INFORMATION GUIDE

Category A grants: Programme-supported dam removals
Category B grants: Enabling others to remove dams



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

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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.

1.2. Category A1: Barrier identification and prioritisation

Category A1 is designed to support the identification and strategic selection of small dams that could later be removed with a grant (A4) from the programme.

If an inventory of barriers doesn't already exist, creating one is a key outcome for this grant. The inventory should include details such as location, height, width, photos, and field verification.

The grant may also fund outreach efforts to engage the local community in discussions about removing the identified barriers.

Identification and prioritisation projects must demonstrate a clear link between the activities funded by 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/or 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 identification grants: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

1.3. Category A2: Dam removal – pre-demolition

Category A2 supports the development of essential work needed to prepare for the removal of a small dam, to be later supported by another grant within the programme. This may include activities such as feasibility studies, preparing technical design documents, and securing necessary permissions and permits.

1.4. Category A3: Dam removal – demolition

Category A3 funds the demolition of a barrier, where no pre-demolition work is required or such work has already been funded by a third party.

1.5. Category A4: Dam removal – demolition (follow-up on a previous grant)

Category A4 funds the demolition of a barrier where pre-demolition work has already been funded by the programme (A1 and/or A2).

2. Category B grants: enabling others to remove dams

2.1. Introduction

This grant supports pre-demolition work when funding for the actual dam removal (demolition) is secured from an alternative funder.

This grant focuses on supporting the development of essential work required to prepare for the removal of a dam, for example, feasibility studies, preparation of technical design documents, and securing permissions and permits. The completion of the work will result in the dam being removed by a third party.

The key difference from Category A2 grants is that the programme does not fund the demolition itself, as it is or will be financed by another source. Our initial research indicated that, while funding for demolition could often be secured, pre-demolition work was sometimes overlooked. This gap was preventing some river managers from progressing with dam removal projects.

3. Eligibility criteria

3.1. Who can apply?

We recognise that projects often involve a range of partners and contributors, including NGOs, government bodies, academia, the private sector, community groups, and individuals. We welcome and encourage applications from diverse consortia and collaborations. However, we have specific criteria regarding who can act as a coordinating partner.

The **coordinating partner** is the main applicant to the programme and will lead the project management. They will handle the grant finances, sign the grant contract with the programme, and take responsibility for the successful delivery of the project. This partner will usually be based in the country of implementation. If a non-resident organisation applies as the coordinating partner, they must justify why their involvement is essential, for example, if there is no suitable national coordinating organisation in the implementing country.

The following organisations may apply to the programme for Categories A and B:

- Charitable organisations (ALL)
- Organisations with not-for-profit status (ALL)
- Public sector entities (**A3 and B only**)

Charitable organisations and not-for-profit organisations are eligible to apply for all grant types. We expect most applicants to be organisations with an environmental focus and a proven track record in river restoration or ecological work.

While private organisations and community groups are encouraged to participate in projects as partners, we do not accept unsolicited applications from these groups. If such groups cannot identify a suitable NGO coordinator for their project, they are welcome to contact the programme to explore potential options.

Projects must be implemented in Greater Europe, and the 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	North Macedonia	Spain
Czechia	Moldova	Sweden
Denmark	Monaco	Switzerland
Estonia	Montenegro	Türkiye
Finland	Lithuania	United Kingdom
France	Luxembourg	Ukraine
Georgia	Malta	Vatican City

3.1.1. For Public Sector Entities wishing to apply

The eligibility criteria for public sector entities are more restrictive than those for NGO applicants. The programme defines a public sector entity as a department, agency, authority, commission, or any other body established under a legal act for public purposes or the public good.

To apply for a grant as a publicly funded entity, you must manage water resources and have proven experience in river restoration and/or dam removal. It is essential that the staff managing the grant have relevant expertise in these areas; general agency experience alone will not suffice. Applicants must also show a commitment to forming partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders for the project's implementation.

Additionally, applicants must outline the availability of public funding for river restoration and dam removal in the implementing country and justify the need for resources provided by the Open Rivers Programme.

Public entities applying as lead project partners are only eligible to apply for an A3 dam removal grant or a Category B grant.

A public entity applying as the lead partner must provide at least 50% of the project costs, as the programme will only contribute up to 50%. The total funding for the project must be shown in the ORP project budget. We expect the majority of the costs to be allocated to towards the demolition of a barrier in the case of A3 grants or for technical designs or other important feasibility work in the case of B grants. Please note that we do not usually support staff, travel, communications, event or permitting costs for public entities. If you have any queries about whether your project costs are eligible for support, please contact us before submitting your proposal.

