**Resource Pack for AXA PARKS Fund Applicants**

**Introduction:**

*This Resource Pack has been developed for the applicants to the AXA PARKS Fund grant round. Whilst encouraging community engagement is the focus of this grant round, preserving and enhancing biodiversity is also a key objective. This pack is intended to act as a guide for applicants to support you in the biodiversity aspect of your project by providing information and resources.*

*This Resource Pack has been developed by The Community Foundation for Ireland in consultation with professional ecologists, and anything included in this document should be attributed to The Community Foundation.*

*Please note, this document is not intended to be the sole authority on biodiversity, but more of a signpost to additional information and organisations working in this space. Even if this guide is followed completely by an applicant, it will not guarantee that applicant being successful in the AXA PARKS grant round.*

**AXA PARKS Mission Statement:**

“Never has there been a more important time for our parks and green spaces to flourish.

 Our parks are a source of respite, a place to exercise, somewhere to meet and a protected place for our local habitat to flourish. Along with our focus on sustainability, AXA is working to make a difference in local communities through a new environmental grants programme, supporting projects that demonstrate a commitment to improved outcomes for health, sustainability, climate resilience and communities. Our AXA PARKS programme will serve not only communities but will also protect Ireland’s native biodiversity – helping ensure that people, plants, and animals can thrive across the whole island.”

**This Resource Pack for applicants includes:**

* Overview of AXA PARKS Fund 2022
* Project examples
* What is Biodiversity and other helpful definitions
* The role of an Ecologist
* Key sources of information
* Contacts at The Community Foundation

**Overview of AXA PARKS Fund grant round 2022:**

 **Objectives:**

The Community Foundation has partnered with AXA to run a community and biodiversity grant round to develop green spaces in communities in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Community Foundation for Ireland will be the charity responsible for making grants to organisations in the Republic of Ireland and The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland will be responsible for making grants in Northern Ireland.

Successful projects will include all of the following aspects:

* The green spaces will be on public land that is accessible to all members of the community, except for specific cases, for example refuges, schools, or community day care centres
* The green spaces and their development will encourage community engagement and participation in the local area and aim to improve wellbeing.
* The green spaces will improve the local environment through protecting current native biodiversity or supporting the recovery of neglected or damaged natural habitats.

**Project Examples**

All projects in this grant round must encourage community participation through the creation of the green space, whilst also preserving and enhancing local biodiversity.

Some examples of projects include:

* The creation and enhancement of…
* Community Gardens or Green Spaces
* Sensory Gardens
* Green Spaces at schools or pre-schools
* Wildlife habitats such as species-rich meadows and grasslands
* Pocket forests and urban orchards
* Walking trails
* Rain gardens
* Ponds
* Pollinator corridors
* Native flowering hedgerows
* Projects that broaden accessibility to a current green space
* The transformation of concrete spaces to green spaces (e.g. living walls and roofs, bioswales)
* The rewilding or ‘greenification’ of local towns and villages.
* Implementation of actions in existing community biodiversity action plans
* Projects that protect endangered habitats and species

Once developed, the space should be open for the community to use and enjoy.

**What is Biodiversity?**

Biodiversity refers to the variety and variability of all living things including plants, animals, microbes, fungi and people. It also includes the places where plants and animals live (known as habitats), the interactions among living things (the web of life) and their environment (ecology).

Biodiversity is all around us, everywhere and in our everyday life. It forms complex systems that sustain life on Earth. Each part of the system is important no matter how small or trivial it may seem to us. Think of it as a puzzle; having a biodiverse system allows us to see the full puzzle but when we start to remove different pieces, or species, the picture loses important parts.

We rely completely on biodiversity to provide us with the basic elements we need such as clean air and water, food, fuel, building products and medicines. We also rely on it for the many free ‘services’ such as nutrient recycling, pollination and water filtration etc. It is therefore vital that we make space for nature in our towns, villages and countryside for us to continue living full and healthy lives.

Whilst the main focus of this grant round is to encourage community participation, it is important to ensure that the the local environment and biodiversity is supported and protected.

**Other helpful definitions:**

* **Greening** - planting more trees, flowers and other plants in an area
* **Rewilding** - allowing nature to take over an area
* **Water Management** - slowing rainwater before it gets to the drainage systems
* **Community Gardens** - a single piece of land gardened collectively by a group of people
* **Pocket Parks and Forests** - small urban or rural woodland
* **Allotments** - an area of land used for growing fruit and vegetables
* **Rain Gardens** - an area which is planted so that rainwater from roofs, driveways, etc runs into it and soaks into the ground, and therefore does not cause flooding or other problems
* **Green Roofs** - a roof that is partially or completely covered with vegetation
* **Living Walls or Vertical Gardens** - vertical structures that have living plants or other greenery attached to them
* **Native Trees and Shrubs** - good trees and shrubs to plant include Hazel, Willow, Hawthorn, Wild cherry, Whitebeam, Guelder rose and Elder.
It is important that you source locally grown stock so that it is in synch with our climate and the rest of our wildlife.

 **The Role of an Ecologist:**

Please note, that in the case of some projects, you may need the assistance of an Ecologist. Whether it is in writing your application, or once you have been awarded the funding, an Ecologist might help you to ensure that your project has good biodiversity principles and that your materials are sustainable and environmentally friendly.

If successful in this grant round, The Community Foundation can link you in with an Ecologist, who might be available to provide support for your work.

**Key Sources for Information:**

There are currently many existing guidance documents, organisations and websites that can assist you to carry out your proposed project or just provide some further reading on a topic of interest.

**Information on Biodiversity:** <https://biodiversityireland.ie>

**Information on Saving our Bees:** [All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021 - 2025](https://pollinators.ie/) – a national strategy for pollinator conservation, including a range of actions. This is a very accessible plan for all of us, from farmers to local authorities, to schools, gardeners and businesses, coming together to try to create an Ireland where pollinators can survive and thrive.

**The Government Strategy on Biodiversity Conservation:** [The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021](https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-plan) – For those that wish to know about Ireland’s overarching strategy for biodiversity conservation. A detailed plan that sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland’s ‘Vision for Biodiversity’ and follows on from the work of the first and second National Biodiversity Action Plans.

**Contacts:**

For any issues regarding this document or information regarding the AXA PARKS Fund please contact The Community Foundation by email at applications@communityfoundationni.org or by phone on 02890 245927.