# YOUTH FUNDING TOOLKIT

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR YOUTH-LED CLIMATE AND NATURE PROJECTS.**

***BY YOUTH, FOR YOUTH.***

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Breathe Mongolia

# Intro

Fundraising isn't just about raising money. It's finding people who care about the same future you do and helping them understand how they can support your work. It's also about **building a network of opportunity**; a good funder can sometimes unlock your next funding opportunity by offering introductions, credibility, and support beyond the grant.

This toolkit will help you get there. It was co-created by young project leaders for young project leaders, working on youth-led climate and biodiversity work, but the skills inside apply across fundraising in general. It's designed for early-stage teams, with clear, practical guidance on storytelling, budgets, grants, donations, earned income, donor meetings, reporting, and a few templates you can copy and adapt.

Fundraising rarely happens overnight. It takes planning and teamwork: sharing tasks, tracking deadlines, and making room for fundraising alongside on-the-ground work.

Use this however it works best for you. If you're new to fundraising, go step by step with your team. If you're stuck on one thing (like budgets or relationship building), jump straight to that section. And if you're not legally registered yet, don't worry - there are still ways to access funding (often through a trusted host organisation or partner).



The Tiwai Honey Initiative

## One honest note

The funding system isn't built for young leaders. Even though youth are driving solutions on the ground, only a very small share of institutional funding reaches youth-led initiatives. That's not because your work isn't worthy of funding; it's because of systemic barriers. One of the barriers is that many funding processes still assume young people are "too risky", require paperwork that's hard to access, or favour organisations with long track records.

This toolkit won't fix the system overnight, but it will help you navigate it: with practical tools, real examples, and tips that make fundraising clearer and more manageable. Because **your project is worthy of funding**, let's make it happen!

### Definition: Systemic Barriers

Are obstacles built into the way society works. They aren't about individual people, but about rules or norms that make it harder for some groups to access opportunities or resources. **We Trust Youth** is a great place to learn more about how to advocate for structural change.

# Funding Affirmations

Fundraising can feel really overwhelming sometimes. Throughout your fundraising journey, come back to these Fundraising Affirmations to keep you motivated and remind yourself that your project is important and has real value!



*My project is important and worthy, with or without funding.*



Resources also look like people, community, time, knowledge, water, and territory.

*My project does not depend on money to have an impact.*

My work has value before funding, during funding, and beyond funding.

*I don't need perfect data. If I can show what changed, why it matters, and who it reached, that counts.*



*Money does not define my impact. Impact is what brings resources in.*

*I can stay true to my values while raising money.*

*Funding is a tool, not the goal.*



*Each application helps me sharpen my story, strengthen my plan, and identify what to improve. Every no is one step closer to the right yes.*

*Support is not a favour; it is a shared decision to make something meaningful and real.*

# Start with your WHY



## TIP!

Save your strongest applications in one document (your project summary, budget notes, key impact proof points, and a few story lines). You can reuse and tailor them each time, which saves loads of time and keeps your applications consistent.

## The power of storytelling

The work you are doing to protect and restore nature in your community is incredible and meaningful. The hard part is learning how to share the real-life impact your project is having.

Funders can struggle to understand your work, especially if they have never been to your country or seen the context you are working in. Storytelling is how you translate the work you are doing; it's how you help someone understand the problem, picture the change, and really feel why it matters.

A strong story is clear (it is easy to understand quickly), authentic (it sounds like you), and consistent (it doesn't change depending on the form or platform).

# When you’re shaping your story, think about these layers.



Guardianas del Estuario

## 1 The spark

What did you see or experience that made you want to act? What’s the problem you’re trying to solve?

## 2 Why you?

What skills, knowledge, or lived experience make you well placed to lead this work?

## 3 The reality

Where are you working, who’s involved, and what does a normal day look like? Give just enough detail to make it real.

## 4 One proof point

You don’t need loads of data. One or two solid numbers, a short example of change, or a quote from your community can go a long way. Look at this example from **The Iris Project**.

# Most donor conversations go well when you can explain:

## The problem

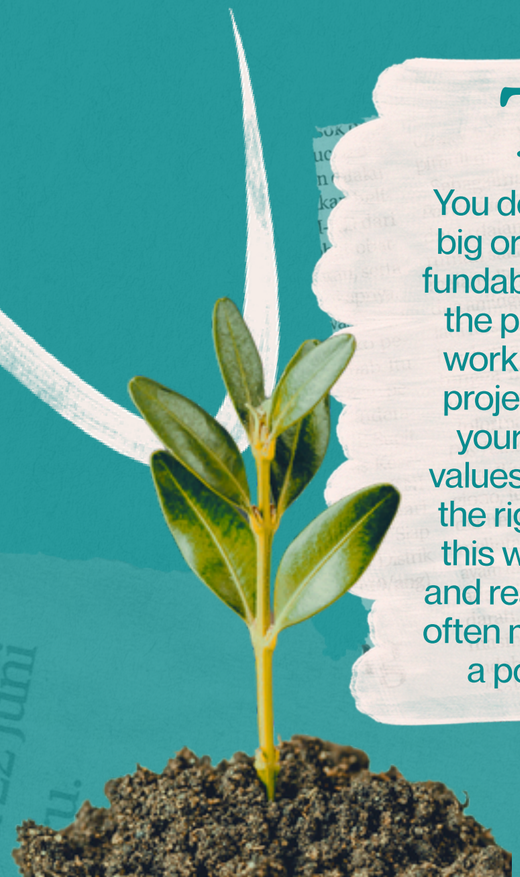
(what's happening and why it matters)

## Your approach

(what you're doing, and why it fits your community)

## What's changed

(one proof point: a number, a real example, a quote, or an impact story)



## TIP!

You don't need to be a big organisation to be fundable. Funders back the people doing the work as much as the projects. Show them your purpose, your values, and why you're the right team to lead this work. Small wins and real-world learning often matter more than a polished brand.

# Case Study



## Astrid Peraza Juárez

**Astrid Peraza Juárez, 2023 National Geographic Society and The Nature Conservancy Externship alum and seed funding recipient, shares how they have used storytelling as a tool to fundraise.**

> *When I first started sharing my project's impact, it looked very simple and very personal. I was just being honest about where I came from and why I cared. I talked about growing up near the sea, surrounded by mangroves and marine life, and how being in close contact with nature shaped who I am. In the early days of my activism, I quickly realized that education and storytelling were powerful tools to create the kind of change I wanted to see. I wasn't trying to "sell" a project, I was sharing my place in life. My goal was never just to make a documentary, but to tell a story strong enough to move people to take action for nature. Having that intention clear helped me shape how I applied for opportunities. I didn't box myself into a single category; instead, I embraced a broader identity that allowed my work to fit across environmental, gender, youth, and storytelling spaces.*

*One of the biggest changes I made in how I told my story was putting my passion first. For a long time, I focused heavily on results, on proving impact, using the right language, and saying the "correct" things. Over time, I realized that passion and authenticity matter just as much.*



*When I began speaking from the heart and being honest about why mangroves mattered to me personally - and why seeing women lead restoration efforts gave me hope - people started to really listen. They didn't just understand the project; they started to care about the ecosystems, the community, and the women protecting them.*

*In terms of format, video has always been my strongest tool. Speaking directly, from the heart, allows me to convey emotion, urgency, and hope in a way that feels very natural. At the same time, writing has become another key part of my storytelling. Over the years, I've learned how to clearly and simply explain why the project matters and what long-term impact it has, using very few words. Whether it's a pitch, a one-pager, or an application, clarity and honesty have been essential.*

*As a result of consistently putting myself out there and sharing my story, I've raised over USD 40,000 for my project. This didn't happen overnight. It came from applying to many opportunities, hearing "no" far more often than "yes," and learning to see rejection as part of the process rather than a reflection of my worth. Each application, conversation, and piece of storytelling opened doors - to funding, connections, and spaces where the voices of my community and our mangrove ecosystems could be heard.*

*If I had to do it all again, I would let go of my fear of rejection much earlier, and of the feeling of not being "good enough." There is a valid reason for me being here and doing this work. As long as I show up with honesty, responsibility, and respect for my community and the ecosystems we protect, that is enough. What I would absolutely keep is staying loyal to myself, to my community, and to the mangroves that inspired this journey in the first place.*

# A few ways to make your story LAND




- Once you've got your core story, make it easy to see and remember. One strong photo with a short caption, a 30–60 second video, or a simple diagram can bring your work to life.
- Choose one real moment that shows progress: something you're really proud of, a turning point, or a small win that changed something for someone. And adapt your story to who's reading.
- Different funders care about different things, so keep the heart the same, but explain it in language they'll understand.
- If it helps, write a one-line mission you can reuse anywhere: **what you do + who it's for + the change you're aiming for.** This can be the starting point for a simple Theory of Change (ToC). Then articulate your 'why you/why now': what makes your approach unique, and what early proof (results, partnerships, traction) shows you can deliver.