3.1.2. For identification projects only (A1)

We will not support more than one A1 (identification project) unless your previous project/s have been awarded a follow-on dam removal (A2 pre-demolition, or A4 dam removal grant).

3.1.3. 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.

3.1.4. 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.

3.2. Basic criteria that needs to be met

Projects focus on the removal of small dams.
The programme supports the removal of man-made barriers such as dams, weirs, culverts, sills, sluices or fords. We do not support the removal of natural barriers.

Our rationale is that focusing on the removal of small barriers is the most cost-effective method of river restoration. Smaller barriers are generally easier to remove and pose less risk compared to larger structures.

We typically select projects involving barriers around 1-3 metres in height, although we will consider higher barriers as well. When assessing your application, we will compare it with all other submissions and prioritise projects that offer the best value for money - i.e., the greatest ecological restoration relative to the programme's investment.

We reserve the right to evaluate the eligibility of projects that contemplate the removal of groynes on a case-by-case basis and according to the degree to which they obstruct longitudinal connectivity. Please note that while barriers over five metres in height may occasionally be considered, they must demonstrate exceptional ecological benefits relative to the project's total cost.

Upstream distance of river length opened up.
We aim to support projects that open up at least 10 km of river (upstream) but will consider projects that reconnect lower distances if there is still an exceptional ecological justification for the removal.

The barrier(s) will be removed to the full vertical extent.
We require that all small dam removal projects remove the entire vertical extent of the dam (i.e. the full height). Projects involving fishways, including nature-like bypass structures, rock ramps, or those that retain a sill, will not be eligible. For a barrier removal to qualify as successful, the dam must be fully removed through its entire vertical extent, restoring natural hydraulic connectivity, hydrological conditions, sediment transport, and fish migration.

The removal of the barrier must result in a significant uplift in connectivity and positive ecological change.
In general, we recommend selecting a barrier that fully blocks the longitudinal connectivity of the river during all flow types.

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.

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.

3.3. Eligible costs and expected timeframes

- Applicants must submit a detailed budget and schedule of activities spreadsheet, clearly explaining all activities and associated costs. **The budget and schedule should be final and cannot be altered by the applicant after the proposal is submitted.** A template is provided, which can be adapted for your application. You can find the template on the programme website under the Apply for a grant page.
- All project expenditures and implementation timescales must be in the future and after a grant has been awarded. Applicants cannot budget for activities that have been started or executed prior to the grant award.
- All costs must be relevant and necessary for completing the project.
- All costs should be presented in Euros, and the programme will transfer funds in Euros.
- Office equipment (e.g. laptops or phones) and field equipment (e.g. waders or underwater cameras) are not eligible for funding under the programme.

3.4. What is not supported

- The removal of barriers that do not fully obstruct river connectivity and do not pose a significant obstacle for fish migration.
- Expensive projects with low ecological significance (e.g. limited river length reconnected).
- Projects in rivers with poor ecological status are less likely to receive support, as the ecological benefits following removal may be minimal or take a long time to materialise.
- Post-dam removal restoration, unless necessary to prevent negative impacts (e.g. altered hydrological regimes causing flooding or bank stabilisation).
- Partial dam removals. To be eligible for funding, the entire vertical extent of the barrier must be removed. The programme only supports complete removal to fully restore natural river flow.
- Purchase of barriers.
- Barrier identification and prioritisation projects in countries where dam removal is already a well-established river restoration measure (see section 1.2. Category A1: Barrier identification and prioritisation').

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

4. Application stages and timing

There are three calls for grant applications each year and we require one proposal from each applicant. Please see below for each call's stages and timing.

Please note that all timings and durations in the tables below are approximate and subject to change. Up-to-date timings for the year ahead can be found on the Open Rivers Programme's official website, on the Application Calendar page.

4.1. Winter Call

Action	**Timing**
Application call opens	Early February, and lasts approximately 4 weeks
Q&A webinar for applicants	1-2 weeks after call opens
Application call closes	Mid-March
Request for additional information from applicants (if needed)	Late May
Outcome of application is announced Grant Award Letters (contracts) are signed Projects can begin	Late June – early July
Kick-off meetings for new projects	Late July

4.2. Summer Call

Action	**Timing**
Application call opens	Early June, and lasts approximately 4 weeks
Q&A webinar for applicants	1-2 weeks after call opens
Application call closes	Early July
Request for additional information from applicants (if needed)	Late September
Outcome of application is announced Grant Award Letters (contracts) are signed Projects can begin	Early to mid-November
Kick-off meetings for new projects	Early December

4.3. Autumn Call

Action	Timing
Application call opens	Early October, and lasts approximately 4 weeks
Q&A webinar for applicants	1-2 weeks after call opens
Application call closes	Late October
Request for additional information from applicants (if needed)	February
Outcome of application is announced Grant Award Letters (contracts) are signed Projects can begin	Mid-March
Kick-off meetings for new projects	Late March

5. 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.

