



# Environmental Funders Network

STRATEGY 2023-2026

*Guided by Nature*

2024 EDITION



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Environmental Funders Network is a charity registered in England and Wales (no. 1181318) and Scotland (no. SC050579).  
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## Foreword

'Philanthropy can be as simple as signing on the dotted line,' said a January 2024 special issue of *The Economist* focused on the subject. Anyone trying to deploy their resources to the best effect, however, knows that giving is rarely so easy, even when adopting the 'no-strings', trusting approach to giving espoused by the article. When it comes to the environmental crisis, signing on the dotted line requires first knowing where to find the line to sign. Where do you begin? What should you prioritise? How do you know if you're succeeding, or helping others to?

And if you are an environmental organisation, how do you raise sufficient resources to deploy your strategies to

full effect, benefit from the learnings of others, and understand how your work complements (or competes with) that of other groups?

These are the questions EFN continues to ask and help answer. We help make the myriad solutions to the environmental crisis visible to those who can bring them to fruition. Coordinating, strategising and connecting, our work helps bridge the diverse efforts to respond to the environmental crisis. With funders and environmental organisations ramping up their efforts as the challenges mount, it's more important than ever that we join forces to accomplish more than we could alone.

In the middle of a crucial decade for climate and nature action, 2024 will be a pivotal year. Nearly half of the world's population will be voting in national (or EU) elections, potentially producing a rapidly changing political landscape for environmental organisations to navigate, while posing significant opportunities for, and threats to, environmental action.

Here in the UK, many environmental NGOs are already working closely to align communication, advocacy and engagement strategies, but they - and eNGOs around the world - need sufficient funding to carry out their plans to best effect, particularly as the cost of living crisis threatens to eat into their sources of income from the public and statutory giving. Trusts, foundations and high-level individual donors will be more important than ever to the success of environmental initiatives.

Over 200 trusts and foundations, plus scores of high-level individual donors, participate in the Environmental Funders Network. They use it to keep abreast of fundable solutions to a wide range of environmental issues, to connect with one another and to refine their giving strategies. Meanwhile, over 600 environmental NGOs benefit from our resources, communications and networking. We see our role as helping to create the conditions for funders and NGOs to succeed in their work.

We chose to focus our current strategy on the period 2023-2026, knowing that at the end of that period we would want to pause to take stock and, if necessary, re-strategise.



In this document, we lay out that strategy, which builds from a set of principles on which we base our work. All of our work priorities for 2024 are rooted in these principles, and we use them to guide our decisions in each of our three work pillars:

- 1 Expanding environmental philanthropy**
- 2 Improving the effectiveness of environmental funding**
- 3 Supporting those that do environmental work to be more effective**

Every year, for the duration of the strategy period, we will reflect anew on the external context for our work and revise our priorities accordingly. The broader framework of our mission, vision and principles will remain the same.

If you have ideas for how we could work together, please get in touch at [info@greenfunders.org](mailto:info@greenfunders.org).

**Florence Miller**, *Director*

**Catherine Bryan**, *Chair of Trustees*





## OUR MISSION

We aim to increase the levels of philanthropic support for environmental causes and to improve its overall effectiveness.

## OUR VISION

A world where people and planet thrive.

## OUR AMBITION

We will drive a step-change in the levels and effectiveness of environmental philanthropy from UK sources, creating the conditions needed for those who are working to foster a thriving world to succeed.

As a result of our work, there will be higher levels of funding for the environment, and philanthropic funding for environmental causes will be maximally effective.

## WHO WE ARE

- We are a network of, and for, funders and advisors with an interest in the environment, supporting the whole philanthropic ecosystem, from individual donors and private foundations to intermediaries, pooled funds, and philanthropy and wealth advisors
- We also support those working on and fundraising for environmental issues
- We create connections between people funding or working on environmental issues, and bolster their agency, ambition and effectiveness
- We are UK-based, with a UK and international outlook

## HOW WE WORK

We have three pillars to our strategy, aligned with our mission:

- Expanding environmental philanthropy: encouraging new donors to support environmental causes, and established donors to increase their giving
- Improving the effectiveness of environmental funding
- Supporting those that do environmental work to be more effective

## OUR PRINCIPLES

Our principles guide our work, underpinning how we make decisions. We are:

