Darwin Initiative Innovation

Supplemental Guidance Notes for Applicants: Round 28

2021 - 2022

These guidance notes provide information on:

- what can be funded
- how to apply
- the process used to select projects for funding

Applicants should also read the Finance Guidance, which explains:

- what budgetary information you need in your application
- how the payments will be made if your application is successful, and how you should manage your budget
- when reporting is due and how it is linked to payments

Applications are made through the online application portal **Flexi-Grant** at ltsi.flexigrant.com

All guidance is available via the Flexi-Grant portal, and replicated on the Challenge Fund website below.

Applications are administered independently by NIRAS-LTS International.

Please read all the available guidance including the separate Finance Guidance before requesting additional assistance, as these provide answers to most queries.

Further resources and templates to support your application are available on the [Forms and Guidance Portal](), including:

Application Forms (for drafting purposes)	Change Request Forms
Application Templates	Terms and Conditions
Flexi-Grant User Guide	Reporting Forms
Claim Forms	Project Database

If you can't find the answer, please contact the Darwin Administration Team:

Darwin Initiative

[www.darwininitiative.org.uk]()	[darwin-applications@ltsi.co.uk]()	+44 (0) 131 440 5181

For queries specific to using the Flexi-Grant system, email: [flexigrant@ltsi.co.uk]()

c/o NIRAS-LTS International Ltd, Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, UK, EH26 0PL

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Glossary

Biodiversity	"Biological diversity" means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
Country	Normally refers (unless otherwise stated) to any country on the eligible country list (see 2.7 and Annex A in "Darwin Initiative: Guidance Notes for Applicants: Round 28"), and not countries such as the UK.
Defra	Darwin Initiative is a programme of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), UK Government.
DEC	Darwin Expert Committee is a group of independent experts in biodiversity and sustainable development that provides strategic advice, assesses proposals and makes recommendations to Defra of funding decisions.
Evidence	Ranges in format, quality and relevance and include, documented and undocumented experiences, data, studies, policies, best practices etc. but is particularly valued when it is quality assured, accessible and applicable.
Fellows	Funding for Fellowships is now possible within any of the grants to strengthen the capability and capacity of eligible countries, if it is justified and demonstrates value for money (see Annex D in "Darwin Initiative: Guidance Notes for Applicants: Round 28").
Lead Applicant	The individual who leads on the submission of the application and supporting materials, and will be the project contact point during the application process.
Lead Partner	The partner who will administer the grant and coordinate the delivery of the project, accepting the Terms and Conditions of the Grant on behalf of the project.
Matched Funding	Additional finance that is secured to help meet the total cost of the project, including public and private sources, as well as quantified in-kind contributions.
NIRAS-LTS	Darwin Initiative Administrator, and first point of contact for projects and applicants.
ODA	Official development assistance – commonly known as overseas aid – is when support, expertise or finance is supplied by one government to help the people of another country via activities that promote economic development and welfare as a main objective.
Partner(s)	Have a formal governance role in the project (for example representation on a Project Board or Management Committee), and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities.
Poverty	Poverty is multi-dimensional and not solely about a lack of money; encompassing a range of issues to fulfil basic needs and better one's life with dignity.

Project Leader	The individual with the necessary authority, capability and capacity, and a full understanding of their role and associated obligations to take responsibility for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant.
Scale	The ability to take a proven approach and evidence to deliver greater impact either through larger grants or through uptake by stakeholders or other mechanisms.
Stakeholder	Are consulted, engaged and/or participate in project activities as they have an interest or concern in the project and its impact. They can also be partners, but if not, they would not have a budget management, or a formal governance role, within the project.
Value for Money	Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes. Value for money is not about achieving the lowest initial price.

Contents

This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Darwin Initiative: Guidance Notes for Applicants: Round 28, Finance Guidance and resources available on the [Forms and Guidance Portal](#).

1 Darwin Initiative Innovation

- Grant: £10,000 - £200,000
- Application Stages: Single
- Duration: 1 – 2 years
- Anticipated number of Awards: 8-10
- Operating between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2024 (N.B. projects should start no later than end of Q2, 30 September 2022).

Competitive grants for testing new approaches and developing a stronger understanding of barriers to scaling.

