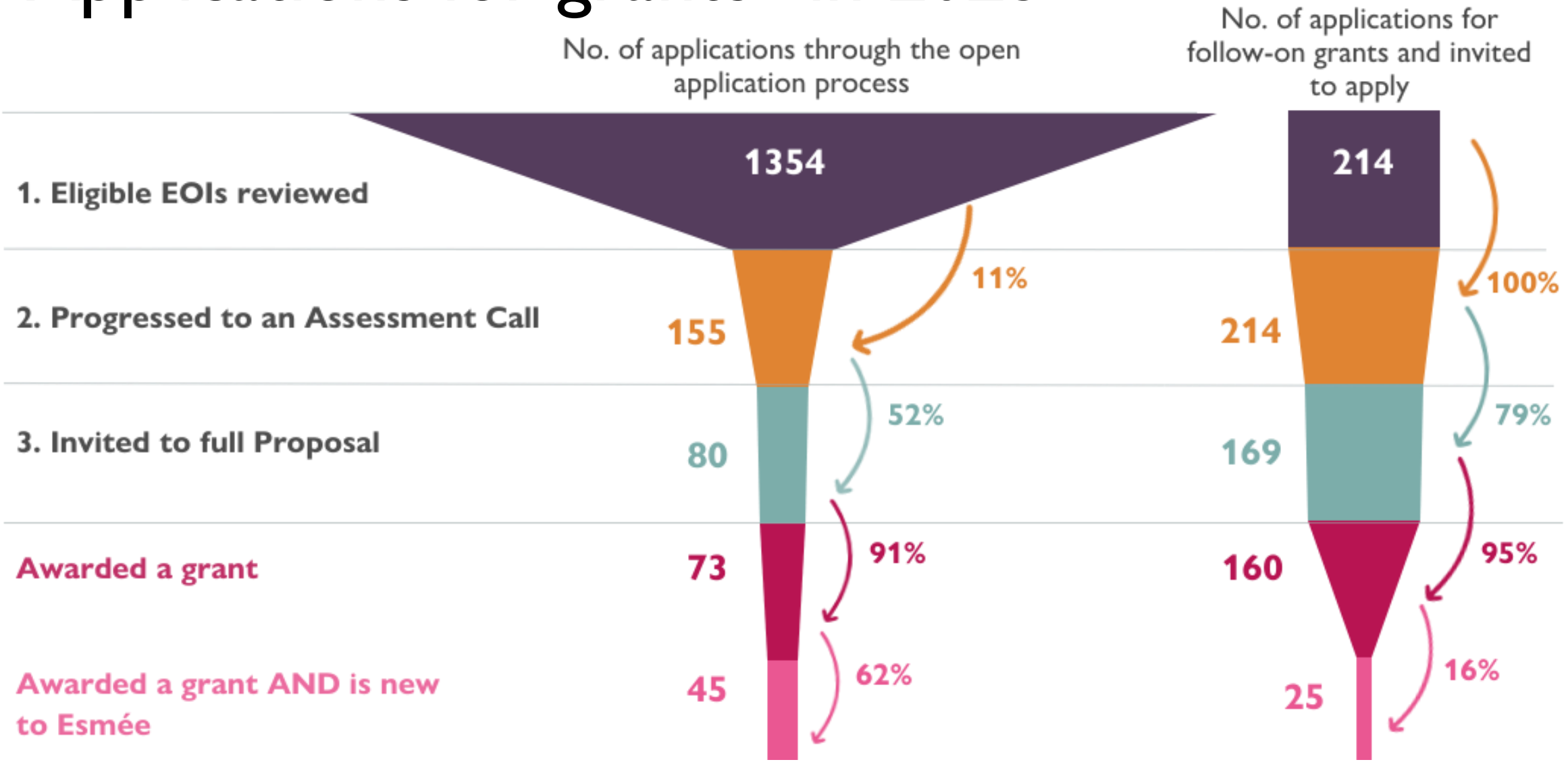
Applications considered at staff meetings

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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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For more information:
www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

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Find us on social media