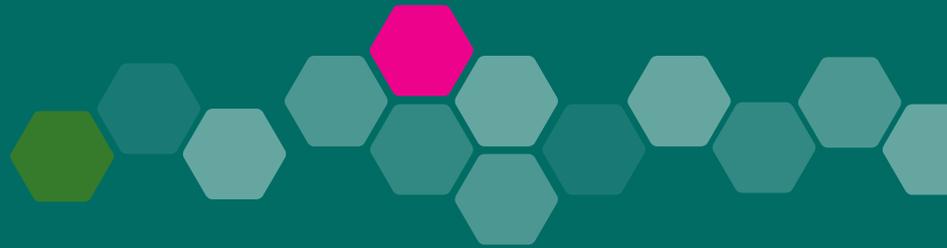




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# Scottish Land Fund - Evaluation



**AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE**





# Scottish Land Fund: Evaluation

March 2021

**RESAS**

Rural & Environmental Science  
and Analytical Services



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# Executive Summary

## Overall

- The Scottish Land Fund is regarded highly, both by those who applied for funding and by those who work with and administer the fund,
- In total, 92% of applicants rated the overall process involved in the Scottish Land Fund as either good or very good,
- Individual aspects of the Fund were also rated highly, with 95% saying the advice they received was good or very good and 91% saying the same about the feedback they receive about their application. Ratings for transparency of the process were a little lower though still very positive at 83%.

## Application Process

- Applicants are broadly supportive of the application process, with ratings of advice received, feedback and time taken to process all rated as good or very good by at least 85%,
- The two-stage approach, introduced in 2016, is seen as an improvement on the previous process though some stakeholders believe it can lead to delays,
- The time it can take from initial inquiry to final acquisition can be lengthy, however this does not deter applicants and there are opportunities to fast-track projects as required,
- The eligibility criteria are viewed as being necessarily tough; however, some stakeholders would like clarity and a possible change in the locational criteria for urban applicants who are often groups of shared interest rather than geographic groups,

## Administration

- Land Fund Advisors provide invaluable support to applicants to the fund, with 91% saying that they do a good or very good job,
- Around 7 in 10 successful applicants also rely on funding from other sources and some think that there could be more support provided in this regard,
- Applicants often do not understand why they have to deal with multiple agencies in making applications and some believe that this causes confusion and delay.

## Funding opportunities

- Given the prevalence of relying on funds from other sources in addition to the Scottish Land Fund, there were some calls for the fund to be widened and wider advice given on accessing funds from different sources,

- The current rules on how funds are spent, in terms of what is permitted spending on capital and on revenue are sometimes unclear to applicants, some of whom would like further clarity,
- Some stakeholders want a review of the current budget arrangements for the Fund, which currently means that money unspent in one year cannot be carried forward.

## Recommendations

The fund is highly valued and seen as a vital tool for community groups who wish to transform land and buildings in their local areas. However, the evaluation has also highlighted a range of feedback from applicants and stakeholders which are aimed at improving the administration and functioning of the fund. The recommendations are grouped below; within each grouping recommendations are set out in order of priority to groups and stakeholders :

### Application process

- to consider adding and funding an additional stage, before stage 1, to help organisations make early decisions about the viability of their application,
- to provide more financial support to community groups to learn about governance and provide advice and guidance,
- do more to promote the fund, including updating promotional material and other literature, possibly including case studies,
- rework the forms used at stages 1 and 2 so that they are supported by OS Mac systems as well as MS Word,

### Fund criteria

- to provide more detailed written guidance on eligibility criteria to help inform organisations about whether to apply, ensuring that guidance is written in plain, accessible language,
- to consider changing the geographic criteria as current guidance is seen as a deterrent, particularly for urban-based community organisations, and could be changed to include 'communities of interest',
- to consider publishing a clear set of criteria for judging future applications, particularly in a period of increased demand for the SLF,

## Finances and Funding

- concentrate any new money for stage 1 revenue funding to support applications,
- to consider reviewing and altering the current capital to revenue funding ratios which would benefit a number of organisations,
- to consider combining alternative sources of funding with the SLF, particularly in view of increased demand for SLF funds,
- to consider ways in which funds can be released more swiftly in cases where an application to buy a building may be lost at an auction.

# Background and Methodology

## Background

The Scottish Land Fund supports communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and buildings, giving more people the option for community land ownership than ever before. Access to the funds is given to allow for the purchase of plots, land and buildings. Guidance is given throughout the life of an application through a dedicated land fund advisor.

The Scottish Land Fund is delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government through a partnership between the National Lottery Community Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The Scottish Land Fund has clear outcomes, which are:

1. for communities to achieve more sustainable economic, environmental and/or social development through ownership of land and buildings,
2. for communities to have a stronger role in and control over their own development,
3. for communities to own well-managed, financially sustainable land and buildings.<sup>1</sup>

To apply for funding, applicants must first contact a Scottish Land Fund adviser and if eligible they will then be given an application form. The stages of the application process are:

- Stage 1: Technical assistance funding,
- Stage 2: Acquisition funding

All applicants to the fund must progress through Stage 1, although funding does not need to be requested at this stage. If funding is requested, Stage 1 grants can range between £2,500 and £30,000 and can be used to obtain specialist advice in preparation of a feasibility study. To progress through Stage 1 some community support must be evidenced.

The eligibility varies between stage 1 and stage 2 of application, with stage 1 requiring the applicant to be part of a community group, while stage 2 requires an applicant to be a corporate body.

The acquisition funding grants given in Stage 2 can be between £10,000 and £1,000,000 however there can be exceptions to this maximum value in unique cases. The funding in Stage 2 can cover capital and revenue costs, however the project must be viable and meet the aims of the Scottish Land Fund. It is understandable that not all of those who are successful at Stage 1 apply for Stage 2 funding.

## Methodology

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/scottish-land-fund#section-2>

The methodology comprises of the following key strands:



Strand 1: A secondary analysis of the administrative data. This was carried out using quantitative data techniques.

Strand 2: An online survey completed by 186 community groups who have applied for SLF in the last five years. The survey questions were informed by the secondary analysis of the administrative data, and covered perceptions of the SLF processes and priorities for future change.

The survey questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed by Diffley Partnership and signed-off by Scottish Government. It was agreed that the survey would be scripted on the SurveyMonkey tool and issued online, by a unique link, to all applicants to the 2016-2021 Scottish Land Fund. A total of 400 questionnaires were issued; in total 25 were returned due to out-of-date email addresses, four opted out, giving a valid population of 371 and an overall response rate of 50%.

The fieldwork was issued online between 15th January – 5th February 2021. Several reminders to non-respondents were issued during this time.

Strand 3: 14 in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholders. The interviews explored issues of eligibility criteria, timing, application processes; and considered priorities for future change.

The interviews were designed to explore the perspectives of those who are closest to the SLF who are best placed to make recommendations for areas for future change.

# Presentation and Interpretation of Findings

## Data Overview

### Quantitative data

Quantitative data identifies the prevalence of particular views among the population group and identifies differences in opinion by key demographic variables.

Throughout the report, differences between variables are commented upon only where we are sure these are statistically significant i.e. where we can be 95% certain that they have not occurred by chance.

Where percentages do not sum to 100%, this may be due to rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers. Aggregate percentages (e.g. "good/poor") are calculated from the absolute values. Therefore, aggregate percentages may differ from the sum of the individual scores due to rounding of percentage totals. Throughout the report, an asterisk (\*) denotes any value of less than half a percent and a dash (-) denotes zero.

### Qualitative data

The qualitative samples are designed to ensure that a range of different views and experiences are captured, meaning it is not appropriate to draw conclusions from qualitative data about the prevalence of views or experiences among the population group. As such, quantifying language, such as 'all', 'most' or 'a few' is avoided as far as possible when discussing qualitative findings.

### Report Structure

The findings from the various strands of the evaluation, including the secondary analysis, survey of applicants and qualitative interviews have been thematically grouped using cross-cutting themes emerging from the data.

The report begins with an overview of the management information as analysed in stage 1 of the evaluation. The remainder of the report follows the structure of the survey questionnaire.