5.1. 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 – contributing 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:

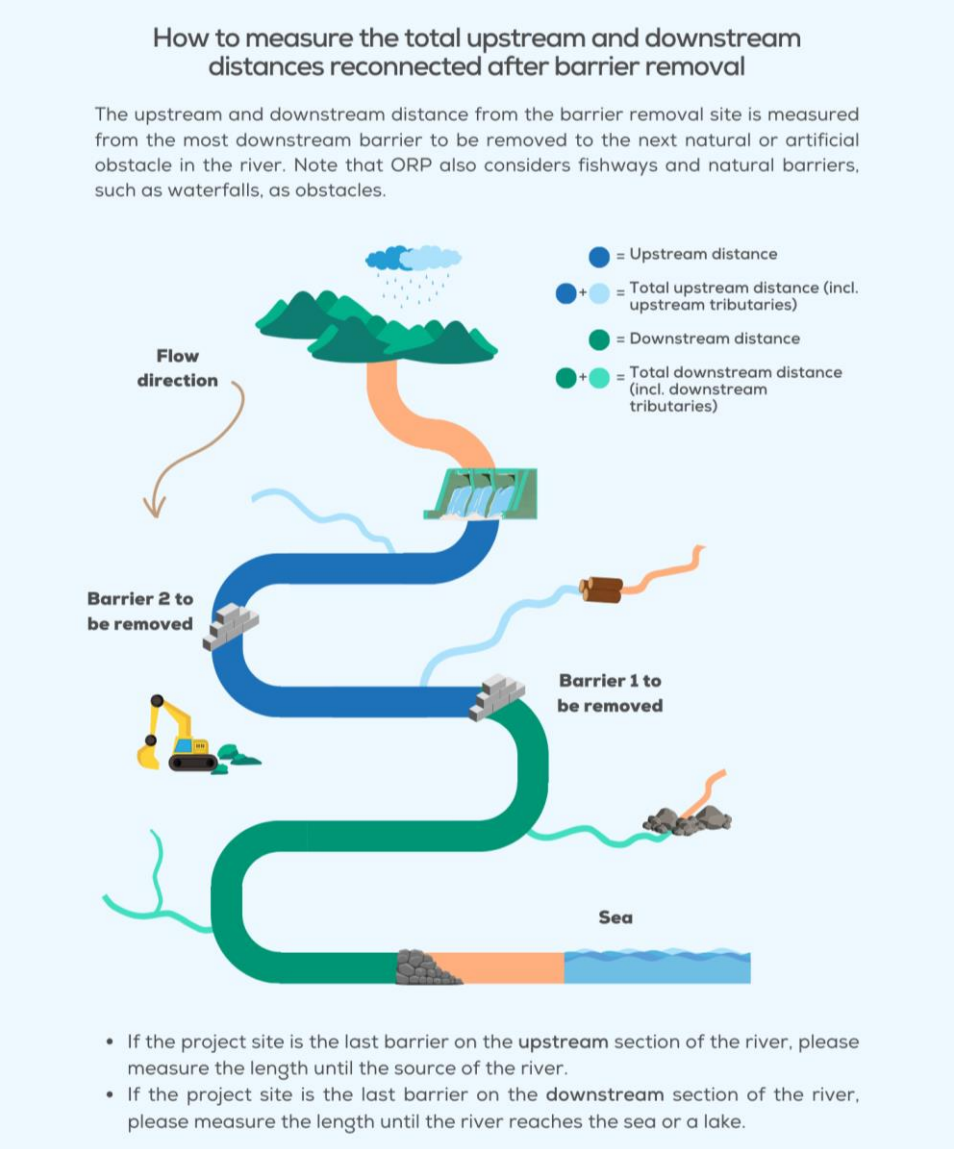
- Potential to open up significant areas of previously fragmented river – measured in kilometres gained upstream to the next barrier (natural or artificial), while also considering the distance to the next downstream barrier.
- Potential to restore rare, threatened, or endangered habitats or species, focusing on rivers of significant ecological importance.
- Contributing to the restoration of ecological and hydromorphological processes.
- Contributing to the restoration of connectivity between habitats, considering longitudinal, lateral, and vertical connectivity.
- Helping to ensure rivers are more resilient to both short- and long-term changes, such as climate fluctuations.
- Consideration of entire river basins, with justification for the relevance of each proposed dam removal in opening up the catchment.
- Extent to which the removal contributes to a wider restoration plan at the catchment level and supports achieving Good Ecological Status.
- Demonstration that River Basin Management Plans have been consulted and have informed the approach to dam removal.
- How the project will contribute to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, considering EC guidance on river restoration targets published in late 2021.
- Provision of additional benefits to riparian ecology.
- If the targeted site is in a protected area (Natura2000, UNESCO Biosphere, national/regional park, etc.), please explain why this area is awarded this special protection.