## TIP!

Free tools like **Canva** (and Figma) can help you make clean, consistent visuals without a designer, and if you're a registered nonprofit, Canva often offers free Pro access.

Take a look at the **elevator pitch tips** from National Geographic Society in the annex!

# Case Study










## Alyssa Erin Kardos Loera

**Watch this inspiring example from Alyssa, co-founder of ReMade in Cambodia, as she shares the powerful "why" behind her work.**

Take a look at the annex for **two quick guides** to check if your story is covering all the important points and not missing out your "Why"!

# Building your Theory of Change (ToC)



## Step 1

**Start with the change you want to see (Impact):** What is the long-term difference you're working towards?

***Example:*** *Wetlands in our community are protected and local biodiversity is increasing.*



Viaje Al Microcosmos

## Step 2

**Identify what you actually do (Activities):** List the main things your team is doing right now to move toward that change.

***Examples:***

- *Running community clean-ups*
- *Training local volunteers*
- *Monitoring wildlife*
- *Meeting local leaders*

## Definition: Theory of Change (ToC)

explains the change you want to see, and how your work will get you there. Some teams draw it as a diagram, but it can also just be a few sentences.



Uru Uru Team

## Step 3

**Describe what that will change in the short term (outcomes):** What should be different in the next 6-24 months because of your activities?

***Examples:***

- *More volunteers involved*
- *Reduced waste entering the wetland*
- *Community members understand why protection matters*
- *Local authorities start supporting the work*

## TIP!

Your Theory of Change doesn't need to be perfect or complicated - it needs to show a clear link between what you do → what changes → the impact you're aiming for.

Find a template for **building your ToC** in the annex.

# Keeping your community safe

When you share your work, don't feel pressure to share sensitive community details, and always get consent when telling other people's stories. If being public online puts you or your community at risk, you can still show credibility in other ways: partner references, photos that don't show peoples faces, anonymised testimonials, a short call with a community leader, or a list of collaborators.

## TIP!

here is an example of what you could say to a funder if you are unable to share information: ***"For safety reasons, we're careful about what we share publicly. We can share evidence privately (photos, references, partner contacts) and talk you through our work on a call."***

If you are not from the community you are speaking on behalf of, make sure you have their consent on how and to whom you are telling their story.



## Sumarni Laman

**Iris Project Advisor, shares best practice on keeping your community safe and getting consent to share community information.**

"

There have been several situations where I needed to protect the identity of communities for security and ethical reasons.

For example, during an advocacy and restoration project in an area degraded by mining, there was ongoing social tension between the community, police, the company, and local government. In such contexts, sharing identities, locations, or images publicly could increase risks for community members. In those cases, we prioritize community safety above reporting visibility. We communicate transparently with funders about these sensitivities, and most funders understand the gravity of the situation and respect our decision to limit public disclosure.

Another example was during a disaster relief mission. The affected communities were experiencing severe mental distress and had lost access to basic needs. We were very careful not to compromise their dignity. Instead of photographing people receiving aid, we documented logistics, supplies, and volunteers at work without clearly showing the faces of affected individuals. Protecting dignity was more important than producing emotionally compelling images.

**When is verbal consent appropriate, and when should it be written and formally signed?**

*In community settings, verbal consent is often appropriate for informal documentation, especially when there is strong trust and ongoing relationships. However, it must still be clear, specific, and informed — people should understand how their story, photo, or video will be used. If the community is the one that captures the video or photo and shares it to me, I also ask consent if I can use it and explain where I will post it.*

**Written and formally signed consent becomes important when:**

- Materials will be used for international publications or major funder reports
- Content will be widely distributed online or through media
- The documentation involves sensitive issues (e.g., land conflict, legal disputes, political advocacy)
- Funders specifically require formal documentation

**Best practice for navigating situations safely and respectfully**

*For me, the best practice is grounded in empathy, context awareness, and ongoing communication. There is no one-size-fits-all rule. Each situation requires understanding the social, political, and emotional realities on the ground.*

**I usually ask:**

- Could sharing this create risk for the community?
- Does this respect their dignity?
- Do they truly understand where their story will go?
- Are we amplifying their voice, or speaking over them?

*It is also important to be transparent with funders. When we explain the risks and ethical considerations clearly, most funders are supportive and open to alternative forms of verification such as private documentation, partner references, or direct conversations.*



# DEEP DIVE

Learn more about the **10 Principles of Community Centric Fundraising** for ways to fundraise with justice and equity at the core. It's especially useful for grounding your approach, and for telling stories that build belonging (not "othering") and reflect mutual support. It also reinforces good practice around consent, co-ownership, and not fundraising on behalf of communities without their leadership and full permission.

# When to lead with being

# YOUTH LED

**Some funders actively look for youth-led work. If that's part of their strategy, say it early and confidently - it's a strength, and it's often why you'll stand out.**

Other funders care most about project outcomes and impact. In those cases, lead with your impact first (what changed, for whom, and your proof points), and mention that you're youth-led where it adds context or credibility - for example, when it explains why your approach works, how you're rooted in the community, or why you can deliver.

## A simple rule

**If they fund youth leadership**

lead with youth-led

**If they fund outcomes**

lead with impact



Mudzi Cooking Project

# Build a budget that works for you



**A budget is your project plan in numbers. It doesn't have to be perfect - it has to show what your project wants to do, what it will cost to do it. That clarity builds trust with a funder and helps you stay on track.**

The simplest way to build one is to start with your work plan. Write down what you'll do over the next 6-12 months (your main activities), then add the costs next to each step. If you can explain each cost in one plain sentence - what it's for and why it matters - that can help keep you on track too.

# How to figure out what things will cost?

## TIP!

Build in some contingency budget. Travel costs change, things break, and sometimes projects take more time than expected. A small buffer (often 5-10%) can save you later when unexpected costs pop up. Add it in as a single budget line called “Contingency” or “Unforeseen costs”.

## Two quick quotes

for anything expensive or unfamiliar. A screenshot of a text message with costing from a vendor counts!

## Real prices

Real prices you can check quickly: screenshots, receipts, local suppliers, online listings, transport fares.





## Your past spending

if you’ve already run activities, is often the best predictor of how much it will cost to do it again.

# What to include
## *(so you don't under-budget)*



### Project costs

are the visible, on-the-ground things you need to deliver activities - materials, tools, transport, venue hire, data/airtime, printing, and small equipment.



### Operation costs

are the costs that make the work possible - coordination time, basic admin, communications, internet, finance support, safeguarding, translation, and design. These aren't "extra"; they're often what makes a project sustainable over the long term.



### Growth costs

are what strengthen your project over time - training, reusable equipment, piloting something new, improving your systems, or expanding carefully to a second site.

# Beyond the three main types of costs, there are important additional descriptions you can name in your budget:

## Safety and wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing costs are real project costs. Every project has some level of risk (online or offline), so include what you need to do the work responsibly - for example: safer travel, secure communications, data protection, safeguarding, legal advice, insurance, protective equipment, or peer support. Where to put them in your budget:

- If it's needed to run an activity, put it under project costs (e.g., safer travel to a site, protective equipment).
- If it's behind the scenes and supports the whole project, put it under operational costs (e.g., insurance, safeguarding, secure comms tools, legal advice).

## "in-kind support"

If something is being donated - "in-kind support" (venue, volunteer time, materials), still name it. It shows community support and helps funders understand what the project really costs - but try not to build a plan that only works if everyone works for free.

## A quick note on volunteers and paying yourself

It's common for early-stage leaders to leave their own time out of the budget, then struggle to keep going. If you're coordinating, reporting, organising, or consistently doing fieldwork, that is real labour. Depending on the funder, you might call this a stipend, part-time coordination, or project management support, but the point is the same: your project needs people's time to run.

Additionally, volunteers are incredible, but relying on unpaid labour can limit who gets to participate. If possible, budget for stipends, food/transport, or subsidising time.

# How to know how much to ask for

1



## Be honest about real cost

A smaller number doesn't always make it easier to win the grant, and under-budgeting often means you end up filling the financial gap yourself and burning out. Your budget should reflect the true cost of doing your work well, safely, and sustainably - including coordination time, basic operations, and any safety or wellbeing needs.

2



## Always check the funder's requirements

Some have fixed amounts, caps, or only fund certain costs. This is often an area where a funder will start to show how rigid or strict they are. Look at the section on **Funder Red Flags** to learn more.

3



## Make sure your budget matches your plan

If you can't explain what the money pays for, the ask is probably too vague.