# The Scottish Land Fund: Application Overview

## Summary

The spread of successful applications by urban rural classification is an important barometer for groups making applications and for the of stakeholders engaged in this evaluation. The analysis above shows a broadly similar spread between all areas in terms of both the proportion of total successful applications and the proportion of total sums awarded. For example, large urban areas account for 8% of successful applications and 9% of total sums awarded, while at the other end of the spectrum, remote rural areas accounted for 57% of total applications and 59% of total sums awarded.

## Overview of management information

### Stage 1: Applications

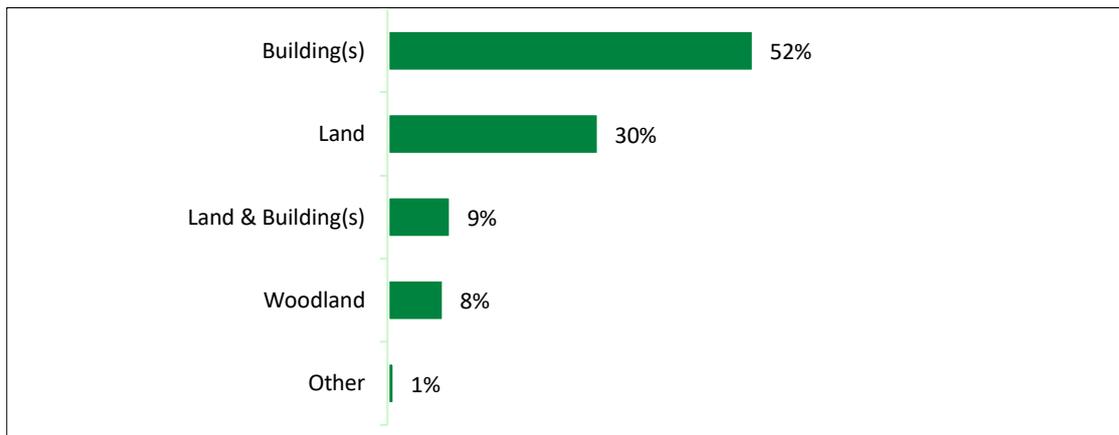
In total, there were 493 applications for Stage 1 funding between 2016-21, which is broken down by year in Table 1 below. Please note, one application in 2016-17 was withdrawn before a decision was given. Success at Stage 1 can take one of two forms; awarded funds or invited to continue to Stage 2, if no technical funding is required.

Table 1: Applications received, by year

| Year    | Successful    |                     | Not successful | Total      |
|---------|---------------|---------------------|----------------|------------|
|         | Awarded funds | Invited to continue |                |            |
| 2016-17 | 54            | 33                  | 21             | 109        |
| 2017-18 | 55            | 13                  | 23             | 91         |
| 2018-19 | 50            | 31                  | 29             | 110        |
| 2019-20 | 65            | 30                  | 26             | 121        |
| 2020-21 | 30            | 22                  | 10             | 62         |
| Total   | 254           | 129                 | 109            | <b>493</b> |

The number of applications varied by project type, with over half (52%) seeking funding for a building and only 30% requiring funding for land. The full breakdown of application by type of project is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Applications received, by type of project



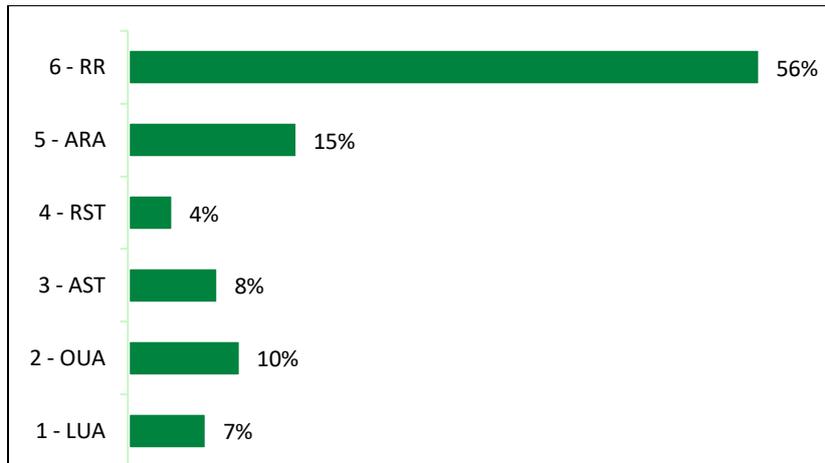
As with type of project, there was some variation in the number of applications received by urban rural classification. The breakdown of the 6-fold Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Urban Rural 6-fold classification

| Class | Class Name             | Class Acronym | Description   |
|-------|------------------------|---------------|---|
| 1     | Large Urban Areas      | LUA           | Settlements of 125,000 people and over  |
| 2     | Other Urban Areas      | OUA           | Settlements of 10,000 to 124,999 people   |
| 3     | Accessible Small Towns | AST           | Settlements of 3,000 to 9,999 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a Settlement of 10,000 or more                     |
| 4     | Remote Small Towns     | RST           | Settlements of 3,000 to 9,999 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes to a Settlement of 10,000 or more              |
| 5     | Accessible Rural Areas | ARA           | Areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a Settlement of 10,000 or more        |
| 6     | Remote Rural Areas     | RR            | Areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes to a Settlement of 10,000 or more |

Over half (56%) of the total applications came from those in remote rural areas (6 – RR). As shown in Figure 2 below, only 17% of the total applications came from those in urban areas (1 – LUA or 2 – OUA).

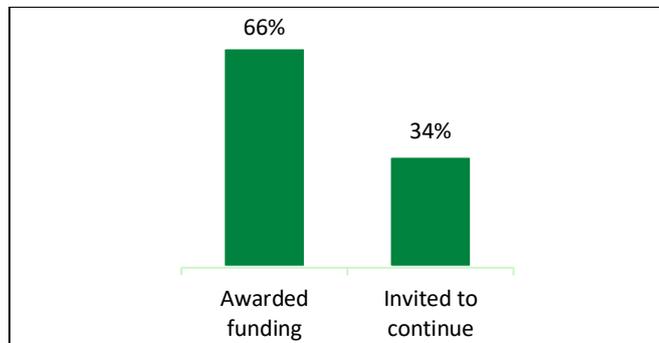
Figure 2: Application breakdown, by Urban Rural Classification



### Successful applicants

Successful applicants are both those who are awarded funding immediately and those who are invited to continue to Stage 2 of the funding process; this comprises 383 applicants to the fund at stage one. Those who are invited to continue to Stage 2 have not applied for technical assistance funding to develop their project. Figure 3 shows that of those who have been deemed successful, two thirds (66%) have been awarded funding and a third (34%) were invited to continue without requesting technical assistance.

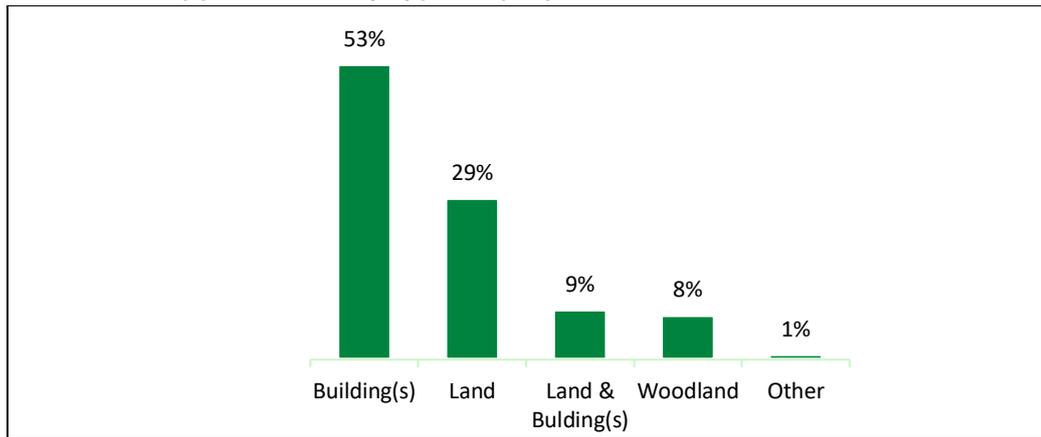
Figure 3: Successful applicants



This split could be useful for future subgroup analysis; all applicants go through the same processes when applying for the fund and must go through Stage 1 to access Stage 2, however those who access funding through Stage 1 of the process may have different experiences and perceptions of the fund than those who did not access funding at Stage 1.