- **GUIDED BY NATURE:** In thinking about how to support effective environmental work and funding, we take our lead from natural ecosystems, where diversity, connectivity and the efficient flow of resources are crucial to good health.
- **FUTURE FOCUSED AND URGENT:** We focus on what must be done now, knowing that measures taken today to conserve and restore the living world will be significantly more potent than those taken when we are further along our current trajectories.
- **IMPACT-ORIENTATED:** Everything we do is focused on our mission of increasing the levels and efficacy of philanthropy for environmental causes.
- **ACCESSIBLE:** We are open to funders at all stages of their funding journey and keep the barriers to entry to EFN as low as possible.
- **COMMITTED TO PLURALITY:** We recognise that social change requires a range of different approaches that, combined, can lead to impact, and we enable the sector to embrace plurality.
- **COLLABORATIVE:** We embrace the power of collaboration to allow individual groups to become more than the sum of their parts. We collaborate strategically ourselves to achieve more than we could alone.
- **EVIDENCE-LED:** We use research and learning – ours and others’ – to underpin, evolve and guide our work.
- **SYSTEMIC:** We recognise that there are key systemic issues that give rise to environmental harms, including issues of justice and power, such as racism and wealth inequality, and we shine a light on potential solutions through our programmes.
- **AMPLIFYING:** We believe that those particularly affected by environmental issues are well placed to identify solutions, and we use EFN’s platform to help amplify their voices.
- **MODELLING THE CHANGE:** In our team and within our networks, we seek to create a microcosm of the structures and processes we think would make the world a better place, taking into account equitable power dynamics, a relationships-based approach, kindness and care.

## APPROACHES

We use several approaches within each pillar of our work:

- Research to understand patterns of grantmaking, gaps, and the priorities and needs of the sector
- Convening to create, build and strengthen relationships between funders, between environmental groups, and between funders and environmental groups

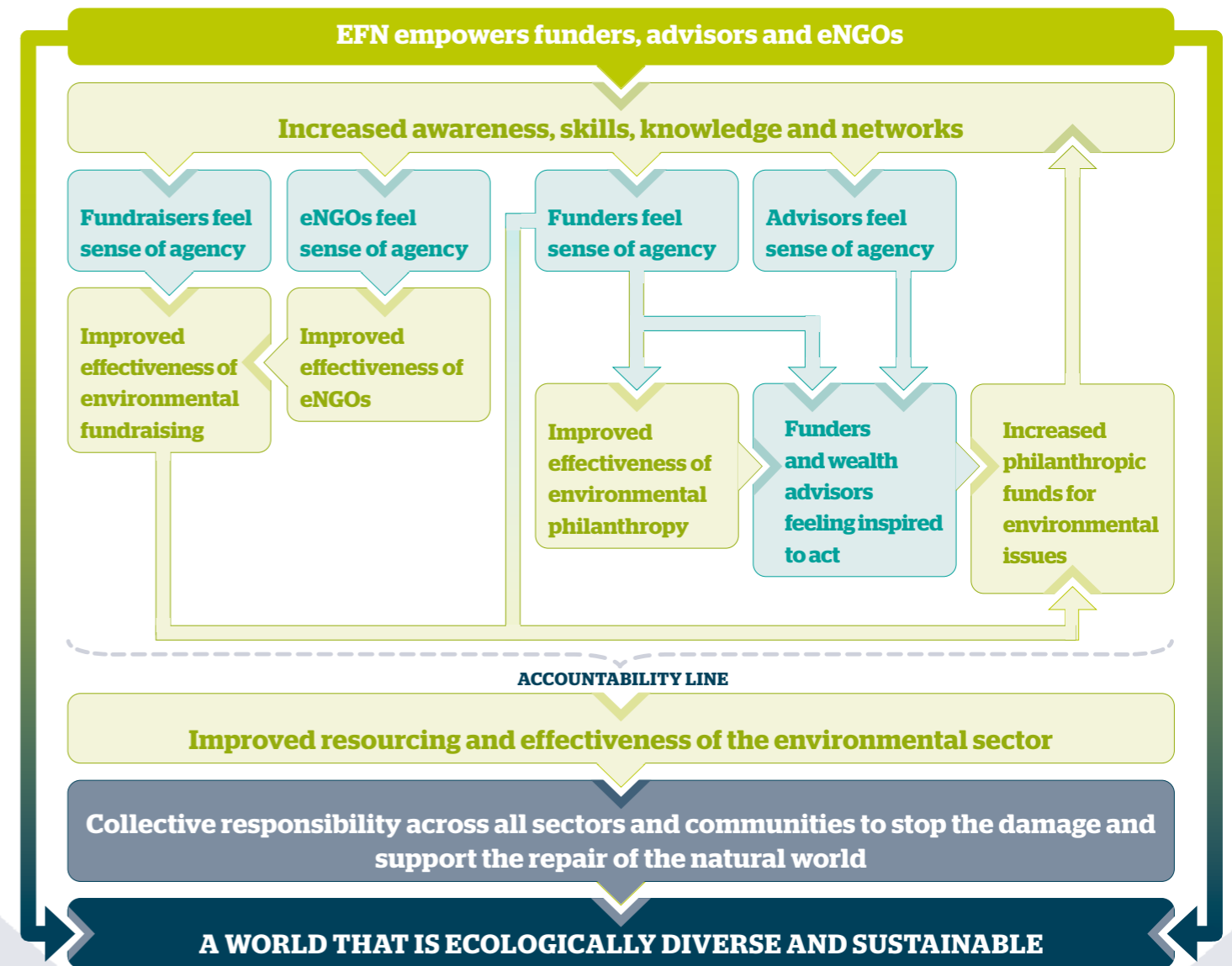
- Publications and other products to inform, inspire and motivate funders and the wider sector
- Informational talks, workshops, field trips and retreats to input from a range of experts and practitioners