- We view applications positively if the interventions are in areas where a project is also being implemented with funding from the Endangered Landscape and Seascapes Programme (ELSP). Like the ORP, ELSP is also funded by Arcadia. You can see all ELSP supported projects here.

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 resources listed on the programme's Project preparation page. For guidance on how to measure the total upstream and downstream distances reconnected after barrier removal, please refer to the infographic below.



Demonstrate a clear pathway to dam removal

A1 and A2 projects should demonstrate that their successful completion will result in the dam(s) being ready for removal, i.e. we are unlikely to support 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. We request that all applications except for identification projects (i.e. A2, A3, A4 and B) should ensure that there is support for removal from the owner of the barrier and local authorities before applying for a grant

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 before applying.

Stands out as unique and important

- Exceptional projects that have a broader catalytic impact.
- Supports the integration of dam removal and prevention into policies, planning, research, implementation guidelines, best practices, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Encourages other organisations or bodies to fund dam removal.
- Inspires others to take action on removing dams.
- Demonstrates a new or innovative technique.
- Generates 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.

5.2. How applications will be assessed

Every 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 (for 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.

6. Application procedure

1. Logon to our application portal

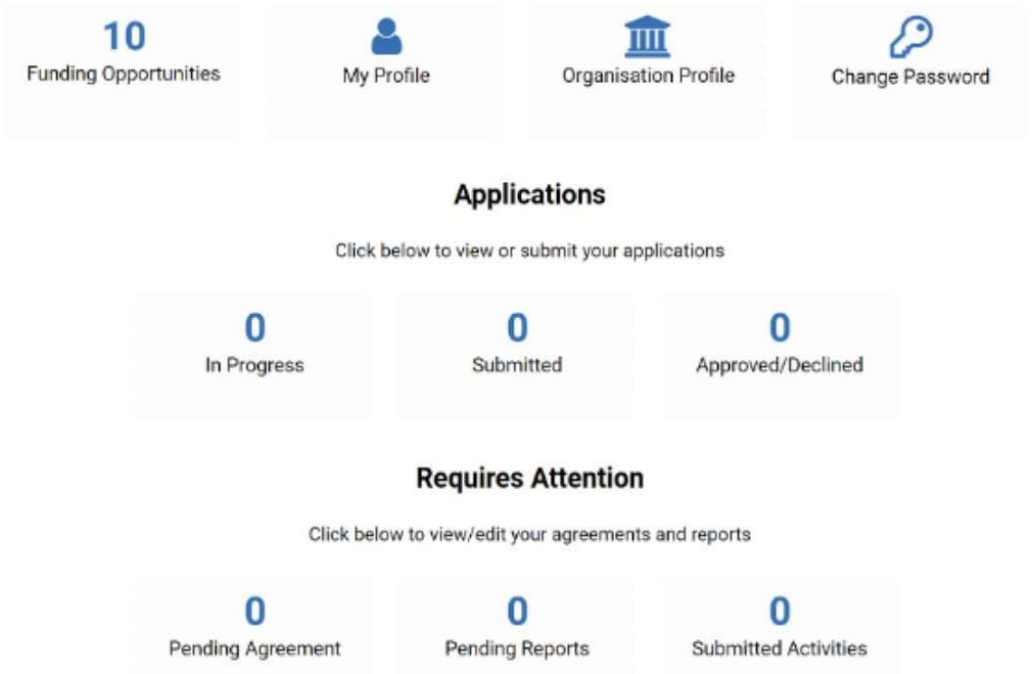
All applications should be made online via our application portal. However, the portal is only accessible when the call is open. Outside of open call periods, you can still prepare your application by downloading the application form templates for all grant categories here.

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.

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

Please note:

- Each question will explain what is required and provide useful guidance to help you with your answers.
- You cannot apply for multiple grants across different categories (e.g., A and B) in a single application. Separate applications must be submitted for grants in different categories.
- You can save incomplete applications and return to them later. The application portal allows you to save draft applications, which you can review and finalise before submission.
- You cannot submit your application until all sections are completed and the mandatory uploads are provided.

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

3. **Submit your application**

- Press the submit button at the bottom of the application before the advertised deadline. The application portal 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.

4. **Download a PDF of your application**

- Save a draft of your application in the portal. Once saved, a blue button

that says “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.

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.