The available evidence to support the approach may be weak or tentative, or come from a different sector beyond biodiversity conservation-poverty reduction.

Innovation projects can take on higher levels of risk, including operational, delivery and contextual risk, in order to test and pilot innovative ways to tackle the biodiversity conservation-poverty reduction challenge.

A higher appetite for these risks, whilst maintaining Darwin Initiative's low appetite for Safeguarding, Fiduciary and Reputational Risk, would be balanced with the potential to be transformational.

Projects will be assessed on their evidence of the capability to manage risks, scenario analysis to map the probability of different outcomes, and a clear theory of change that maximises the likelihood of scaling the model and outcomes. Amongst others, proposals are encouraged that might seek the application of new economic/financial, technological (hardware or data focussed), policy approaches or the application of a model that has worked in areas unrelated to biodiversity.

Uncertainties on the outcomes from elevated risks and a lower level of evidence (quality and quantity) associated with innovation mean that the approach would be likely to be unsuccessful with a direct Darwin Initiative Main or Extra application prior to completing a Darwin Initiative Innovation grant, although there is no guarantee of being successful following an Innovation grant.

1.1 Size of projects

An application **will not score more highly** if it is seeking a grant towards the maximum available finance or duration. Smaller projects, seeking smaller grants or running for shorter periods of time (within those eligible for the type of grant applied for), are also encouraged.

The maximum annual value of funds requested should **not exceed 25% of the Lead Partner's average annual turnover/income** for the previous 3 years (see Financial Guidance for details).

The **value for money assessment** in terms of the scale and legacy of the expected impact relative to cost (see Finance Guidance), is a more important consideration than the absolute size of the project. Each project should have a realistic, and not an overly ambitious, budget and timeframe.

2 How to Apply

2.1 Darwin Initiative Innovation Round 28 Timetable

The timetable for this round of Darwin Initiative Innovation funding for 2021-22 is as follows:

> Applications (via Flexi-Grant only) Deadline – **23:59 GMT** on Monday **6 December 2021**
>
> Results expected in **March 2022**
>
> Projects expected to start from **1 April 2022**
>
> **All applications will be acknowledged within 5 working days of the funding round close. If you have not heard after 5 days, please contact the Darwin Administration Team.**

2.2 Completing the application form

All applications must be submitted:

- through Flexi-Grant, using approved templates where appropriate
- with fully answered questions, referencing evidence where possible, the word count indicates the level of detail required; if appropriate, n/a is acceptable.
- in English, and
- signed, with a PDF signature uploaded as part of the Flexi-Grant application.

> **Competition for funding is strong, applications which:**
>
> - are incorrect or incomplete
> - do not match all published criteria, including eligible countries and dates
> - are submitted using the incorrect template
>
> **will be rejected as ineligible.**

2.3 Supporting Evidence

Only the supporting evidence set out below should be submitted.

If the **essential evidence** is not submitted **with your application form**, or submitted on an incorrect/unofficial template, **it will be rejected as incomplete**.

The application form **provides sufficient space to make your case**, and the submission of unrequested material will significantly **detract from your application**.

All material must be uploaded to Flexi-Grant as a **PDF** or **Excel** file (JPEG is only acceptable for application signature).

2.3.1 Cover Letter

Required: The cover letter is an opportunity to support your application, it should be brief (2 sides maximum) and where possible refer to the application for further details rather repeating them here.

The letter can set out clearly how you have responded to feedback and/or stakeholder input from previous applications during the design phase.

The Cover Letter should be uploaded as a **single PDF file**.

2.3.2 Theory of Change and Logframe

Required: A visual representation of the Theory of Change should be submitted along with a completed logframe using the template provided **submitted as a single combined PDF file**. There is no set template for the Theory of Change, it is for the applicant to determine how to visually present it; however, **guidance is provided**, and it should fit on a single A4 page.

2.3.3 Budget and Financial Evidence

Required: Budget submitted using the correct Excel template, and be fully compliant with the Finance Guidance.

See Finance Guidance for details of the financial evidence required to be submitted with your application to demonstrate Financial capability and capacity including, for example, audited or independently examined accounts for the last two years as set out for the level of finance that you are seeking in the Financial Guidance.