We aim to provide leadership in our programming and push boundaries, where we feel necessary, guided by our principles.

## OUTCOMES

Our theory of change outlines the outcomes we are aiming for, and the mechanisms of change we think will help. The high level theory of change is described below, and you can read about the specific outcomes we are aiming for for each of

our audience groups (funders, philanthropy and wealth advisors, environmental fundraisers, and those working directly on environmental issues beyond fundraisers) in the [full document](#).



## 2024 Work Priorities and Context

Each year we consider the changing external context for our work, the needs of funders and the sector, and the most pressing themes to address as priorities. We have adopted this iterative and adaptable approach to strategy to enable us to respond to evolving needs.

Our 2024 work priorities take into account changes in context, including:

- **Growing concern about environmental issues:** in the UK and elsewhere, the visibility and impacts of the climate and nature crises are increasing, but many people are still not aware that most of the solutions needed are known and could be implemented at scale.
- **Increasing polarisation on climate action:** views on climate action are being increasingly politicised as anti-climate forces sow doubt, push for delays and block actions.
- **Economic concerns:** the ongoing cost of living crisis is affecting the public's ability to take and fund action on climate and nature. Decision makers too often debate the cost of action without taking into account the greater cost of inaction - or the many benefits of pro-climate and nature measures to the economy, energy security and societal wellbeing.
- **Upcoming elections:** in the UK, 50 other countries and the EU, people will go to the polls, posing both significant opportunities and risks for environmental progress.

Through our 2023 member survey, and other member feedback, funders asked us to:

- Continue focusing on the intersections between environmental and social issues.
- Help funders focused on social issues take environmental issues into account.
- More actively support funders with shared interests to connect, share learnings and fund collaboratively.
- Support members to champion and mobilise funding around specific issues or approaches.
- Ensure adequate opportunities for funders to build and strengthen personal connections at our events, fostering a sense of community and motivating members to give.

Our planned activities to respond to these needs are laid out under Pillars One and Two below.

We have received excellent feedback from those in our Green Fundraisers Forum regarding our efforts to facilitate networking between them and to support them in increasing their capacity and well-being.



However, they tell us that:

- They face serious challenges in finding, applying for, and reporting on, funding, which is limiting efficiency across the sector.
- There continues to be a proliferation of environmental organisations with limited connectivity across them, especially amongst smaller organisations.

We have planned a range of activities to address these challenges, laid out under Pillars One and Three below.

We believe that the capacity of environmental actors to succeed is in large part a function of how much they mirror a healthy ecosystem: well-resourced, diverse, connected and resilient.

### JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (JEDI)

We see justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) as integral to the success of environmental efforts: how we treat each other and how we treat the planet are inextricably linked.

Across our operations and our programming we consider how to continually improve our performance in terms of JEDI work - both in terms of how we operate as an organisation and in terms of our programming. Our commitment to JEDI is reflected across several of our organisational [principles](#), which we use to guide all of our work and operations.