### Two simple ways to shape your ask:

- **Levels of support:** write two options - a minimum (the essentials to do the work properly) and a growth option (what would make your project more stable or increase your reach).
- **Cost one clear strand of work:** if you do multiple activities, pick one programme (like education sessions or restoration days), cost it properly, and ask for that. Specific asks are often easier for funders to say yes to.
- Use the **Budget Template** in the annex to draft your first version, then update it as your project grows and changes.

# The different funding pathways



Match funding



Gifts



Earned income

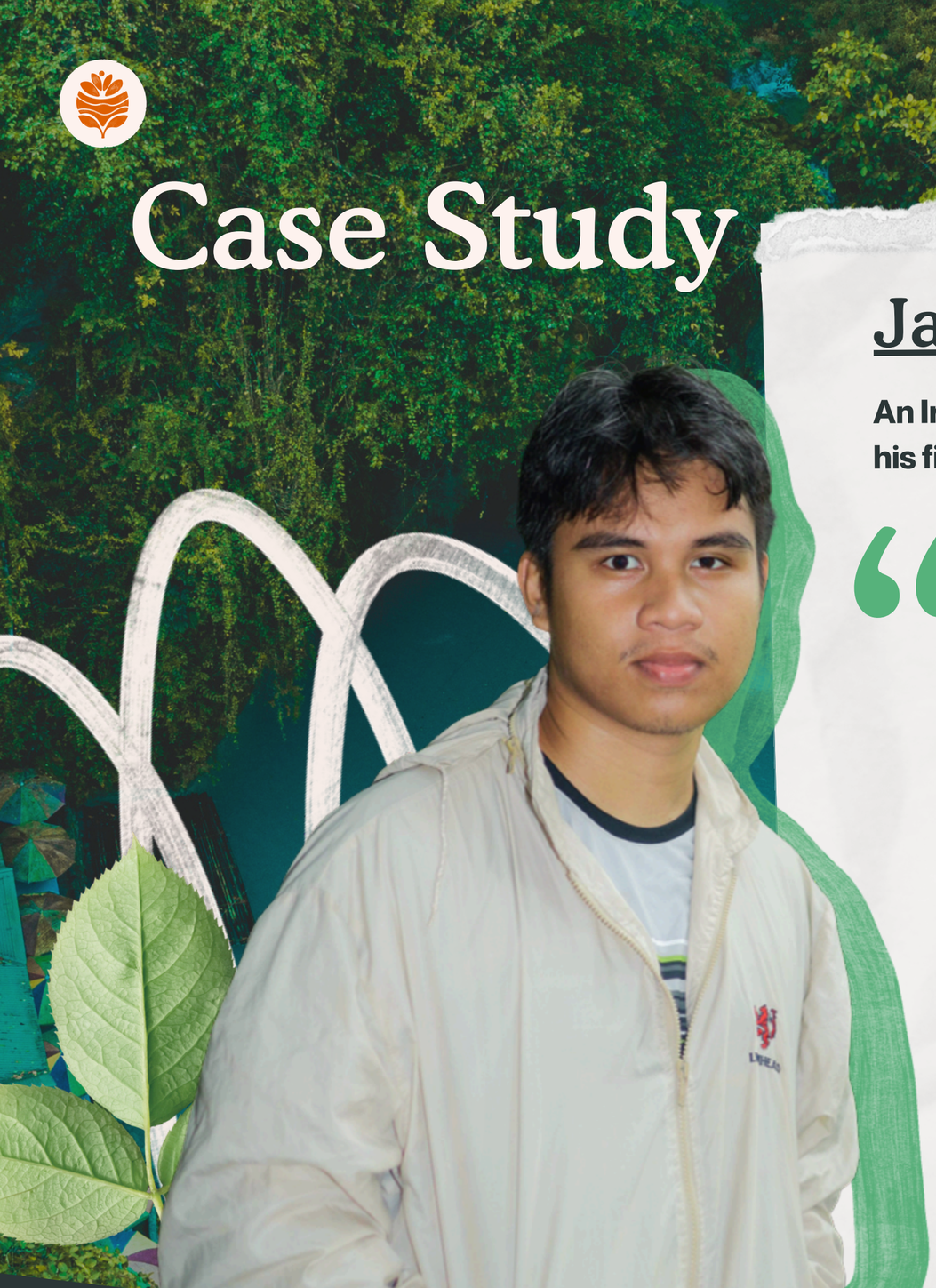
*Click icons to navigate*



Grants

Funding comes in many shapes and sizes; there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. Depending on your project, some sources will fit better than others. This section will help you explore different types of funding and strategies so you can find the best match for your work.

# Case Study



## Jann Vinze Barcinalavie

**An Iris Prize Advisor and Global Landscapes Forum Restoration Steward, brings to life his first grant experience.**

**1. What was the first grant you received, roughly how much it was, and what you used it for?**

*My first grant came in the form of seed funding from a youth climate leadership program I joined. The amount was modest, roughly around USD 450 or slightly less. As part of the program, participants were required to develop and pitch a small project, and a handful of proposals were selected to receive funding for implementation. I used the grant to support a small, community-oriented initiative that was designed to be feasible within the constraints of limited resources.*

**2. How long were you applying for before receiving funding?**

*The funding process was embedded within the leadership program itself, which ran for around two months. During this period, we participated in weekly synchronous online sessions that focused on leadership development, climate issues, and project design. The application and pitching process unfolded gradually alongside the program, rather than being a one-off submission.*



**3. What did that first grant make possible for your project?**

*Because the funding amount was limited, the project took on a more event-based and time-bound form rather than a long-term intervention. Even so, it played an important role in my learning journey. It allowed me to gain hands-on experience in project management, budgeting, grant writing, and pitching ideas to a review panel. More importantly, it helped me understand how to translate broad advocacy or community goals into concrete, actionable activities.*

**4. One tip you'd share with a first-time project lead applying for funding?**

*My main advice is to prioritise practicality. It's easy to get caught up in the language, trends, and identity-driven narratives that often dominate the NGO and funding landscape. While alignment with funder priorities matters, projects should not be shaped solely by what grantmakers want to hear. Instead, grounding proposals in real, practical value for communities is essential. First-time project leads should also avoid over-reliance on grants and think critically about sustainability, local resources, and whether the project addresses an actual need rather than a funding opportunity.*

# Restricted vs. unrestricted grants

Most grants are **restricted**: they're tied to a specific plan, budget lines, and timeline. They can be great for activities, but they may leave you scrambling to cover the core work (admin, transport costs, etc.).

**Definition:**
**Trust-based funding**

funding that is built on trust and partnership, with lighter reporting and more flexibility.

## Unrestricted funding

**Sometimes called core support, flexible funding, general operating, or trust-based grants - gives you room to fund what's most needed as things change.**

Even if a call doesn't mention "unrestricted", you can still ask what flexibility is possible. This is especially true for grants offered through competitive open calls, where the guidelines may look fixed on paper, but there's often room to discuss what's workable. Some funders will cover core costs, allow budget line movement, or keep reporting lighter if you explain what that would enable.

## Participatory grantmaking

**A different kind of grant process - is when the people closest to the issues being funded (often communities affected, activists, or past/current grantees) are directly involved in deciding who gets the funding, rather than decisions being made by foundation staff or trustees.**

- It doesn't always mean "the whole community decides" - it can be a panel (youth-led, community-led, grantee-led) with real decision power. **Youth Climate Justice Fund** is a great example of a youth-led grantmaker using participatory approaches, with regular open calls that move resources directly to youth-led work.
- The application process is often lighter or more conversational, but not always - the key feature is shared decision-making.

## TIP!

If you see words like participatory, community-led decisions, youth panel selects, or grantee-led selection, it's worth taking a closer look.

# Who gives grants *(and how they differ)*

## Intermediary Funders

(Re-granting organisations): Some NGOs and philanthropic organisations distribute funding from larger donors directly to grassroots groups. They often provide smaller, flexible grants and additional support such as mentoring or capacity-building, and are usually closer to the communities they fund.

**Global Fund for Children** **Global Greengrants Fund**

## Awards & prizes

A strong way to build credibility early on. Applications are often simpler than grants, but they can be competitive - focus on clearly telling your story and showing early proof of impact.

**National Geographic Slingshot Challenges** **The Iris Prize** **UNDP Equator Prize**

## Corporate Funders

Corporate Funders (companies and corporate foundations) often support projects linked to their business values, ESG priorities, or locations where they operate. Support can include grants, sponsorship, skills-based volunteering, or in-kind contributions. Showing mutual benefit and opportunities for employee or brand engagement can help.

