

# Community Inclusion Standard: Stakeholder Consultation

The Community Inclusion Standard team is reaching out to individuals and organisations with diverse insights into the nature finance market with the request that they review and critically feedback on the current draft Community Inclusion Standard (CIS). Responses to this consultation will be used by the CIS team to refine and shape the final Standard and associated resources.

This consultation phase is critical to the development of the CIS, ensuring the final standard is relevant to projects of all scales and objectives, maximising community engagement and the delivery of community benefits.

## Background

Deciding Matters is leading a consortium of partners funded by [FIRNS](#) (Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland grant scheme from NatureScot and National Lottery Heritage Fund) to develop a [Community Inclusion Standard](#) (CIS). The CIS was conceptualised by the [Nature Finance Certification Alliance](#) (NFCA) and its development is a collaborative venture with wide-ranging stakeholders.

## Phase One

### Partners:

#### Project Delivery Team:

- Deciding Matters
- Finance Earth
- Scottish Forum on Natural Capital
- Scottish Land Commission
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Soil Association Certification
- The James Hutton Institute
- University of Strathclyde

#### Advisory Group:

- Community Land Scotland
- Foundation Scotland
- Community Woods Association
- Development Trusts Association Scotland
- Peatland Code
- BSI
- Wildlife Works
- Woodland Carbon Code
- SRUC
- Scottish Land & Estates
- National Parks Partnerships
- Federated Hermes
- Aبردn
- Greenbank
- Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund

## Place-Based Partners:

- NW2045
- Highlands Rewilding
- Dumfries & Galloway Council
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust
- Bioregioning Tayside
- Soil Association Charity
- CreditNature
- Anstruther Improvements
- Fife Coast and Countryside Trust

From October 2023 to March 2024 the consortium delivered the following workstreams:

### Financial Feasibility Study

Finance Earth conducted a series of interviews with buyers and investors to gauge appetite for a Community Benefits Standards, whether this certification would illicit a premium, or be seen as desirable for investors. The response was overwhelmingly positive, although no price figures could be estimated due to the rapidly evolving market.

Literature Review: Community participation for community benefits from natural capital projects University of Strathclyde undertook a [literature review](#) of academic and practitioner literature to explore best practice approaches for facilitating community inclusion and participation in order to generate lasting community benefit from nature-based projects

### Best Practice Guide: Community Inclusion for Community Benefit

Deciding Matters led a co-design process with our place-based partners to identify key steps for a project to take, ensuring meaningful community engagement. A wider consultation with stakeholders across the nature finance sector was also held, shaping the [draft guide](#).

### Draft Community Benefits Standard

Soil Association Certification took all phase one outputs and drafted the first Community Benefits Standard (which has since been renamed the Community Inclusion Standard).

## Phase Two

### MoU Partners:

- BSI
- Credit Nature
- Deciding Matters
- Fife Coast and Countryside Trust
- Foundation Scotland
- Future Forest Company Ltd
- Green Finance Institute
- Highlands Rewilding
- Kana
- IUCN UK Peatland Programme's Peatland Code
- Nattergal
- Realise Earth
- SRUC
- Scottish Land Commission
- Soil Association Certification
- Soil Association Charity
- Trees for Life
- University of Strathclyde

- Wilder Carbon
- Woodland Carbon Code

From April 2024 to March 2025, the consortium is undertaking a testing and further development phase, working towards CIS market readiness. Phase Two Workstreams are:

#### Building Confidence in Nature Finance Event

Realise Earth hosted a roundtable event in Stirling, bringing together participants with diverse insights and expertise in nature finance to discuss challenges and opportunities to build confidence in nature finance.

#### Best Practice Guide Testing and Development

Deciding Matters is working with place-based partners to ensure the guide is relevant for a range of project types, and is refining the content.

#### Community Benefits Training Module

Aigas Associates, on behalf of Scottish Land Commission, is working with place-based partners to develop a training module, supporting projects to progress from meaningful community engagement to a signed community benefits agreement.

#### Operationalisation

Kana is leading development of the practical, digital tools which would need to be used by a CIS project in order to support validation and verification.

#### Community Inclusion Standard Testing and Development

A small drafting group (made up of MoU partners) defined the scope and definitions for the CIS, with further refining underway. Soil Association Certification is working with place-based partners to undertake audits as part of the test verification process, ensuring the CIS is functional, relevant, and not burdensome.

## Connections and Alignment

The IP for the standard is held by Fife Coast & Countryside Trust (FCCT), in its capacity as co-host of the Nature Finance Certification Alliance.

The British Standards Institute (BSI) is a signatory to our project Memorandum of Understanding. This ensures maximum synergy and join-up between the BSI Flex 705 and NFCA Community Inclusion Standard (CIS). How the BSI Flex 705 and NFCA CIS will ultimately relate will be to a large degree determined by the conclusion of the FIRNS project, in March 2025 in combination with the outcomes of the BSI Flex 705 Discovery and Development Phases, with relevant timescales for the BSI Flex 705 set out below:

- December 2024 – Draft scope shared with the hub members
- January 2025 – TA submits the base document

- February 2025 – Advisory Group (AG) review
- March 2025 – AG meetings on resolution of AG comments on draft 1
- Summer 2025 - Public Consultation

The consortium aims to work as transparently and collaboratively as possible, sharing learning and utilising existing resources where applicable.

## Consultation Questions

### Proportionality

- Do you think the current CIS is appropriate for projects diverse in size, scale, and impact? Why or why not?
- How else can the CIS be strengthened to be cognizant of proportionality?

### Tiered System

- Do you think the current tiered system (standard and enhanced) is clear? Why or why not?
- Do you think a tiered system is required for the CIS? Why or why not?
- Are the delivery of community benefits the highest standard?

### Examples and Resources

- We have currently identified relevant policies and frameworks from across Scotland, can you signpost us to any relevant resources from England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland?

### Guidance vs. Requirement

- The CIS currently includes guidance for delivery, do you think any of this guidance should become a requirement? Why or why not?

**Responses will be collected through completion of this [Google Form](#).**

## Next Steps

The stakeholder consultation will close at 9am on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January.

The drafting group will review all responses before starting the final development and refining stage. Work on the Community Inclusion Standard will conclude by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.