In addition, we published our data with the Race Report in early 2024 and are using that along with the Wildlife and Countryside Link Route Map Towards Greater Ethnic Diversity to prioritise our JEDI activities for the rest of the year. For example, we will be offering further staff and board training, conducting a race and gender pay gap analysis, and seeking to provide opportunities for environmental organisations and initiatives led by people from marginalised communities to raise funds for their work.

### COMMUNICATIONS

With a Communications Manager now in place for the first time, we have ambitious plans to improve and enhance all of EFN's external and digital communications. This investment in communications will underpin many of the activities detailed below and enable staff members to better engage with audiences and fulfil our mission. Specifically, we will:

- Develop a new, creative and engaging visual identity that better tells the story of EFN and our work.
- Redesign and build a new website with a focus on creating an outstanding user experience and showing the wide range of work and activities EFN does.
- Create and share regular digital content that better serves the needs of EFN and our audiences.



## PILLAR 1: Expanding environmental philanthropy: encouraging new donors to support environmental causes, and established donors to increase their giving

### Context:

The amount of funding for environmental causes is increasing: early analysis for our next *Where the Green Grants Went* report shows a significant rise in total environmental giving from UK foundations. We are seeing increasing interest from funders and philanthropy networks wanting to take action, especially on climate change. Whilst this is great news, the need continues to be significantly higher than the level of funding available. Moreover, the funding increase is largely accounted for by a small number of large foundations giving to a relatively small number of grantees; the new funds are not broadly accessible. Perhaps most importantly, given our acceleration towards climate and biodiversity tipping points, grants made today will arguably be significantly more impactful than grants made in 10 or 20 years time. There is an urgent need for greater ambition from funders in this decisive decade.

We continue to encounter **low levels of awareness** of the **vital role philanthropic funding** plays in driving forward a **more sustainable future** - especially compared to other sources of finance. EFN is one part of an ecosystem of organisations working **to inspire and engage more funders with environmental causes** and **to support them to start giving**.

We know from our work to date that **highlighting the deep connections between the environment and all other social causes** helps funders to recognise the need for more environmental funding. Experience has also shown us that immersive field visits and peer-to-peer events can successfully engage new funders.

Encouragingly, there is now a wealth of guidance available for funders wishing to start supporting environmental causes, but there is a need to **better categorise and signpost resources**, so that people can easily find the help they need. In particular, while there has been welcome growth in support for funders on climate giving, there is an opportunity to provide more resources for nature-focused philanthropy, especially that which highlights the link between climate change and nature loss.

There are also opportunities for us to connect with individuals and foundations that are not yet ready to start donating to the environment, but are **interested in mobilising other forms of finance**, such as impact investing. We also aim to connect with the **next generation of philanthropists**, given that significant wealth transfer is poised to take place.

### In 2024, we will:

#### CONTINUE

- Raise the profile of environmental philanthropy and extend our networks through working with various philanthropy networks and organisations. Specifically, we will participate on Advisory Boards for the Association of Charitable Foundations' *Funder Commitment on Climate Change* and New Philanthropy Capital's *Everyone's Environment* programme.
- Organise events to engage with specific audiences (e.g. those working in finance, the UK's wealthiest families, and health and social funders) and support them to start to give (or give more) to environmental causes. We will improve our follow up after events, offering 1:1 meetings with EFN staff, Advisory Group members and partner organisations.
- Run our *Arts for Life* programme, in partnership with the Arts Funders Group,

which aims to engage arts funders with environmental causes and drive more funding to the arts and environment intersection.

- Organise field trips to provide opportunities for our members and new contacts to come together to learn about particular issues and approaches, and be inspired to direct their philanthropy (or their land use) towards similar projects.
- Offer bespoke advice to donors who are new to the environment, partnering closely with other organisations working to grow environmental philanthropy, such as Impatience Earth, Climate Leadership Initiative, Active Philanthropy and Synchronicity Earth.
- Lead and run the teaching and learning activities of the Environmental Finance & Learning Fund that we co-host with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.





## GROW

- Identify and fill gaps in support and resources, and better signpost these on our new website. We will use the findings of our research with philanthropy advisors, analysis of resources currently available and feedback from donors to develop new resources to support new funders/advisors.
- Publish our research report into the provision of environmental philanthropy advice in the UK and use it to engage with philanthropy and wealth advisors. We

will host at least one multilateral meeting to share the findings of our research with them, and discuss how EFN can help them to meet the needs of their clients (including Next Gens) better.