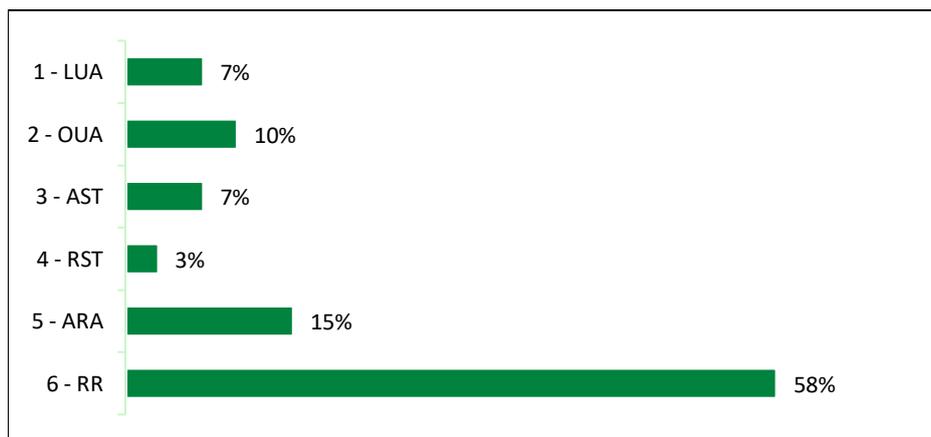
When considering those projects which were successful at stage one, the proportions remain largely the same within type of project. Over half (53%) of all projects successful at stage one are for the acquisition of a building.

Figure 4: Successful applications, by type of project



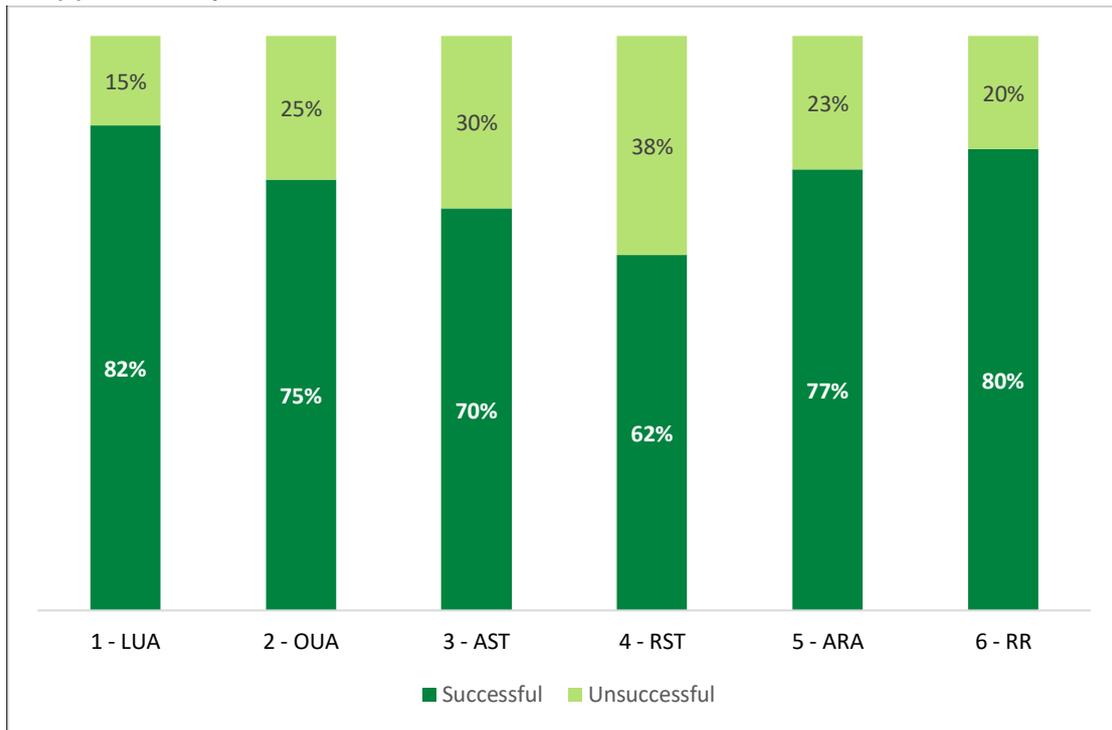
Successful applicants tend to be from those in remote rural areas (58%), which is in line with the overall number of applications.

Figure 5: Successful applicants, by Urban Rural Classification



As shown in Figure 6 below, 82% of applications made in Large Urban Areas are successful and four out of five applications (80%) of total applications in Remote Rural areas are successful. Remote Small Towns have the lowest success rate, with less than two thirds of all projects in this area being successful at stage one. Please note, when considering successful applicants this refers to both those who were awarded funding at stage one or invited to continue to directly to stage two, without receiving technical funding.

Figure 6: Applicants by Urban Rural Classification



### Community Groups

Repeated applications, especially within those who were unsuccessful at their first attempt is encouraged. In total there were 64 community groups with more than one application to the fund, accounting for 137 total applications. A total of 43 of these applications were unsuccessful, and several community groups were awarded funding or invited to continue to stage two on more than one occasion, for different projects. There were five groups who did not receive any funding despite submitting multiple applications.

Table 3: Applications for Stage 1 funding, multiple applications

| Multiple Applications | Number of groups | Successful | Invited to continue | Unsuccessful | Total |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| 2 applications        | 55               | 51         | 23                  | 36           | 101   |
| 3 applications        | 9                | 11         | 9                   | 7            | 36    |
| Total                 | 64               | 62         | 32                  | 43           | 137   |

## Stage 2 Applications

As discussed previously, community groups who wish to receive funding for an acquisition must go through stage one before proceeding to stage two. However, once stage one funding has been awarded or an invitation to continue to stage two has been issued it is not compulsory to apply for Stage 2 funding. The total number of applications for Stage 2 funding is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Applications for Stage 2 funding, by year

| Year         | Successful | Re-applied and successful | Unsuccessful | Total      |
|--------------|------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------|
| 2016-17      | 32         | 0                         | 3            | 35         |
| 2017-18      | 38         | 0                         | 2            | 40         |
| 2018-19      | 53         | 5                         | 3            | 61         |
| 2019-20      | 46         | 4                         | 7            | 57         |
| 2020-21      | 62         | 2                         | 6            | 70         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>231</b> | <b>11</b>                 | <b>21</b>    | <b>263</b> |

Given that 383 applicants were successful at stage one, 31% of applicants did not apply for funding at stage 2 of the process. This is due to a number of reasons, including project viability, community support, and timing of the SLF.

## Successful applicants

Over half (57%) of the successful applicants for Stage 2 funding are from remote rural (6-RR) areas and the funding which they receive is 59% of the overall funding awarded. Those in accessible small towns (3 – AST) and remote small towns (4 – RST) only comprise 7% of the total applications for Stage 2 funding, and they only receive 6% of the overall funding awarded. The full breakdown is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Breakdown of funding awarded, by Urban Rural classification