**Patagonia** **Ikea Foundation**

## Independent Funders

(High networth individuals, family foundations, donor-adviser funds) donor-advised funds): Often relationship-led and accessed through introductions. They may have focus areas (e.g. youth, climate, biodiversity, a region) but processes are usually less formal than institutional funders. They can move quickly when there's trust, and may offer flexible support.

**We Are Family Foundation** **Segal Family Foundation** **Oak Foundation**

## Institutional Funders

(public & pooled funds): Large, formal funding bodies created by governments and international organisations that distribute funding through structured programmes (often via accredited partners). These can include multilateral funds, UN programmes, and national public grant schemes. Early-stage groups often access this type of funding through partnerships or intermediary organisations

**Global Environment Facility (GEF)** **UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme**

## TIP!

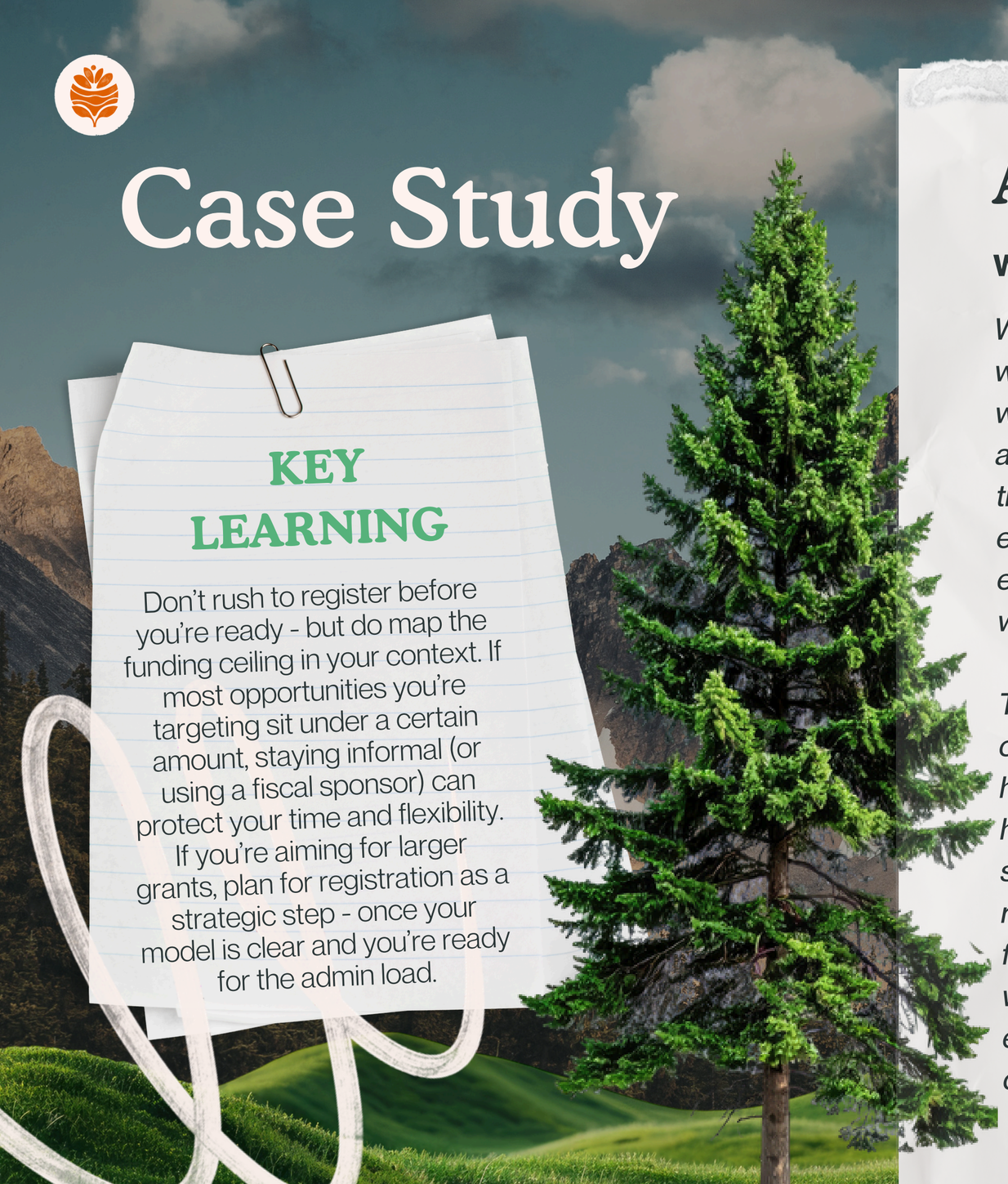
If you're not registered as a nonprofit, only apply for opportunities that fund individuals or explicitly accept unregistered projects. Otherwise, look for a local fiscal host (sometimes called a fiscal sponsor) who can hold and manage the grant on your behalf.

## DEEP DIVE

into this article on **How to raise money from progressive organisations** that focus on building relationships with and getting funded by high-net-worth individuals.



# Case Study



## KEY LEARNING

Don't rush to register before you're ready - but do map the funding ceiling in your context. If most opportunities you're targeting sit under a certain amount, staying informal (or using a fiscal sponsor) can protect your time and flexibility. If you're aiming for larger grants, plan for registration as a strategic step - once your model is clear and you're ready for the admin load.

## Anonymous

**When is the right time to register your organisation?**

*When we first tried to formalise our organisation, we registered in the US the wrong way - and it triggered a real identity crisis. We couldn't decide whether we were an NGO, a non-profit, or something else entirely. Eventually, we registered as an NGO in the US, thinking it would make funding and legitimacy easier. But locally, the reality was more complicated. In Cambodia, registering as an NGO is expensive and came with restrictions that didn't fit our model - especially around earned income. Because generating income was central to how we sustain the work, we ended up registering as a for-profit in Cambodia instead.*

*That decision was driven partly by safety: as one of very few youth-led organisations in our context, we didn't want to leave ourselves exposed to risk. In hindsight, I wish we hadn't registered so early. The admin burden has taken up huge amounts of time, and I can't point to clear benefits. We haven't received a single grant because we're registered - we may meet eligibility requirements, but registration hasn't translated into funding. That said, we've learned there are real funding thresholds. In our context, getting above roughly $25k is extremely difficult without being formally registered - bigger grants often require it. We also wish we'd explored alternatives like a fiscal sponsor, but figuring out how to do that safely in a country with corruption and complex dynamics felt overwhelming.*

## Definition:
## Fiscal host/sponsor

is a registered organisation that can receive grant money on your behalf if your project isn't registered (or a funder can only fund registered groups). The funder pays the host, who then passes the funds to you or pays project costs under the agreement. For example, **The Iris Project** is fiscally hosted by **Global Fund for Children**.



# DEEP DIVE

into the future of fiscal sponsorship in this **Proximate Press series.**

A useful organisation to know about: **The Movements Trust** can act as a charity sponsor/intermediary, helping some unregistered or non-charity groups access funding that requires charitable status. They pass through grants (after checks), but they're not a full fiscal host, providing ongoing financial management.

## Why it helps

it can unlock funding, handle some admin/reporting, and add credibility with funders.

## Watch-outs



hosts usually charge a fee and may have rules about spending and how quickly they can pay funds out.



## Timing is key

try to start negotiations with a potential fiscal host earlier in your grant process. This process takes time and will help you navigate the legal jargon.

# How young project leaders actually access grants

## Think of it as a simple cycle:

### 1 Get ‘grant-ready’

Have a small pack you can reuse: a mission statement, a theory of change, a 4-sentence project description, a 6–12 month work plan, a simple budget, 2–3 photos, and one short proof point (a number, a quote, or a case study of change).



### 2 Find 10 opportunities

then shortlist 3 that truly fit. Applying everywhere is exhausting. The biggest success hack is fit: geography, theme, stage, and eligibility. If you can’t clearly answer “why us, why now” for that funder, it’s probably not worth the time. Look into the Track and learn section for more on this!

### 3 Make a human connection

If there’s an email or a short intro call available, use it. Ask one clear question that shows you’ve read the guidelines (e.g., Can an unregistered youth group apply via a fiscal host?).

### WARNING

Real grants shouldn’t charge an application fee. If something feels off, trust that instinct.

# Case Study



## Alyssa Erin Kardos Loera

**the co-founder of ReMade in Cambodia, shares on building earned income that stays true to the mission.**

*“ReMade began by taking on paid work through conservation societies. Because our work aligned with their goal of engaging more young people, they brought us in and paid us to deliver youth-focused programming. Those early contracts were anchored in fashion shows which became the foundation for how we first generated income. From there, we grew the model step-by-step. We started with event contracts, then hotels began approaching us. That led to a second earned-income stream: upcycling textile waste into uniforms for hotel staff. What’s been important is that every income stream still ties back to our core mission - reducing textile waste while empowering local designers.*

**Over time, we diversified further:**

- **Research contracts**, because we’re one of the only organisations working at the intersection of upcycling, youth and conservation in our context.
- **Training contracts** with conservation agencies - for example, teaching women to upcycle fishing nets, and adapting that work with other wildlife communities.