- Work with the Big Give and other partner organisations to increase the annual Green Match Fund, with the aim of raising £10 million for over 200 charities in 2024, and build towards a high-profile, major national campaign in 2025.

## START

- Pilot our Environmental Impact Investing Group (EIIG), using it to engage with and support individuals and foundations who are interested in impact investing, even if they have not yet considered environmental philanthropy.

- Secure targeted articles in the media to highlight the value of environmental philanthropy and the need for much more of it.



## PILLAR 2: Improving the effectiveness of environmental funding

### Context:

In this strand of our work, we focus on supporting established environmental funders to be as effective as possible in their giving. Specifically, we help funders become well-informed about issues and approaches; employ the best practices in terms of how they deploy their funds; connect them to one another and to a wide range of actors; and understand the landscape of environmental funding and what the gaps are. With the above in mind, we see the following changes in context for 2024 as particularly relevant to this strand of our work.

The ongoing cost of living crisis has emphasised that, more than ever, we need to highlight actions that operate at the **intersections between social and environmental issues**, where both environmental and social benefits accrue.

With so many elections taking place around the world in 2024, funders will need to keep abreast of a **rapidly changing environmental policy landscape** in the UK and elsewhere.

Environmental groups continue to tell us they struggle to raise funds for both **advocacy and community organising efforts**, both of which are **key parts of effecting meaningful change** at the levels of public attitudes, demonstrating political mandate, and public policy.

Where policies are lagging or inadequate - and even when they are exemplary - **locally-led, community-based action** will, as always, **continue to be necessary**.

In renewable power, batteries, EVs, agri-tech, nature restoration and AI more broadly, **tech developments have been rapid** and continue to grow. In each case, questions must be asked around the **just transition: who is benefiting? Who is losing out?** What communities and ecosystems are being sacrificed to address another problem?

As climate change becomes evident, opponents to climate action have switched tactics, from denial to delay. **Disinformation** sowing doubt about the pace of change is significantly on the rise<sup>1</sup>. These **coordinated, well-funded attacks** demand a well-funded strategic response.

Meanwhile, the ability of people and groups to take environmental action face growing restrictions here in the UK<sup>2</sup> and abroad. There is a role for environmental funders to help **keep civic space open**.

Finally, increasing numbers of funders are focused on environmental causes, but strategic coordination between them continues to be limited, with larger, more globally-focused (and well resourced) foundations coordinating at greater levels than others. EFN should be doing more to **foster greater collaboration amongst its members**.

<sup>1</sup> The Center for Countering Digital Hate finds that these 'new denial' claims now constitute [70% of all climate denial claims made on YouTube, up from 35% six years ago](#).

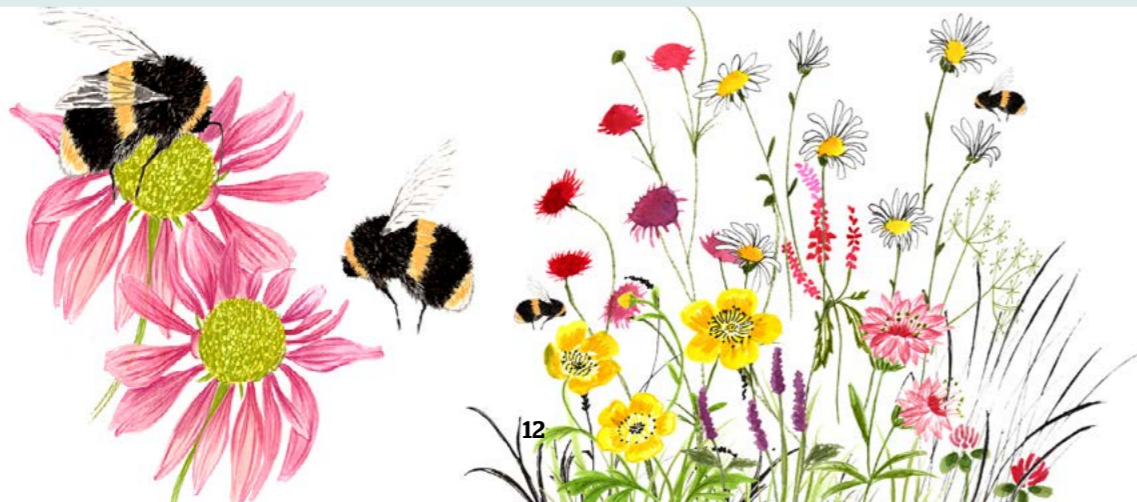
<sup>2</sup> The [UN special rapporteur](#) on environmental defenders said in January 2024 that he was seriously concerned about 'regressive new laws' limiting environmental protest in the UK.