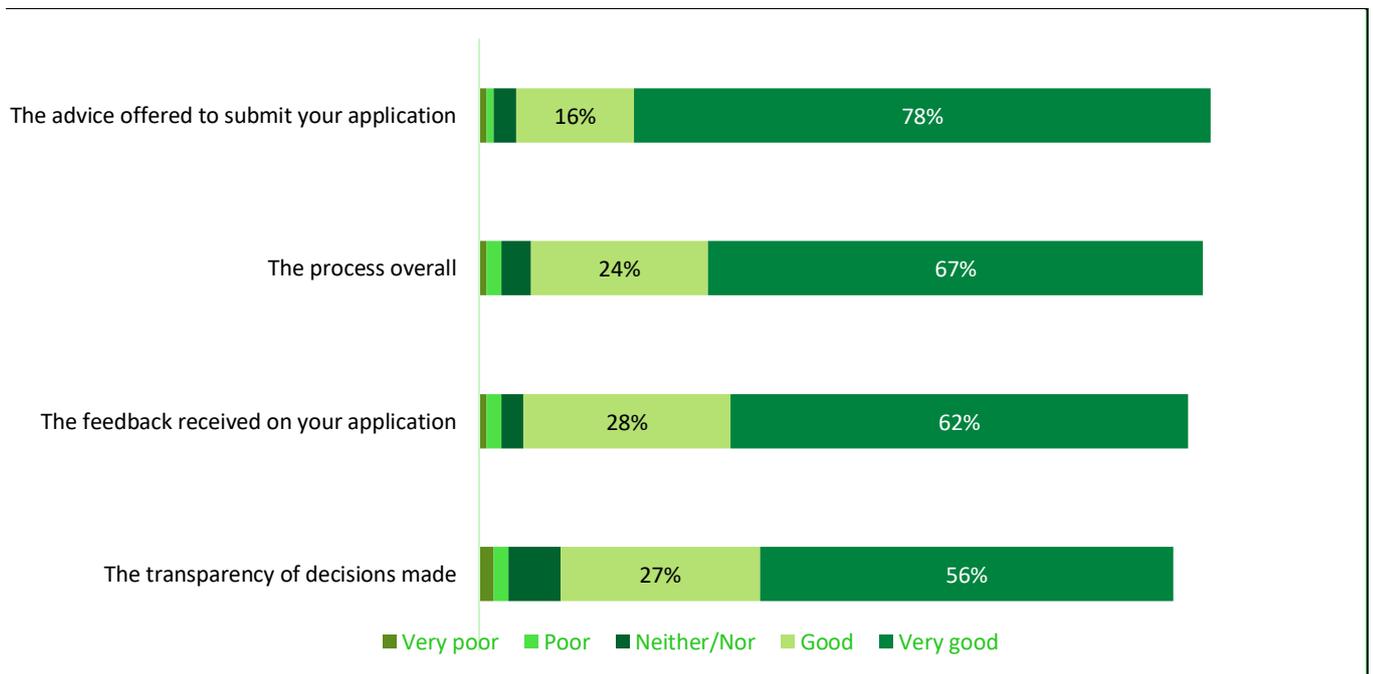
| UR Category  | Successful Projects | Total sum awarded     | Average per project | Minimum awarded | Maximum awarded | % of total awarded |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1 – LUA      | 21                  | £3,673,469.00         | £174,927.10         | £33,000.00      | £647,500.00     | 9%                 |
| 2 – OUA      | 20                  | £4,941,676.00         | £247,083.80         | £56,100.00      | £648,300.00     | 13%                |
| 3 – AST      | 10                  | £1,758,701.00         | £175,870.10         | £25,000.00      | £628,800.00     | 5%                 |
| 4 – RST      | 7                   | £694,111.00           | £99,158.71          | £15,750.00      | £270,000.00     | 2%                 |
| 5 – ARA      | 41                  | £4,798,849.00         | £117,045.10         | £10,000.00      | £394,000.00     | 12%                |
| 6 – RR       | 132                 | £23,090,468.00        | £174,927.79         | £11,900.00      | £4,415,200.00*  | 59%                |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>231</b>          | <b>£38,957,274.00</b> | <b>£168,646.21</b>  |                 |                 |                    |

\*This was an exception to the current limit of £1million. Excluding this value the maximum value awarded to an individual project in a Remote Rural area was 1,049,588.

# Perceptions of the Scottish Land Fund Overall

Perceptions of the Scottish Land Fund were broadly positive, as shown in Figure 7 below, with the vast majority of community groups (92%) regarding the process overall as good. Overwhelmingly, almost all felt that the advice offered to submit their application (95%) and feedback received on applications (91%) was good. There is a slight drop off of support for the process when considering the transparency of the decision made about funding (83%), however this remains high.

Figure 7: Perceptions of the Scottish Land Fund Overall. Base: all (178).



The broadly optimistic sentiments are continuous within the qualitative responses to the survey, reinforcing the positivity seen towards the process overall.

- “The way the Fund operates is focused on getting the best out of those applying, and thus proactively promotes community ownership and the groups that put time and effort into this”.
- “I feel it is great, and a model for how these processes should be. There is a lot of detail needed but it is not disproportionate, and above all there is a degree of flexibility which is usually lacking in big funding or government processes.”

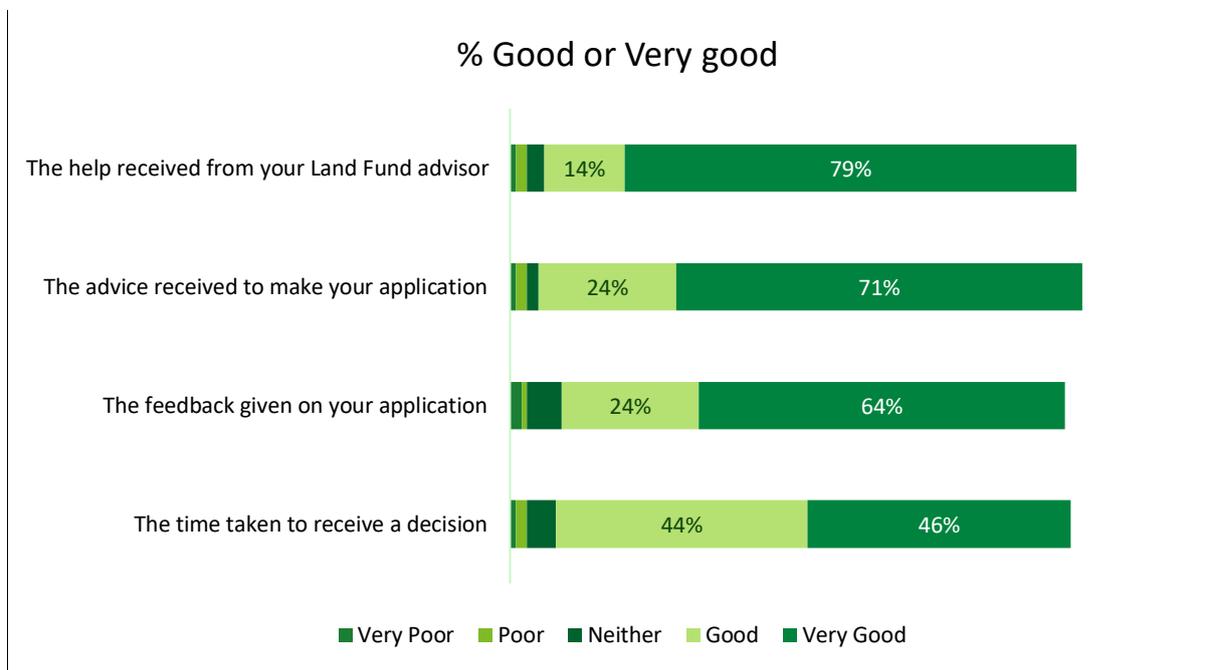
Overall, the Scottish Land Fund is very well received, and the vast majority of applicants to the fund are supportive of the processes.

# Perceptions of the application process

## Stage 1: Technical funding

Perceptions of the application process for stage one funding are broadly positive. Applicants' experiences with their advisors are positive, the overwhelming majority (95%) thinking the advice received to make their application was 'good' while almost all (93%) consider the help received from their land fund advisor as good. The feedback given on applications is also regarded highly (88%), with around two thirds (64%) of applicants perceiving the feedback received on their stage 1 application as very good.

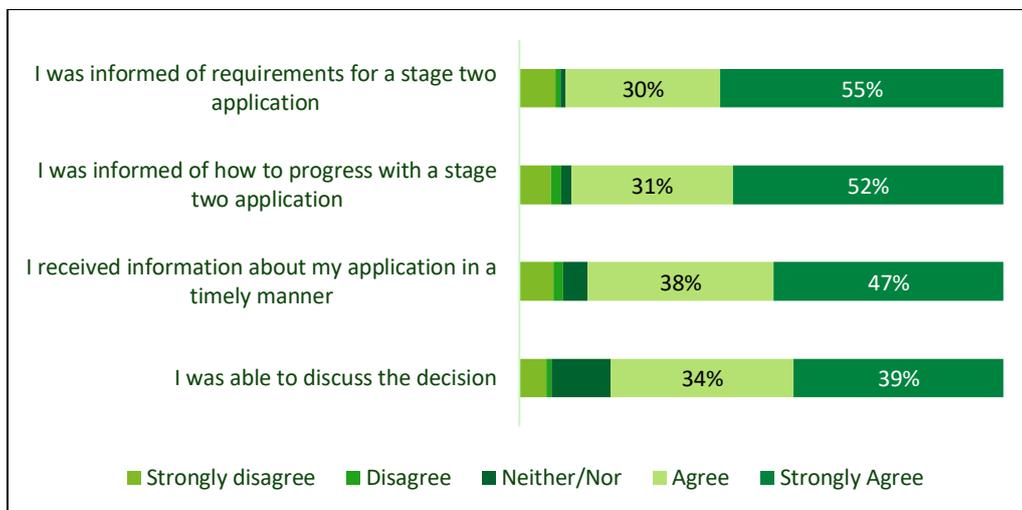
Figure 8: Perceptions of the Stage 1 application process. Base: all (n = 174).