**A big learning has been:** *be open to expanding in different directions, but only if it still fits your mission. Diversifying income helped us build resilience - we weren't reliant on one type of opportunity or one funding landscape.*

**One thing I'd do differently:** *launch a product line earlier. We've sold products on a one-off basis, but a product can become a steadier stream of income. Our goal is to launch a full collection soon, and if I had my time again, I would've built that steady income from the start.*

**Pricing lesson: don't undercharge because you're young:** *In the beginning, we massively undercharged. We had local advisors - one in sustainable fashion and one in conservation - and we asked what they charge. At first, we assumed we couldn't charge similar rates because we're young. Talking to friends who consult helped us recalibrate. Now we adjust pricing depending on who we're working with: we lower rates for smaller community/non-profit projects, and charge higher rates for for-profit clients.*

**Mindset shift: growth, not dependency:** "Something that helped me emotionally was seeing a graph about founder 'happiness': it drops sharply when you start your own organisation - which validated that this is genuinely hard. But once you find your rhythm and your strategy clicks, it rises again. For us, that "click" came from treating grants as growth, not dependency and building earned income alongside them."



# What earned income can look like

Some common routes for youth-led climate and biodiversity projects are:

## Workshops & Trainings

you can run for schools, community groups, NGOs, or companies (e.g., composting, mangrove planting, waste audits).

## Selling products

linked to your work (seedlings, briquettes, compost, crafts made from recovered materials).

## Experiences

like guided walks, eco-tours, restoration days, outdoor activities, or learning experiences.

## Creative & advisory services

photography, storytelling, or youth advisory and speaking opportunities or advising organisations on youth-led engagement.

## TIP!

Earned income can also strengthen grant applications - it shows you're building multiple streams of support, even if it's small.

Look in the **Toolkit Annex** at examples of earned income to see whether it could be a good fit for your project.



Guardianas del Estuario

# How to make it work (without burning out)

Start with one small offer and test it. Don't build a whole business plan on day one. A simple way to do this is to run a pilot: one workshop, one tour, one small batch of products - then decide if it's worth repeating.

Price it in a way that covers the real cost. Many projects undercharge because they only count materials. At minimum, include: materials + transport + your time + a little buffer.

Funding doesn't always look like a grant. In many communities, support shows up as shared time, skills, food, materials, meeting space, or informal savings groups. It's worth naming these as in-kind support - they reduce your costs, show local backing, and can strengthen applications.



# Case Study

## Rhiannon Guess

**2023 National Geographic Society and The Nature Conservancy Externship alum and seed funding recipient, how to build a business while keeping values at the center.**

*My name is Rhiannon Guess, and I am the founder of **Just Beach**, a reef-safe sunscreen company. The product is completely organic and fully natural, made with just 4 ingredients. The primary active ingredient is non-nano zinc oxide, which is widely recognised as reef safe. Because of the nature of organic and natural formulations, the sunscreen is safe for everyone - including babies and animals.*

*The ideology behind Just Beach is that a business can be positively impactful on all sides. I hold a bachelor's degree in Business Management, and one of the most important lessons I take from that education is how often poor morals and bent ethics are justified under the umbrella of "business." I want to challenge that norm. From the beginning, my goal is to create a model where every part of the operation benefits people and the environment - from affordable pricing and giving back, to remaining completely plastic-free from start to finish.*

*Turks and Caicos have limited waste management infrastructure. Most plastic and packaging materials are shipped in and then left on the island, where garbage is often burned as a disposal method. Because of this, every detail of my packaging matters. From wholesale delivery materials to product stickers, everything is plastic-free.*

*15% of profits are donated to the local Reef Fund NGO, which supports the health and protection of our coral reefs. Ultimately, the goal is to make environmentally responsible and personally healthy choices financially accessible, while also reinvesting in the ecosystems that need our support most.*

*Pricing is a major focus for me. I notice a persistent, and frankly classist, divide where environmentally friendly or natural products are priced significantly higher. That approach feels counterproductive to the mission of sustainability and accessibility. Of course, margins are necessary - especially when shipping to Turks and Caicos is costly, and a portion of profits is donated - but I work hard to keep pricing fair. Through a like-minded industry connection, I am able to source and package the product at a relatively affordable cost.*

*One of the more expensive components is the label. Each label must be waterproof, biodegradable, and plastic-free, which increases production and shipping costs. Even so, I price the product competitively by comparing similar sunscreens at the same volume. Currently, my tins retail at roughly half the price of leading competitors in the local market, and I also offer wholesale pricing for bulk purchases. Looking back, I would invest more in marketing, as it represents a significant portion of most business budgets.*

*From a legal and regulatory standpoint, there are few local restrictions specific to sunscreen. My primary compliance focus is ensuring I have permission to partner with and use the name and logo of the Reef Fund I support. Most of my research effort goes into product formulation - ensuring all ingredients are genuinely organic, natural, and safe for topical use.*

*Because my mission extends beyond creating a reef-safe product, I intentionally build fair trade principles, community giving, inclusive pricing, and full lifecycle responsibility into the business model. From day one, I evaluate every decision through the lens of waste reduction and environmental impact. This ethical approach feels natural and sustainable.*



# Gifts & donations




## How to make donations work:

Pick one clear “ask” and keep it simple: what the money will do in the next 3 months, and what success looks like. Use one strong photo or short video, one proof point (a number or a real example), and one easy link to give. Then follow up with genuine updates.

## One-off vs recurring

One-off gifts are great for a specific moment or a once-off project. Recurring gifts are how you build stability. Even $5-$10/month adds up, and it helps you plan.

## Is crowdfunding right for you?

Crowdfunding works best when you have three things: a reachable crowd, a clear goal, and a moment (a deadline, a match, a launch, an urgent need). It’s a good fit if you already have an active network, your goal is easy to explain, and you can share updates during the campaign.
It’s usually not the best fit if the work is highly technical, project details are confidential, or you don’t yet have a group of people you can realistically reach.

## Where donations usually come from

For early-stage projects, the first donors are often closer than you think: friends, family, your community, past supporters, alumni groups, local businesses, and people who’ve seen your work. Bigger donors and foundations often come later, usually through an introduction.

## DEEP DIVE

(a powerful way to grow donations): Donor organising is a simple idea, instead of fundraising alone, you invite a few supporters to help you fundraise from their own circles too. Over time, that turns one donor into a small team of people bringing in more donors. If you want a practical starting point (scripts, templates, and tactics), the **Donor Organizer Hub** is a great resource.

## TIP!

If you’re asking people to donate, make it easy for them to do it in the moment. Add a clear donate button on your website (or one simple donate link in your social media bio).

# Match funding

Match funding is when someone agrees to match the money you raise - usually doubling it. For example, a donor might say, “We’ll match every $1 you raise this month, up to $5,000”. It’s powerful because it makes people feel their gift goes further, and it shows there is already trust and support behind your work.

Match funding can come from a foundation, a company, a major donor, or sometimes an existing supporter who wants to help you unlock more small gifts or donations.

## A few practical tips that really help

- Make the match feel concrete and urgent: what’s the target, what’s the time window, and what happens when you hit it?
- Use it for a clear moment (a launch, a milestone, an urgent need, a specific season), so supporters understand why “now”.
- Keep the message simple: “Your donation is doubled today” is often more effective than a long explanation.

Find a **match funding pitch template** in the annex.



# Mixing different kinds of funding

Most projects don’t grow on one income source. A mix of funding makes you more stable and gives you room to adapt.

**A practical way to build your mix:**

## 1 One pot for core costs

Something that can cover the basics that keep you going (coordination time, travel, data, admin, safety/wellbeing). This could be unrestricted funding, recurring donors, or a reliable partner.

## 2 Project grants for specific activities

Restricted grants are great for clear work that has a cost, e.g. workshops, restoration days or equipment.

## 3 Something that fills the gaps

Earned income and in-kind support (space, materials, food/transport, volunteer time) can keep things moving between grants.

**An example target mix:** one activity grant + one flexible/core source + one gap-filler.

# How to find funding and stay organised



## Where to look for funding

### Stay close to home *(and use word of mouth)*

Small opportunities often come from places you're already connected to: your school or university, community organisations, local environmental groups, WhatsApp networks, and city initiatives.

It also helps to use introductions. Some funders mainly support groups they already know or hear about through recommendations. If a partner in your space has been funded before, ask if they'd be willing to introduce you - even a simple connection can help you get on their radar.