## In 2024, we will:

### CONTINUE

- Publish and disseminate the findings of our *Where the Green Grants Went 9* report to help funders understand the funding landscape and engage funders in discussion of what effective environmental philanthropy entails.
- Organise a regular roster of events for funders to meet and network with one another, learn from each other and hear from experts on a broad range of environmental issues. These events will be a mixture of in-person events (quarterly lunches, annual retreat, field trips, etc) and virtual ones.
- Host the Philanthropy Lab as a space for funders to raise their ambition together, address systemic issues and practise more effective forms of giving to the environment.
- Through our programme (events, publications, blog, videos & podcasts), we will prioritise:
  - Focusing on the least-funded issues and approaches, or 'Cinderella issues', as highlighted by our research and that of others. For example, toxics and pollution, consumption and waste, transport, advocacy, community building, movement-building and collaboration (see our [What the Green Groups Said](#) report appendix for descriptions of these).
  - Highlighting how to fund effectively at the intersections between social and environmental issues, in particular the co-benefits of environmental action for people from different socio-economic groups
  - Providing a platform for those most affected by environmental issues, for example, people from racially marginalised groups, young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those from most affected areas around the world.
  - Helping funders keep abreast of policy developments in the wake of elections.
  - Supporting funders to understand the forces of disinformation and delay, as well as closing civic space(s), and how to push back against them.
  - Providing a forum for understanding and scrutinising technological approaches to addressing the climate and nature crises.



### GROW

- Increase the number of funders participating in EFN's Member Directory (currently we have 70 funders in the private and 40 in the public versions of the Directory). The Directory helps members better understand who is doing what and to make sources of philanthropic funding for environmental work more visible across the sector.
- Provide opportunities for funders to hear from the sector on positive/negative funding experiences and highlight elements of good practice grantmaking, as described in our [Theory of Change](#).
- Provide members with opportunities to share their experiences and learnings with one another, for example through our Food for Thought series.
- Help funders to understand who is doing what across the environment sector (and in particular for the 'Cinderella' issues and approaches).
- Facilitate sharing of knowledge and expertise between EFN, its members, and other regional, national and international funder networks to increase our collective impact.

### START

- Develop the next *What the Green Groups Said* survey for dissemination in 2025.
- Support up to five champions from within the network, each interested in working to ensure more ambitious, collective impact among funders on a particular issue or geography in the UK and abroad. (Let us know if you'd like to be one!)

### REDUCE

- Aim to organise fewer events in 2024, promoting discussion and consideration of issues and approaches instead through other avenues such as our blog or the members' Slack group.





## PILLAR 3: Supporting those that do environmental work to be more effective

### Context:

This strand of our work focuses on supporting the environment sector to bring in more funds, strengthen its communications and improve connectivity and wellbeing across the sector.

Green fundraisers often work in silos, facing common challenges without mechanisms to share their experiences and insights. High turnover rates and burnout are anecdotally common across the sector with individuals battling eco-anxiety and heavy workloads. While our Green Fundraisers Forum (GFF) **provides space to network and share, and aims to strengthen the wellbeing of those working on environmental issues**, there is still much work to be done to improve connections within the sector.

Many environmental NGOs also struggle to reach their intended audiences outside the sector, and report that they would benefit from **guidance to communicate effectively**

with the public and with specific groups, such as wealth advisors.

The environment sector also grapples with a lack of clarity around available funding. While efficiency is desperately required, environment groups expend significant time and resources identifying, applying for, and reporting on, funding opportunities. Accessible mechanisms for **easier fund discovery** are sorely needed, as is adoption by funders of **best practices for grant making and grant management** and an increase in **funding for under-funded and urgent issues**. EFN is well-placed to catalyse advancements such as these, and to facilitate open dialogue between funders and fundraisers. Our growing GFF also serves as the perfect starting point for another initiative to support connection between the two groups: **a map of the UK environment sector**, providing accessible information on who is doing what.