For the majority of aspects of the stage 1 application process, around two-thirds or more of applicants rate the issue as 'very good.' However, there is a slightly less overwhelming rating of the time taken to reach a decision, with 44% rating this as 'good' and 46% as 'very good.'

The majority of those who were successful at stage one felt they were informed of the requirements for a stage two application (85%) and received information about their application in a timely manner (85%). Applicants who were successful with their stage one application also broadly felt informed of how to progress with a stage two application (83%). However, fewer applicants (73%) felt able to discuss the decision.

Figure 9: Perceptions of outcomes of Stage 1. Base: Successful applicants (n = 169).



The application process for stage one is fairly well regarded. This is reinforced through the qualitative responses. There are calls for clearer information about the supporting evidence, which is required with the application form, as well as some clarity with the guidelines and better protocols for when communicating outcomes with those unsuccessful community groups.

- “More information could be supplied regarding the supporting evidence needed”

Applicants to the fund receive a letter informing them of the decision made about their project at management meetings. The letter currently states the points the group must address before applying to the fund again, and this is not always received well by the community group.

- “The issuing of a standard letter when applications fail put a lot of pressure on the funding officers and advisors to explain the decisions made by the assessors.”

However, there are calls for the stage one process to be quicker as it can delay acquisitions where funding was not required.

- “the period of time between submission and decision make planning difficult”

Stakeholders regard the two-stage process highly, given that this is a new stage for the 2016-2021 fund, stakeholders believe it has worked well as it is beneficial to the applicant and has caused the success rate to increase at stage 2.

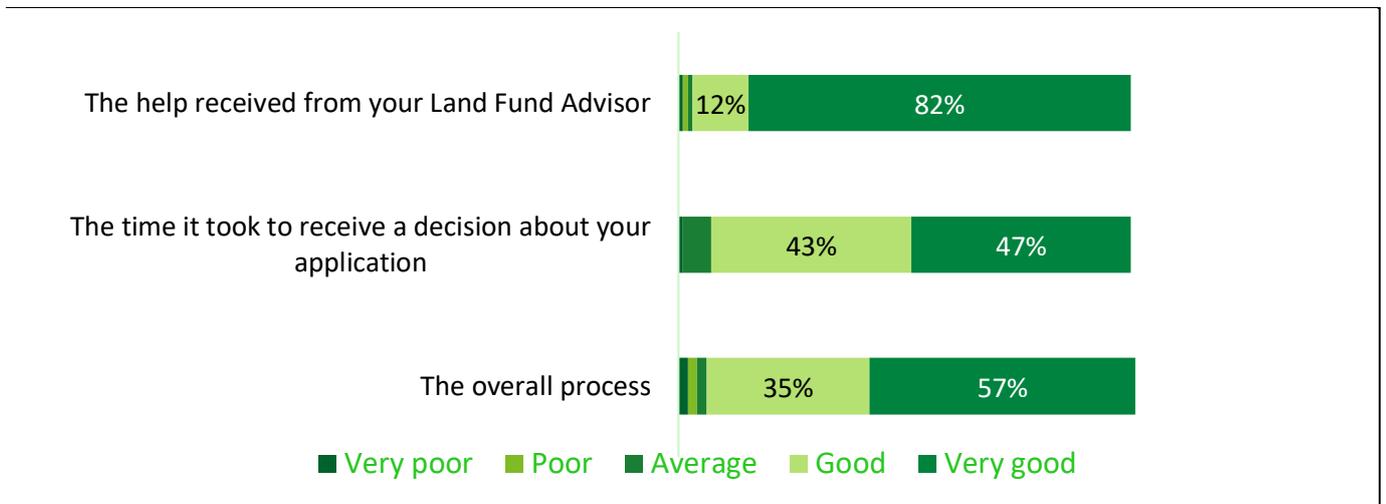
- “Some groups we work with at stage one are very inexperienced and it can sometimes take them years to come back with an application... for groups to go on that journey and do their due diligence, test community support and do a feasibility study, make

sure they've got a competent business plan and make sure they're not buying a liability... to me that stage is very important.”

## Stage 2: Acquisition funding

When considering the application process for stage two funding, almost all applicants (94%) believe the help received from their Land Fund Advisor is good and, as with the stage one application, regard the overall process as good (92%).

Figure 10: Perceptions of the Stage 2 application process. Base: those who applied for stage 2 (n = 132).



However, as with stage one, the strength of agreement wavers when considering the time in which the application takes. Overall, 90% of applicants for stage two funding rate their experience above average however there is a fairly even split between those who think the process is good and very good.

Stakeholders are split on their views with regards to the time it takes to progress through the Scottish Land Fund and attain acquisition funding.

- “Two stages is not a bad thing. It allows people to dip their toe in. Having to write down what you want to do is also a good way of testing out whether or not what seemed like a good idea when you were talking about it really is.”

However, a minority of community groups may experience delays due to the time it can take to receive acquisition funding. This can be due to time taken to progress from stage 1 to submit a stage 2 application and receive a decision from the management committee. Currently the committee meets six times a year, although projects can be fast tracked if time sensitive. There are a few instances where the perceived delay has a knock-on effect, where business plans may require to be changed due to the fluctuation in the property market, and

the initial business plan a group had based their application on may become out of date. This could cause the group to lose the opportunity to purchase the land they had plans for while they explore other sources for capital funds.

There is a notion that the application form at stage two is limiting and does not allow enough detail to explain about the community group and the purpose of the acquisition. There is a perception that there is no opportunity in the application form to demonstrate the character and nature of the applicant organisation to help distinguish them in a highly competitive arena.

- “The application form is somewhat restrictive and does not really allow for full explanation of background and context of applicant’s situation or environment.”
- “In comparison with a Community Asset Transfer application form the SLF2 feels limiting.”
- “It would be helpful if the question on ‘outcomes’ in the Stage 2 application could be more clearly stated. It was difficult to interpret what was wanted.”

## Eligibility Criteria

There is an agreement that well defined, rigorous, guidelines should be in place for any funding opportunity.

- “The only thing we found a bit much was the expectation to change our constitution. We did that and it did not cause any major problems. But if every funder asked us to change the constitution according to their wording, that would be a bit difficult”

Internal stakeholders have different opinions of the eligibility criteria than those external stakeholders. External stakeholders described the eligibility criteria as being restrictive, too narrow and specific and as a barrier to accessing funding. However, internal stakeholders are typically supportive of the ‘generous’ eligibility criteria, believe they are fit for purpose and feel able to help groups fit the criteria.

- “[They] are deliberately challenging. We’ve had some push back, but we need to remember that full engagement and involving everyone in a community is not easy and it’s a big job.”

There is a notion that the eligibility criteria at stage two can be restrictive and can be a barrier for groups to progress with their application. There is also a concern that urban groups may struggle more than rural groups, because of the eligibility criteria.

- “It’s much more challenging to apply the same rules, or guidance and principles, to urban areas as it is to rural areas.”

In particular, communities in urban areas who are based around a specific interest, e.g. bowling clubs, tend to struggle in changing their structure to become a geographical community.

## The Application Process Overall

The views of stakeholders are consistent with community groups; there are some areas which could be improved upon; however, the majority of applicants are happy. Some improvements, such as the suggestion by some stakeholders to reformat application forms so that they are supported by OS Mac systems, are straightforward and quick to achieve, while others will require greater thought and time.

The addition of stage one funding is regarded as a valuable resource for community groups, and stakeholders are broadly supportive of the two-stage process.