# Where to look for funding



LinkedIn

Instagram

Opportunity boards

Newsletters

YIL

Segal Family Foundation

climates

THE RESILIENCE PROJECT

CARE ABOUT CLIMATE

BIOPHILIC CONVERSATIONS

THE IRIS PROJECT

host ally for action

FORCE OF NATURE

justice funds — a curated list of funding opportunities for the Global South.

ethos atlas

The Bloom

Global Landscapes Forum

United Nations Youth Office

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

# How to find funding

Use “microgrants”, “seed funding”, “youth-led”, “community conservation”, “restoration”, “biodiversity” + your country/region as search terms

Corporate foundations or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes linked to your issue (waste, water, biodiversity)

Partners you already know (NGOs, universities, networks). They often hear about opportunities early

Funders who already support similar projects in your country/region

Local community foundations, conservation funds, youth funds, climate funds



# How to identify a “good” funder

## Green flags

- **Values align naturally:** You don’t need to reshape your work to fit their agenda.
- **Trust-based partnership:** They listen, act on feedback, and view change as an opportunity to learn.
- **Duty of care is real:** Clear safeguarding/whistleblowing routes - and they’ll fund safety & wellbeing costs.
- **Fair, proportionate reporting:** Reporting matches the grant size and formats can fit real life (video, photos, voice note + transcript).

## Red flags

- **Forcing a fit:** they push you to change your goals, so you match the call.
- **Controlling/micromanaging:** They question every decision or restrict spending in ways that block delivery.
- **Lack of protection:** No safeguarding, whistleblowing, or duty-of-care policy.
- **Admin-heavy for no reason:** Long proposals for small grants, endless check-ins, or reporting that doesn’t match the funding.

## DEEP DIVE

You can follow **Crappy Funding Practices** to hone your red flag meter!

## Definition:
## A safeguarding policy

is a document that explains how you keep children, young people, and vulnerable people safe - including expected behaviour and what to do if there's a concern.

## Definition:
## Due diligence

is the basic checks a funder does before giving money (who you are, how you'll use funds, and any risks). It should be proportionate - if it feels heavy for a small grant, you can ask for a lighter approach.

## Definition:
## A whistleblowing policy

is a clear way for people to report wrongdoing safely and confidentially (like abuse, fraud, discrimination, or power abuse) without being punished for speaking up.

## Definition:
## Reverse due diligence

is you doing the same in return. It means taking a little time to check whether a funder is a good fit for you - their values, how they treat grantees, what reporting looks like, and whether the partnership will feel supportive and safe.

# Getting to know your future funder

Before spending hours on an application, take some time to understand who the funder is and what they actually support.

Doing this research saves your energy and helps you tailor your pitch so it lands with the funder. Think of this as mapping the right route before setting off on a journey.

1



## Start with their focus

What themes do they care about (youth, biodiversity, climate adaptation, women-led work, a specific region)? What language do they use to describe the projects they support? What are they trying to achieve? If you can't clearly explain the overlap with your work, it's probably not the right funder.

2




## Who else have they funded

Who have they funded recently, and what do those projects have in common? Pay attention to size (small grassroots vs large NGOs), geography, and whether they fund early-stage work. This is one of the quickest ways to spot whether you're in their world or not.

3



## Choose the kind of support that helps you do your best work

Before you say yes (or even apply), decide what you actually need. Is this a one-off push for a specific moment, or support that lets you plan longer-term? Do you want a funder who's light-touch, or one who'll be more involved?

# TIP!

**Use AI for research purposes, but always check the funder's website to confirm details. Some helpful AI prompts:**

- *"Summarise what this funder supports, where they fund, and any eligibility rules I should watch out for."*
- *"Based on their past grants, what kinds of projects do they seem to prefer and what do they avoid?"*
- *"Based on their mission and strategy, what parts of my project could be a strong match for this funder?"*

**Test your alignment:**

before you apply, write one sentence that links your project to what the funder cares about (based on their wording), and one sentence on what the money will do for your project. If you can't write those two lines clearly, it's probably not the right funder or your pitch needs sharpening.

# Track and learn

**Fundraising feels less overwhelming when you can clearly see what's in motion. Create a tracker that looks at fundraising prospects across the year, so that you can plan accordingly for deadlines. Along with tracking deadlines, you can also track key engagement points with existing or potential funders.**

One spreadsheet should be enough for this. The key is to have an overview of your financial year with key dates on when to follow up on certain actions for funders or reporting deadlines.

**Reframe rejection -** rejection isn't failure - it's feedback. Sometimes the timing or fit just isn't right. Starting with smaller or local opportunities can help build a track record for bigger ones later! If they allow it, ask for one line of feedback; it helps you improve your next application.

## TIP!

Understanding how your funders want to stay engaged with your work is crucial. Some funders want a more personal approach and appreciate informal updates and catch-ups.

Others are happy with receiving scheduled quarterly or bi-annual reports. Learn what your funders want early on and plan ahead.



# How to stay organised throughout your grant journey

As your work grows, you'll hopefully start juggling more funders, more deadlines, and more moving parts. A simple system will save you a lot of stress later.

To help you keep on track of things:

- **The goal is to keep everything easy to find in one place.** A shared folder system (Google Drive, Dropbox, whatever you already use) is enough. Create one main "Fundraising" folder, then one folder per funder. Inside each funder folder, keep the essentials: the signed agreement, the approved budget, reporting templates, key documents, and any photos or stories you might use in updates.
- **It's also worth saving the "decision" moments from email.** Things like confirmed deadlines, approved budget changes, or what they've said yes/no to. If agreements or expectations are confirmed in an email, save it (or screenshot it) into the funder folder so you're not digging through your inbox months later.
- **For deadlines, the simplest trick is calendar reminders.** Put the report due date in your calendar, then add a reminder a few weeks before so you have time to gather numbers, stories, photos, and receipts without rushing.

# Applying for funding



## DEEP DIVE

Into the **Black Fox Global Resource**, to learn how to navigate donor relationships, the foundational rules to consider as you build your fundraising approach, and how to respond to “no” from a funder.

## Should you apply for everything?

**Not all opportunities are worth applying for. And it’s not because your project isn’t worthy. It’s because your time is limited. Choose intentionally. When applying for funding, a targeted approach is often far more effective than an “apply for everything” method.**

Before you apply, do a quick alignment check. If you can’t answer these clearly in a sentence or two, it’s probably not the right opportunity (or not right now):

- **Do they fund work like ours, in our place, at our stage?**
- **Do I meet the eligibility requirements?**
- **Is the amount worth the time it will take to apply and report?**

Even when you don’t get the funding, you’re building your fundraising muscles. Keep notes on what you sent and what feedback you got (if any).

# How to strengthen your application

Funders read a lot of applications, and they're usually skimming at first. The easier you make your work to understand, the stronger your chances.

**Aim for clarity:** what's the problem, what are you doing about it, what will change, and how will you deliver it?



## Green flags - what funders love

| Do | Why it matters |
|---|---|
| **Clear, well-structured proposal** | A clear, well-structured story: the problem is specific, your approach makes sense, and the impact is easy to picture. Use bold, clear metrics to show impact. |
| **You've done the basics properly** | Your numbers add up, costs are explained in plain language, and you've included the operational budget that makes the work possible (coordination, transport, data, basic administration). |
| **Engage beyond funding** | You've answered the actual questions, stayed within word limits, and followed the guidelines. You've attended Q&A sessions and asked application-specific questions to see whether this is the right opportunity for you. |
| **You show alignment without forcing it** | If a funder offers you capacity support beyond the financial grant, and this is something you would be interested in being part of, mention it in your application. You reflect their priorities in your own words, and you're specific about why your work fits (rather than copying phrases). |
| **Weave your personal story** | Use your personal story strategically, even if the application doesn't ask for it directly. A short, relevant personal "why" can show why you're the right person/team to do this work. Keep it tied to the project: what you've seen or experienced, what it taught you, and how that gives you insight, trust, or access to deliver the solution. |

# Red flags – avoid

| Don't | Why it matters |
| --- | --- |
| **Getting names wrong (the funder, your project, your organisation)** | It's a tiny detail, but it makes people doubt everything else. |
| **Using AI in a way that flattens your voice or introduces errors** | Tools can be great for tightening, structure, and grammar, but keep the ideas and wording true to you, and always double-check facts, numbers, names, and claims. |
| **Don't build a project around a funder** | Adjust the wording or emphasise different parts of your work, but don't change your core plan or values just because you've seen a funding call. Build around your community's needs, then look for funders whose priorities already fit. |
| **Overgeneralised goals** | "Raise awareness" or "support communities" can be true, but add one concrete detail so it's believable: who, where, how many, by when, what will be different. |
| **Forcing a fit** | If their priorities don't match your work, it will show, and you'll waste energy. |

# I’ve been invited to meet with a donor. What's next?

A donor meeting can feel intimidating, but it’s also a chance to make your work feel real and to check if this funder is a good fit. Think of it as a two-way conversation: you’re helping them understand your project, and you’re learning what they care about and how they like to fund.