Despite aspirations, the UK environment sector continues to lack diversity amongst staff and boards. Compounding this issue is a wealth of evidence highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental issues on those already marginalised. Over the upcoming year we hope to see improvements including greater focus on the **intersection of environmental and social justice issues**, more recognition of the work of **activists working to combat climate change in their own communities** and an **increase in ethnic diversity across the sector**.



## In 2024, we will:

### CONTINUE

- Wrap up our research into opportunities and barriers for wealth advisors to work with the sector and increase philanthropic environmental giving. We will continue hosting networking events for advisors in England and Scotland.
- With partners, develop and run a second phase of the Climate Activist Speaker Fund to support young activists worldwide, while shifting EFN from a leading to a supporting role. This will involve continuing work with the current cohort of ten activists while bringing on ten more.
- Continue the first phase of the Inter-Narratives Community and facilitate progress into the second phase of the programme, which supports those working on narrative change across issues (climate change, new economy and social justice).
- Continue our day-to-day work supporting the Green Fundraisers Forum (GFF), including helping environmental fundraisers to connect, share and identify opportunities through the newsletter, Slack group, away days, bi-monthly group meetings and ad-hoc individual support meetings.
- Explore outsourcing of GFF training opportunities to members of the group and development of new systems of peer-to-peer mentoring and skills-sharing.
- Collaborate with The Funding Network, to nominate charities for their fundraising events - while pausing the EFN Live event for now - and support the Big Give to run the Green Match Fund.
- Support the Sustainable Wellbeing Environment Network to encourage resilience in the sector with a particular focus on facilitating discussion and action around healthy funder-fundraiser relationships. Also work to embed more of the themes of the network across EFN.





## GROW

- Use the past year's learnings from the Rapid Response Fund to develop new communications, increase the engagement of funders, streamline the administration processes involved and promote the fund to organisations run by, and supporting, racially marginalised groups.
- Organise and form an environmental fundraisers working group on Fundraising

Challenges that aims to identify the most pressing funding challenges within the sector and their causes, possible solutions and their implementation with emphasis on efficiency in grant application processes for both funders and grantees. Publicly share findings to enhance understanding of these issues, encourage best practice among funders and foster constructive dialogue between fundraisers and funders.

## START

- Explore potential methods to create a living, interactive map of the UK environment sector (making it easier to understand who is doing what, where and how), beginning with a subset e.g. GFF members working on particular topics.
- Spotlight 'Cinderella' issues and approaches by trialling a new comms strategy of spotlighting GFF members working in these areas in the newsletter and on Slack.



## EFN in Scotland

### Context:

With its own government, parliament, regulatory and legal systems, Scotland provides a very different context for **Scottish eNGOs** to operate in compared to other UK environmental groups.

For its size, Scotland punches far above its weight in terms of natural capital. However, our research (*Where the Green Grants Went Scotland* published in 2017) found very low

levels of grant funding for environmental work from a relatively small pool of funders.

Our Scotland programme is a microcosm of our wider work across all three pillars above, adapted to reflect the specific context in Scotland. It's gathering momentum, supported by a dedicated member of EFN staff in Scotland and our Scotland Advisory Group.

### In 2024, we will:

#### CONTINUE

- Convene funders with an interest in Scotland through lunch meetings, events and field trips to increase funding for environmental causes, in particular by helping them join the dots between social and environmental issues.
- Work with funders and others to create new opportunities for environmental giving in Scotland, such as a nascent fund for grassroots ecological restoration initiated by an EFN member.
- Run at least four events (including one large-scale networking opportunity) that target funders not yet funding environmental work and provide opportunities for networking for funders and targeted audiences.
- Ensure Scottish organisations benefit from the partnerships EFN develops to increase funding for the sector overall, such as the Big Give's Green Match Fund and the Rapid Response Fund, and that they are connected to our Green Fundraisers Forum.

#### GROW

- Develop relationships with wealth and philanthropy advisors in Scotland (at least one annual event and one-to-one meetings).
- Identify and act upon opportunities to support non-environmental organisations in Scotland to incorporate nature-focused activities into their work.

We hope you are as energised by these priorities as we are! We would love to have your help delivering on any of them. EFN is a small team and we know we cannot achieve our aims alone. If you have ideas for how we could work together, please get in touch at [info@greenfunders.org](mailto:info@greenfunders.org).