The time taken to progress an application can be seen as quite lengthy, however there are both benefits and drawbacks to the timescales. Additional time can allow community groups to plan for the acquisition stage longer and have firm plans in place for after acquiring their asset. However, for some groups the time taken to get a decision on funding can cause them to lose their asset and ultimately have to change their plans.

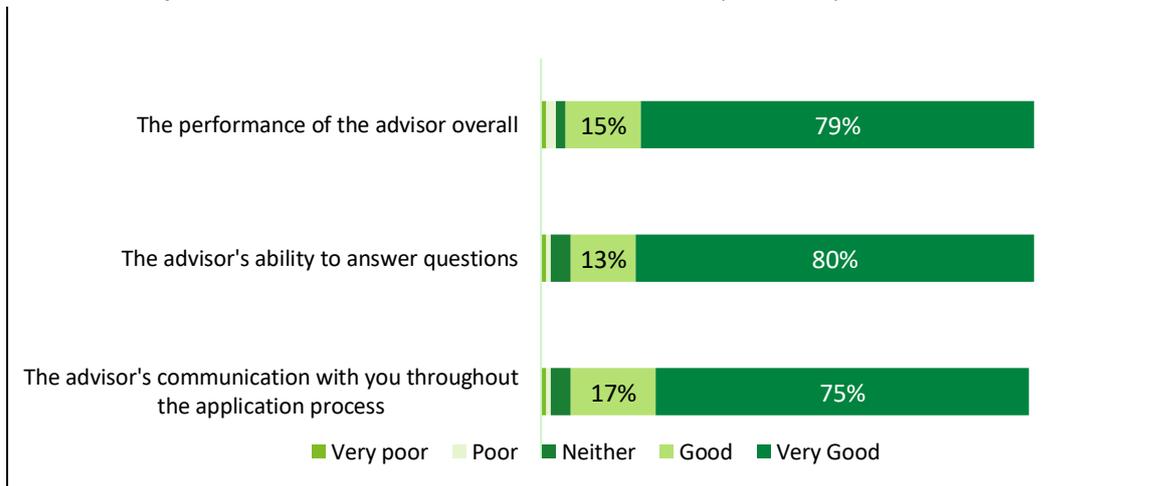
The eligibility criteria work: there needs to be some rules to follow with funding opportunities like this and on the whole groups can adapt to fit the guidelines. Governance structures are important however there should not be a one size fits all approach to community groups. The feedback from the interviews suggests that community groups in urban areas often find the eligibility criteria more difficult to work with than those in rural areas, due to them being formed in communities of interest, for example groups coming together to buy a sports facility, rather than communities of geography.

# Perceptions of administration

## Communication with Land Fund Advisors

There is an overall satisfaction with the work Land Fund Advisors do for the community groups they work with.

Figure 11: Perceptions of Land Fund Advisor. Base: all (n = 176).



The positivity towards the Land Fund Advisors is echoed in the qualitative responses.

- “Overall, they were really helpful and responded even late at night it off the next day.”
- “Our advisor couldn’t have been more helpful.”
- “Our land fund advisor was exceptional in guidance, advice and support and shared our disappointment at the failure of our Stage 2 application. I believe our Land Fund Advisor did everything possible to keep us informed and assist us to deal with whatever came up in our path”

However, there are some calls for continuity with advisors and a cohesive approach when the named advisor is not available (for instance, during periods of annual leave).

- “We have had a number of different advisors. All were very helpful, but more continuity would have been helpful.”
- “We initially had three advisors which led to some conflicting advice and poor response level. However, our final advisor was totally brilliant.”
- “Our application was submitted close to deadline and the first advisor was on holiday for some of that. An alternative contact would have been good.”

## Administration of the fund

There is some confusion within applicants to the fund about why two agencies are involved with the SLF, and that having two agencies can be a hinderance.

- “It is not clear to me why the process needs to involve dealing with the Big Lottery at some points in the process and then with HIE at other times.”
- “By using one agency for both stage one and stage two”
- “It can be difficult for the groups to understand why they need to deal with two agencies”

It would also be useful to have more support for groups who do require extra funding. There is a notion more could be done here from both applicants and stakeholders, however there are mixed opinions on how this could be achieved.

Some stakeholders would like to see the Scottish Land Fund process extended beyond the current two stages; however, there are different suggestions as to how best to achieve this change. Some stakeholders support the idea of introducing an additional element before the current stage one of the process, arguing that it would allow more opportunity to apply for stage one funding on more than occasion and allowing more support to organisations before they decide whether or not to make a formal application. Others suggest offering more assistance after stage two, which would offer ongoing revenue support, arguing that this would help applicants make money from their acquisition and could include advice on what other support they are entitled to apply for.

# Perceptions of Funding Opportunities

## Capital versus Revenue

Currently, applicants to the Scottish Land Fund are permitted to apply for funding of up to £1million to cover the costs of acquisition for their project. Within that overall limit there are rules around what the funding can be used for; these rules state that 80% of the funds awarded must cover capital costs, i.e. the cost of the acquiring the land or building for their project, while the remaining 20% can cover revenue costs, i.e. all costs for the running and upkeep of the land or building.

A vast majority of applicants require additional funding to help with renovations and operational costs and there are split opinions on whether the SLF should be the source for this. Often applicants are unaware of what the money granted from SLF can actually be spent on, and there are calls to clarify this better.

- “It would be helpful if there was revenue funding available for project officers, which is vital to the continuity of a project”

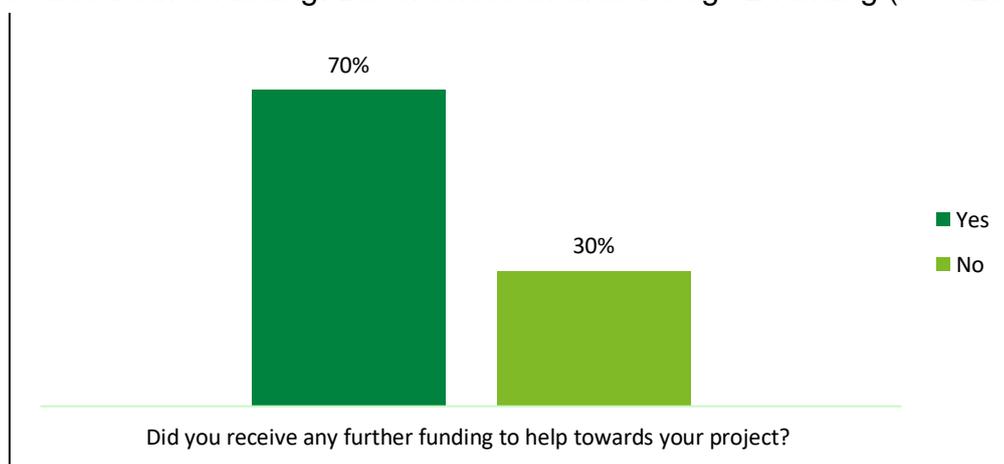
There are also divided opinions when considering the capital to revenue split. Some consider the split to work well and others view it more as an arbitrary number that doesn't matter.

- “It's a capital fund, we're there to acquire assets but there's a strong demand for us to be more than that.”

## Other funding Opportunities

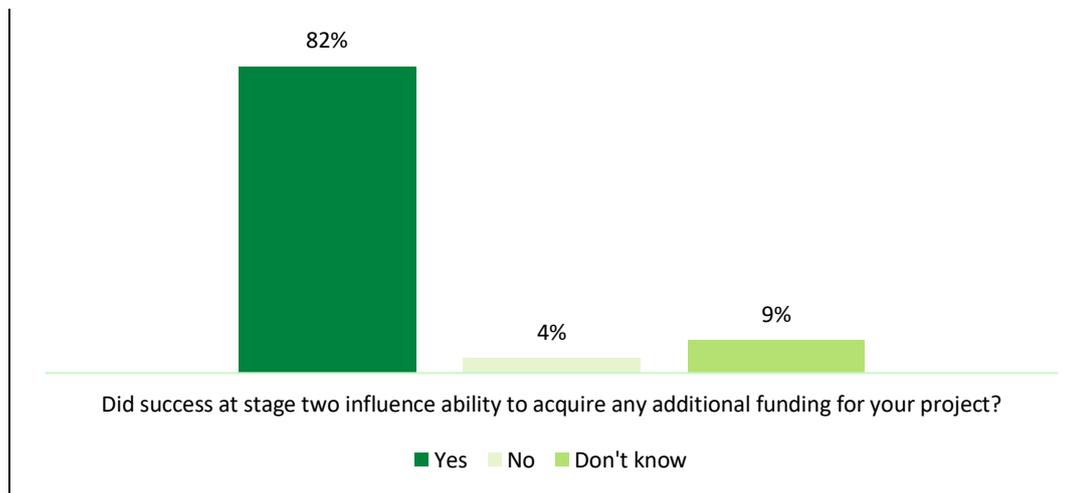
A vast proportion (70%) of community groups who applied for stage two funding also received funding from another source.