**Go in ready to clearly share the basics, even if you’ve already submitted your application:** what you do, who it’s for, what’s changed so far, and what support would unlock your longer-term impact. And leave space to ask a few questions, their priorities, what they look for in strong partners, and what a “yes” could look like (amount, timeline, reporting, flexibility).

## Before the interview:

### 1 Understand the funder

Take time to get to know the funder as if you’re learning about a new collaborator. Look at their website and pull out three things: what they fund, where they fund, and what kind of projects they seem to choose. If you can, note one or two past grantees that feel similar to your work. This gives you an easy way to say, “I noticed you’ve supported X - our work connects because...”

### 2 Bring 2–3 people to the donor call (max)

Keep it small and agree on roles in advance: one person shares the story + impact, one covers the plan, and one answers budget/logistics. If your team can’t join, do a quick run-through with them beforehand so you’re speaking with shared confidence and clarity.

### 3 Choose the right examples

You don’t need to tell them everything. Pick one or two real moments - a challenge you’ve faced, a small win you’re proud of, or something you’ve learned - that show you’re close to the work and able to deliver.

A good sign you’ve prepared well is this: you can clearly link your work to what they care about, without twisting your mission. You want them to leave thinking, “This is a strong project and supporting it helps us meet our goals too.”

## TIP!

Funders are looking for projects that help them achieve their priorities. Make the link explicit: in one sentence, say how your work supports their priorities, and in the next, say what their funding would unlock. That’s what turns an ask into a partnership.

# 4 Prepare questions for the funder

**This is a rare chance to hear directly from them. The more you understand how they think and how they fund, the stronger your next pitch (to them or anyone else) will be.**

- What inspires them to fund projects like yours?
- How do they like to work with grantees beyond funding?
- If we share a short concept note, would you be open to quick feedback on what would make it stronger?
- Are there other funders or programmes you think could be a good fit and would you be open to introducing us?



# 5 Plan for practical barriers



- If you know the interview isn't in your native language, ask about an interpreter at least a week in advance.
- For online interviews, try to have strong connectivity or signal and test your setup.
- Keep the background noise to a minimum and pay attention to your background.
- If using a phone, place it on a stable surface to avoid shaky video.
- If the funder is local, consider an in-person meeting or inviting them to visit your project.

# 6 Prepare a pitch deck

Before you start, revisit the Start with your 'why' section. Use the stories, insights, and examples from those exercises to shape your slides. Take a look out the **pitch deck template guide** in the annex for guidance on building a deck.

Now you are ready to jump to the annex to go through the **Interview Prep Guide**.

# After funding



Getting your first grant is exciting, but it can feel like a lot of responsibility. This section is about the simple steps that help you stay on top of the agreement, avoid surprises, and build a good relationship with the funder.

## What to expect with your first grant agreement

**When a donor decides to support your work, they'll usually send a grant agreement. This is a formal document that outlines what the funder is offering, what they expect in return, and the key responsibilities you're taking on. It will cover things like:**

Before you sign, pull out the key details and write them somewhere you can easily find:

- **What the grant funds can (and can't) be spent on**
- **Payment dates and any conditions**
- **Reporting deadlines (and what format they want)**
- **Anything that could trip you up (for example: needing approval to change the budget, rules on equipment, photos/communications permissions)**

**Grant agreements can be full of legal language, so don't worry if it takes a couple of reads. Highlight the parts that matter, and if anything feels unclear, ask. A short clarification call is normal, and it's much easier to fix confusion now than halfway through the grant.**

AI Tools can help you summarise tricky wording, but always double-check the final interpretation with the funder if it affects what you're allowed to do. You don't need to memorise the whole document. You just want to feel clear on: what you're committing to, what the funder is committing to, and where you might need support. Asking questions early is a good sign; it shows you're taking the grant seriously.

## Money + compliance details to check (this catches most by surprise):



- **Is there pre-financing?** Some grants reimburse you after you spend. If you don't have cash to front costs, ask if they can pay some money upfront (even a first instalment) or pay vendors directly.
- **What proof do they need?** Ask what they expect you to keep (receipts, invoices, photos, attendance lists) and how organised it needs to be.
- **Do they require an audit?** An audit is an independent check of your accounts. Not all grants need one - but if they do, check who pays for it and whether it needs to be included in the budget.

## What's worth trying to negotiate (it's normal to ask):

### Payment schedule

a larger first instalment, or payments that match when your costs happen.

### Budget flexibility

permission to move a small % between budget lines without approval.

### Reporting format

keep it proportionate to the size of the grant (example: a short update or call + photos + 2–3 numbers for smaller grants).

### Audit/finance costs covered

if they want an audit or extra finance checks, ask to include the cost in the grant.

# How to get the most out of the donor partnership

Once funding starts, the relationship matters as much as the report. The simplest way to build trust is through steady, clear communication.

## 1 Keep communication simple and clear

Reply when you can. If you're in the field/offline, use an out-of-office message with the date you'll be back.

## 2 Stay in touch between reports

A small update now and then (a photo + one line, a success, or a quick note if plans change) goes a long way.

## 3 Build more than one connection

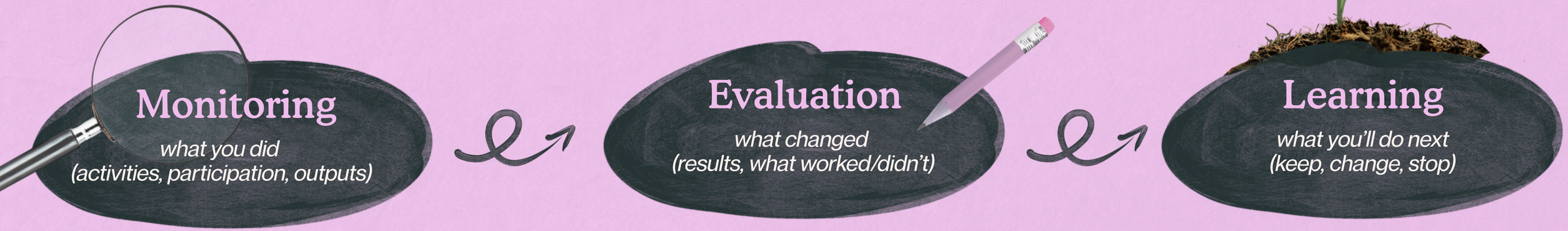
People move jobs - knowing more than one person helps protect the relationship over time.

## 4 Ask for helpful extras

If it feels like a good partnership, it's okay to ask for an introduction, a short testimonial line, permission to list them as a supporter, or quick feedback on your next ask.

# Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) that actually helps you (not just the funder)

You don't need a complicated system. You just need a simple way to track what you did, what changed, and what you learned - so you can make better decisions and share progress clearly. You're accountable first to your community, your team, and your mission. Reporting to a funder should support that, not distract from it.




## A simple approach that works for most early-stage projects:

- Choose 2–5 indicators that fit your work (a few numbers + one or two stories).
- After each activity (or once a month), save one proof point: a number, a quote, a photo, or a short example.
- Write one line of learning: "Next time we will..."

# Examples of meaningful indicators

That’s enough to strengthen your project and create strong updates.



## Waste/pollution

kg/lbs collected, sites cleaned, households reached, waste diverted, repeat participation.




## Advocacy/systems

meetings held, commitments secured, local policy steps, new partners mobilised



## Restoration/biodiversity

area restored, seedlings planted + survival rate, species sightings, nesting activity, water quality check results, patrol days completed



## Education/community

sessions delivered, attendance + repeat attendance, community feedback, behaviour change examples

# Make reporting easy (use MEL as your draft)

**Most reports ask the same things: What did you do? What changed? What did you learn? What's next? If you've tracked lightly, your report is mostly done.**

Don't leave it to the last minute. Many grants have interim reports (mid-way) and a final report. A "report-ready" process (monthly or after each activity)

When the report is due, pull your best bits together, and you're done.

## TIP!

If you've already written a good update for another donor, you can ask to reuse it here (removing any sensitive details). For example: "We've prepared a short update for another funder covering this period - would it work to share that, or do you need a different format?"

**What we did**

(1–2 lines)

**What we learned / what we'll do next**

(1 line)

**What changed**

(one number or one real example/quote/photo)



# When things change: amendments and extensions

Projects rarely go exactly to plan. If something needs to change, tell the funder early and ask for an amendment. Most funders would rather adjust the plan than have you struggle in silence.