Figure 12: Sourced other funding. Base: Those awarded stage 2 funding (n = 128).



Success at stage 2 of the SLF was perceived as an influencing factor for securing additional funding.

Figure 13: Success at stage 2 as influencing factor. Base: those who accessed further funding (n = 93).



Applicants to the Scottish Land Fund go on to access funding from a wide range of other funds, trusts and grant providers. The most common source of additional funding is from the local authority, LEADER, HIE, RHF, The Robertson Trust and from community fundraising.

### Annualization of the budget

Currently the Scottish Land Fund is operated on an annual budget which is not reviewed during the course of the year. This means that once the financial year for the fund ends, any money which is left unspent is not carried forward to the following year.

There are calls to review the annualization of the budget, and there is a notion that timing frustrations are linked to the coming to the end of the annual budget and there being no resources left until the next year of the SLF.

- “I guess some of the frustrations around the finances are around the annualization of it. The fact we always end up in a position where we’ve overcommitted but underspent”

## Recommendations for Future Change

As discussed throughout this report, the research has highlighted the broad positivity for the Scottish Land Fund among applicants and the range of stakeholders who participated in the qualitative research.

The fund is highly valued and seen as a vital tool for community groups who wish to transform land and buildings in their local areas. However, the evaluation has also highlighted a range of feedback from applicants and stakeholders which are aimed at improving the administration and functioning of the fund. The recommendations are grouped below; within each grouping recommendations are set out in order of priority to groups and stakeholders:

### Application process

- to consider adding and funding an additional stage, before stage 1, to help organisations make early decisions about the viability of their application,
- to provide more financial support to community groups to learn about governance and provide advice and guidance,
- do more to promote the fund, including updating promotional material and other literature, possibly including case studies,
- rework the forms used at stages 1 and 2 so that they are supported by OS Mac systems as well as MS Word,

### Fund criteria

- to provide more detailed written guidance on eligibility criteria to help inform organisations about whether to apply, ensuring that guidance is written in plain, accessible language,
- to consider changing the geographic criteria as current guidance is seen as a deterrent, particularly for urban-based community organisations, and could be changed to include 'communities of interest',
- to consider publishing a clear set of criteria for judging future applications, particularly in a period of increased demand for the SLF,

### Finances and Funding

- concentrate any new money for stage 1 revenue funding to support applications,
- to consider reviewing and altering the current capital to revenue funding ratios which would benefit a number of organisations,
- to consider combining alternative sources of funding with the SLF, particularly in view of increased demand for SLF funds,
- to consider ways in which funds can be released more swiftly in cases where an application to buy a building may be lost at an auction.

# Appendix A

## Questionnaire

### Introduction

It is vital that the Scottish Government understand applicants' views on the processes of the fund, establishing how helpful the process is and considers how the process could be improved upon for the future.

Scottish Government have commissioned independent researchers, Diffley Partnership, to undertake a survey of applicants to understand your views and experiences. We would be really grateful if you could take around 10 minutes to answer this short questionnaire.

In line with good research practice, we can assure you that the answers you give to the survey are confidential and will not be seen outside the research team.

### Contextual questions

ASK ALL

Q. Which of the following statements best describes your situation?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

- My application was successful at both stage 1 and stage 2,
- My application as successful at stage 1, but was unsuccessful at stage 2,
- My application was successful at stage 1, but I did not apply for stage 2 funding,
- I was unsuccessful at stage 1,
- I withdrew my application

### **The overall process**

ASK ALL

Q. Thinking about your experience of the Scottish Land Fund overall, how good or poor would you rate it in the following aspects?

RANDOMISE ORDER

- The process overall
- The transparency of decisions made
- The advice offered to submit your application
- The feedback received on your application

SCALE: 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good), DK, NA

ASK ALL

Q. Thinking about the communication with your Scottish Land Fund advisor, how well did they perform in each of the following aspects.

RANDOMISE ORDER

- The performance of the advisor overall,
- The advisor's ability to answer questions,
- The advisor's communication with you throughout the application process,

SCALE: 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good), DK, NA

ASK ALL

Q. In the space below, please say how, if at all, you think the Land Fund application process overall could be improved?

WRITE IN BELOW

### Stage 1

ASK ALL

Q. Thinking about the application process for stage one, how good or poor would you rate it in the following aspects?

RANDOMISE ORDER

- The time taken to receive a decision,
- The advice received to make your application,
- The feedback given on your application,
- The help received from your Land Fund Advisor,

SCALE: 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good), DK, NA

ASK TO THOSE AWARDED FUNDING/INVITED TO CONTINUE

Q. Thinking about the decisions made at stage one of the funding process, to what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- I received information about my application in a timely manner,
- I was able to discuss the decision,
- I was informed of how to progress with a stage two application,
- I was informed of requirements for a stage two application

SCALE: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither/nor, tend to disagree, strongly disagree, DK

ASK TO THOSE WHO WERE UNSUCCESSFUL

Q. Thinking about the decision made about your stage one application, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I understand why the decision was made,
- I felt I would be able to apply again in the future,
- I received feedback on my application which was easy to understand,
- I was encouraged to resubmit my application,

SCALE: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither/nor, tend to disagree, strongly disagree, DK

ASK ALL

Q. In the space below, please say how, if at all, you think stage 1 of the application process overall could be improved?

WRITE IN BELOW

ASK THOSE WHO DID NOT APPLY FOR STAGE TWO BUT WERE SUCCESSFUL AT STAGE ONE

Q. When thinking about your project, why did not apply for any further funding?

SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

- The project was not viable,
- There was not enough support within the community,
- The location was bought by someone else,
- I did not have the support I needed to proceed with the application,
- Something else (WRITE IN)

## Stage 2

ASK THOSE WHO APPLIED FOR STAGE TWO FUNDING

Q. Thinking about the application process for stage two, how good or poor would you rate it in the following aspects?

RANDOMISE ORDER

- Overall process,
- Time it took to receive a decision about your application,
- The help received from your Land Fund Advisor,

SCALE: 1 (very poor) – 5 (very good), DK, NA

ASK THOSE WHO WERE SUCCESSFUL

Q. Thinking about the decision made about your stage two application, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- I understood the decisions made,
- I understand the outcome, and the reasoning
- I was given feedback,
- The decision was fair,
- The decision was transparent,
- I was able to ask questions regarding the decision

SCALE: Strongly agree, agree, neither/nor, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know, N/A

ASK TO THOSE WHO WERE UNSUCCESSFUL

Q. Thinking about the decision made about your stage two application, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I understand why the decision was made,
- I felt I would be able to apply again in the future,
- I received feedback on my application which was easy to understand,
- I was encouraged to resubmit my application,

SCALE: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither/nor, tend to disagree, strongly disagree, DK

ASK THOSE WHO WERE AWARDED STAGE TWO FUNDING

Q. Were you able to acquire the land or building you received the funding for?

SCALE: YES/NO

ASK THOSE WHO WERE AWARDED STAGE TWO FUNDING

Q\*. Is your project operational?

- Yes – my project is fully operational,
- Yes – at least one phase of my project is operational,
- No – my project is under development,
- No – my project is no longer operational

ASK THOSE WHO ANSWER NO TO Q\*.

Q. Why is this the case?

WRITE IN BELOW

ASK THOSE WHO WERE AWARDED STAGE TWO FUNDING

Q. Did you receive any further funding to help towards your project?

SCALE: YES/NO

ASK THOSE WHO SAID YES

Q. What was the source of any additional funding required for your project?

WRITE IN BELOW/OPTIONS

ASK THOSE WHO SAID YES

Q. Did success at stage two influence ability to acquire any additional funding for your project?

SCALE: YES/NO/DK/NA

ASK TO THOSE WHO SAID YES

Q. Why was extra funding required?

SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

- Underestimated how much would be required for completion of the project,
- Did not receive what was applied for from the land fund,
- The acquisition cost more than expected,
- Operational costs were more than expected,

ASK ALL

Q. Thinking about the help and assistance you received from your Land Fund Advisor, could they have done anything differently to help?

WRITE IN BELOW.

# Appendix B

## Survey Results

### Question 1

Which of the following statements best describes your situation?

| Base: All (186)   | %  |
|---|----|
| My application was successful at both stage 1 and stage 2                         | 75 |
| My application was successful at stage 1, but was unsuccessful at stage 2         | 3  |
| My application was successful at stage 1, but I did not apply for stage 2 funding | 18 |
| I was unsuccessful at stage 1   | 3  |
| I withdrew my application   | 1  |

### The overall process

#### Question 2

Thinking about your experience of the Scottish Land Fund overall, how good or poor would you rate it in the following aspects?

| Base: All (178)                               | Very poor | Poor | Neither | Good | Very good | Don't know | N/A |
|---|-----------|------|---------|------|-----------|------------|-----|
| The process overall                           | 1         | 2    | 4       | 24   | 67        | 0          | 0   |
| The transparency of decisions made            | 2         | 2    | 7       | 27   | 56        | 7          | 0   |
| The advice offered to submit your application | 1         | 1    | 3       | 16   | 78        | 2          | 0   |
| The feedback received on your application     | 1         | 2    | 3       | 28   | 62        | 2          | 2   |

#### Question 3

Thinking about the communication with your Scottish Land Fund advisor, how well did they perform in each of the following aspects.

| Base: All (176) | Very poor | Poor | Neither | Good | Very good | Don't know | N/A |
|-----------------|-----------|------|---------|------|-----------|------------|-----|
|-----------------|-----------|------|---------|------|-----------|------------|-----|

|   |   |   |   |    |    |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|
| The performance of the advisor overall                                  | 1 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 80 | 1 | 0 |
| The advisor's ability to answer questions                               | 1 | 1 | 4 | 13 | 81 | 1 | 0 |
| The advisor's communication with you throughout the application process | 1 | 1 | 5 | 17 | 76 | 1 | 0 |

**Question 4**

In the space below, please say how, if at all, you think the Land Fund application process overall could be improved?

Open text questions will be analysed when the survey closes.

## Stage 1

### Question 5

Thinking about the application process for stage one, how good or poor would you rate it in the following aspects?

| Base: All (174)                               | Very poor | Poor | Neither | Good | Very good | Don't know | N/A |
|---|-----------|------|---------|------|-----------|------------|-----|
| The time taken to receive a decision          | 1         | 2    | 5       | 44   | 46        | 2          | 0   |
| The advice received to make your application  | 1         | 2    | 1       | 24   | 71        | 1          | 0   |
| The feedback given on your application        | 2         | 1    | 6       | 24   | 64        | 2          | 1   |
| The help received from your Land Fund Advisor | 1         | 2    | 3       | 14   | 79        | 1          | 0   |

### Question 6

Thinking about the decisions made at stage one of the funding process, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| Base: All (169)  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know | N/A |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|------------------|-------------------|------------|-----|
| I received information about my application in a timely manner | 47             | 38    | 5       | 2                | 7                 | 2          | 1   |
| I was able to discuss the decision                             | 39             | 34    | 11      | 1                | 5                 | 3          | 7   |
| I was informed of how to progress with a stage two application | 52             | 31    | 2       | 2                | 6                 | 2          | 5   |
| I was informed of requirements for a stage two application     | 55             | 30    | 1       | 1                | 7                 | 1          | 5   |

### Question 7

Thinking about the decision made about your stage one application, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

| Base: All (4)  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know | N/A |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|------------------|-------------------|------------|-----|
|  | N              | N     | N       | N                | N                 | N          | N   |
| I understand why the decision was made                             | 0              | 4     | 0       | 0                | 0                 | 0          | 0   |
| I felt I would be able to apply again in the future                | 1              | 1     | 1       | 1                | 0                 | 0          | 0   |
| I received feedback on my application which was easy to understand | 0              | 3     | 0       | 1                | 0                 | 0          | 0   |
| I was encouraged to resubmit my application                        | 0              | 0     | 2       | 0                | 1                 | 1          | 0   |

### Question 8

In the space below, please say how, if at all, you think stage 1 of the application process overall could be improved?

Open-text questions will be analysed when the survey closes

### Question 9

When thinking about your project, why did not apply for any further funding?

| Base: All (33)  | %  |
|---|----|
| The project was not viable  | 6  |
| There was not enough support within the community                   | 9  |
| The location was bought by someone else                             | 6  |
| I did not have the support I needed to proceed with the application | 3  |
| Something else  | 76 |

## Stage 2

### Question 10

Thinking about the application process for stage two, how good or poor would you rate it in the following aspects?

| Base: All (136)   | Very poor | Poor | Neither | Good | Very good | Don't know | N/A |
|---|-----------|------|---------|------|-----------|------------|-----|
|   | %         | %    | %       | %    | %         | %          | %   |
| Overall process   | 2         | 2    | 2       | 35   | 57        | 1          | 2   |
| Time it took to receive a decision about your application | 1         | 0    | 6       | 43   | 47        | 1          | 1   |
| The help received from your Land Fund Advisor             | 1         | 1    | 1       | 12   | 82        | 1          | 1   |

### Question 11

Thinking about the decision made about your stage two application, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| Base: All (130)                                    | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know | N/A |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|------------------|-------------------|------------|-----|
| I understood the decisions made                    | 49             | 40    | 4       | 0                | 3                 | 2          | 2   |
| I understand the outcome, and the reasoning        | 45             | 43    | 4       | 0                | 3                 | 2          | 3   |
| I was given feedback                               | 46             | 39    | 3       | 2                | 3                 | 1          | 7   |
| The decision was fair                              | 49             | 35    | 6       | 0                | 3                 | 2          | 4   |
| The decision was transparent                       | 47             | 33    | 9       | 2                | 3                 | 3          | 5   |
| I was able to ask questions regarding the decision | 42             | 28    | 12      | 0                | 3                 | 2          | 14  |

### Question 12

Thinking about the decision made about your stage two application, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

| Base: All (5) | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know | N/A |
|---------------|----------------|-------|---------|------------------|-------------------|------------|-----|
|---------------|----------------|-------|---------|------------------|-------------------|------------|-----|

|  | N | N | N | N | N | N | N |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I understood why the decision was made                             | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| I felt I would be able to apply again in the future                | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| I received feedback on my application which was easy to understand | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| I was encouraged to resubmit my application                        | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

### Question 13

Were you able to acquire the land or building you received the funding for?

| Base: All (129) | %  |
|-----------------|----|
| Yes             | 91 |
| No              | 9  |

### Question 14

Is your project operational?

| Base: All (56)  | %  |
|---|----|
| Yes – my project is fully operational                 | 35 |
| Yes – at least one phase of my project is operational | 24 |
| No – my project is under development                  | 39 |
| No – my project is no longer operational              | 2  |

### Question 15

Why is this the case?

Open-text questions will be analysed when the survey closes.

### Question 16

Did you receive any further funding to help towards your project?

| Base: All (128) | % |
|-----------------|---|
|-----------------|---|

|     |    |
|-----|----|
| Yes | 70 |
| No  | 30 |

**Question 17**

What was the source of any additional funding required for your project?

Open-text questions will be analysed when the survey closes.

**Question 18**

Did success at stage two influence ability to acquire any additional funding for your project?

| Base: All (93) | %  |
|----------------|----|
| Yes            | 82 |
| No             | 4  |
| Don't know     | 9  |
| N/A            | 5  |

**Question 19**

Why was extra funding required?

| Base: All (41)  | %  |
|---|----|
| Underestimated how much would be required for completion of the project | 3  |
| Did not receive what was applied for from the land fund                 | 6  |
| The acquisition cost more than expected                                 | 3  |
| Operational costs were more than expected                               | 9  |
| Something else  | 86 |

**Question 20**

Thinking about the help and assistance you received from your Land Fund Advisor, could they have done anything differently to help?

Open-text questions will be analysed when the survey closes.



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