## What to do:

- Share what changed, what's staying the same, and the new plan (keep it simple).
- Ask clearly for what you need: budget flexibility, a revised timeline, or an extension.
- Put the updated dates and decisions back into your tracker.

### Definition: Amendment

a written change to the grant agreement (timeline, budget lines, activities, reporting dates, etc.).

### Definition: No-cost extension

more time to finish the work, with the same budget (no extra money).

### Definition: Cost-plus extension

more time and additional funding to complete the work.

## TIP!

**A simple email line you can use:**
"Plans have shifted slightly due to **[reason]**.

We're still aiming for **[same goal]**. Could we agree on an amendment to **[timeline/budget]**, so we can deliver well?

We propose **[new dates / revised budget lines]**."

# Time to reflect & repeat



Take stock of what worked well in your grant journey and what could improve.
Apply these lessons to future funding opportunities, continuing to grow both your project and your funder relationships.

**When to ask a donor to renew?** Before the final report lands - not after everything ends.

- Early signal (mid-grant): if things are going well, mention what continued support could unlock next.
- Best time (6–8 weeks before the grant ends): share a short “what’s next” plan + a simple budget, and ask if they’re open to renewing.
- After the final report: send the report, then follow with a clear next-step ask (or ask for an intro if renewal isn’t possible).

## TIP!

**A simple line you can use:**

“We’re starting to plan the next phase of the work. Would you be open to discussing renewed support, or is there someone else you think we should speak to?”

# Collaborators & contributors



This toolkit was built with young leaders - for young leaders. It's the result of real conversations, draft reviews, voice notes, WhatsApp messages, and honest feedback from people doing the work on the ground.

**Thank you to our collaborating youth-led organisations:**

FORCE OF NATURE

Global Landscapes Forum

THE IRIS PROJECT

COALITION WILD

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Finally, thank you to the youth leaders, grantee partners, and advisors who reviewed drafts and told us what was missing. Your insight is the backbone of this toolkit.

**Knowledge partners / consultants:**

Laura Valencia, **The Iris Project's Youth Advisors & grantees:** Alicia Amancio, Alyssa Erin Kardos Loera, Sumarni Laman and Jann Vinze Barcinalavie and **The National Geographic Society and The Nature Conservancy Externship alum and seed funding recipients;** Astrid Peraza Juárez and Rhiannon Guess.

# Annex

# National Geographic Society
## *elevator pitch tips*

1

### Self-reflection & knowing your audience

- Include your why
- Who is the target audience? Are they a decision maker? What do they already know about your subject?
- Are you looking for something from them?
- What is the setting?

2

### Make your audience care

- What is the problem you are trying to address? And why care?
- Share why it matters and make the audience feel the urgency around the issue. Show them that you know a little something about the topic.
- How will your project make an impact?

3

### Have a call to action

- What can my audience take away from this specific interaction?



4

### Practice makes perfect

- Rehearse out loud!
- It's not just about what you say, but also how you say it.

# Does your story work?

## Checklist:

- [ ] I explain why I care about this issue (in a real, human way).
- [ ] I can describe my project in 2–3 clear sentences.
- [ ] I include one example or one impact number.
- [ ] I have one main message I come back to again and again.

# Project description template

## A simple 4-sentence description you can reuse

[Project Name] supports [community/group] by [what you do].

So far, we have [action word: reached/supported/planted/created] [X number of people or key impact stat].

We use [your approach or method] because [why it matters / why it works for your community].

Our goal is to [the change you want to make] so that [the big, long-term impact you're working toward].

# Quick Theory of Change builder

## Start by filling out the blanks below

1

### The change you're working towards *(Impact)*

In 5 years, we want to see: .....

**TIP!**

Think about what will be different for people, nature, or your community

2

### What are you doing? *(Activities)*

Right now we are:

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

**TIP!**

Write what you actually do *regularly*, not everything you hope to do someday.

3

### What will change in the next 6–24 months *(Outcomes)*

Because of our work, we expect to see:

- .....
- .....
- .....

**TIP!**

These should be realistic and visible changes you can point to.

4

## Connect the dots
## *(Your simple Theory of Change statement)*

Because we

we expect to see

which contributes to

## Theory of Change statement

Because we run restoration activities and train volunteers, we expect to see healthier mangrove coverage and increased community engagement, contributing to long-term ecosystem recovery.



## What a completed example looks like

### Impact:

Local mangrove ecosystems are restored and protected.

### Activities:

- Run monthly planting activation days
- Train youth volunteers
- Work with fishers to reduce destructive practices

### Outcomes (6–24 months):

- 500 new mangrove seedlings established with
- 80% survival rate
- More young people involved in restoration
- Local fishers adopt new methods

# Creating a budget



## Expenses

| Category | Item | Quantity | Amount | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Compensation | | | | |
| Equipment | | | | |
| Food | | | | |
| Travel | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

**Total**

# Income

| Category | Item | Quantity | Amount | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Donations | | | | |
| Seed funding | | | | |

**Total**

# Is earned income the right fit for you?

| Option | Who it works for | Pros | Things to think about |
|---|---|---|---|
| Workshops | Teams with skills to teach | Builds skills, engages community | Requires marketing and prep time; need to set fair prices |
| Community Products | Nature-based or creative projects | Can generate a steady income; tangible impact | Managing inventory, pricing, and distribution |
| Eco-experiences | Land restoration or environmental projects | Unique, memorable, draws interest | Permits, safety, and risk and security planning is needed |
| Youth advisory/consulting | Advocacy or social-change groups | Shows expertise, flexible | Requires prep, clear boundaries, and expectations |



# Match funding pitch template



“Our project, [project name] supports [community/group] by [what you do]. So far, we have [X number of people reached or key impact statistic].

We recently received a grant of [amount] to support [project name]

If we can double this amount, we will be able to

[expand impact, reach more people, add more workshops, increase resources, etc.].

Would you be interested in helping us grow our impact by matching this grant?”

# Prepare a pitch deck

## 1 Why we exist

Share the heart of your project.
What problem are you addressing?

Why does it matter to you and your community?

## 2 Our impact

Show the difference you are already making. Use simple numbers, quotes, photos, or short stories to bring your impact to life. This is the slide to use your best photos. Add 1 or 2 bold impact numbers.

## 3 Our growth

Highlight how your project or team has grown: new partners, more participants, expanded reach, or strengthened systems. Use an infographic to show growth on this slide.

## 4 Our collaboration

This is where you make the case for how your project fits into their funding priorities. This is where you bring to life the partnership and the reasons why you see them as a great funding partner for you. Make the connection clear. Use what you learned in the Where to Look for Funding section to show:

- What the funder cares about
- How does your work align with their priorities

## 5 Our ask

Be ready to share what support you're looking for and what it would unlock. If it's a pitch or you've been invited to discuss funding, name the amount (or a range) and link it to your budget. If it's an early intro call, focus on fit first - then follow up with a clear ask once you know what's realistic.

# Prepare a pitch deck

6

## An invitation

End with a simple final slide inviting them to partner with you.

- A brief thank you
- What are the next steps you propose
- Links to your social media or web




## Presentation Tips

### Use photos from your project

Real images bring your project to life; don't worry if they're not perfect or professionally shot. Authenticity matters more than polish.

### Keep words to a minimum

Let your impact, photos, and key messages shine. Simple, uncluttered slides are more memorable.

### Stay true to your project identity

Canva has thousands of templates, which can be overwhelming. Choose colours, fonts, and styles that match your project's personality and values.

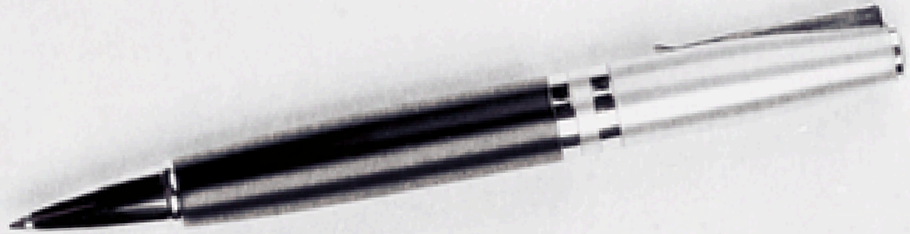
### Highlight both numbers *and* stories

A strong deck balances facts (impact data, reach, growth) with emotion (human stories, quotes, lived experience).

# Interview prep guide

## Three key messages I want them to remember:

1.
2.
3.



## Examples/stories I can use:

1.
2.
3.

## Questions I want to ask them:

1.
2.
3.

# YOUTH FUNDING TOOLKIT