2.3.4 Project Timeline

Required: Project timeline in presented using the template provided, and uploaded as a **single PDF file**.

2.3.5 CVs and Job Descriptions

Required: One-page CVs or job descriptions of all the key project staff **named in the application form**. If you cannot secure a CV from a named Project Staff member, please provide an explanation why, along with a summary of the skills and experience of the team member concerned.

These CVs/job descriptions should be merged and uploaded as **a single PDF file**.

2.3.6 Letters of support

Required: Letters of support from all project partners (including the Lead Partner) should be on **headed paper and must be in English** (or with an English translation); letters of support from stakeholders are desired but not considered essential. Those written by high profile stakeholders or project partners are expected to be stronger, than from others, and act **as evidence of:**

- **support** for the application and the **importance** of the work to your organisation
- your **relationship** with partners and actors within the **project country**
- **support** for the need of the **proposed project** (including any proposed Fellows)
- your **ability** to achieve high **quality results** and productive **partnerships**

If it is not possible to obtain a letter of support from any of the project partners, please explain why.

These Letters of Support should be merged and uploaded as a **single PDF file**.

2.3.7 Safeguarding Policy

Required: A copy of the Lead Partner safeguarding policy which includes a **statement of commitment to safeguarding** and a **zero-tolerance statement** on bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, and must be submitted as a **single PDF file**.

2.3.8 Risk Register

Submitted if awarded: A copy of the initial Risk Register, with Delivery Chain Risk Map, using the template provided. The Issue Log, included in the template, will only need to be edited once the first issue materialises during project delivery and therefore should be left blank at this stage.

2.3.9 Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy

Available on request: A copy of your policy setting out how the Lead Partner complies with legislation and relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption as covered in the Terms and Conditions **does not need to be submitted** but maybe requested.

2.3.10 Ethics Policy

Available on request: Evidence that the Lead Partner will meet the **key principles of good ethical practice** (see 3.5 in "Darwin Initiative: Guidance Notes for Applicants: Round 28") should be demonstrated in your response to the Ethics question in the application form. A copy of your ethics policy **does not need to be submitted** but maybe requested.

2.3.11 *Optional evidence*

A **map** or **list of references** can be **optionally** submitted a **single combined PDF** file to support your application; but these **must not exceed 5 sides of A4 in total**, or it will make your application ineligible.

Table 1: Summary of Required and Optional supporting evidence.

Darwin Initiative Innovation	
Cover Letter	Required (2 sides of A4 maximum)
Theory of Change and Logframe	Logframe required on the template provided, and ToC required (1 side A4 maximum) but no specific template.
Budget and Financial Evidence	Required on correct Excel template. Audited or independently examined accounts for the last two years, or other evidence of financial capacity as set out in the Financial Guidance
Project Timeline	Required on Timeline template
Safeguarding Policy	Required
CVs and Job Descriptions	Required, one-page CVs or job descriptions of all the key project staff named in the application form.
Letters of support	Required from all project partners, absence needs to be justified. Optional from key stakeholders.
Risk Register	Submitted if awarded, on Risk Framework Template, with Delivery Chain Mapping completed. Issues Log should not be completed.
Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy	Not required, but available on request.
Ethics Policy	Not required, but available on request.
Map and List of references	Optional, maximum of 5 sides of A4.

3 Assessment Process

All eligible applications that meet the required standard will be assessed by the **Darwin Expert Committee** (DEC), who are independent experts in biodiversity and sustainable development (see, www.darwininitiative.org.uk/about-us/).

DEC follows a strict code of practice: if any member has been involved in or is closely associated with an application, the applicant or a project partner, they **declare their interest** and play no role in its assessment or discussion at the Moderation Panel.

An overview of the process for assessment is:

1) **Initial Review:** Applications that are poor quality, incomplete or do not meet the essential eligibility criteria or standard will be rejected. You will be informed of the reasons for rejection.
2) **Independent Expert Review:** Applications are scored by at least three members of DEC, against the assessment criteria to inform the discussion at the Moderating Panel.
3) **Moderating Panel:** DEC discusses comments and agrees the strongest applications to recommend for funding.
4) **Funding Decision:** Defra reviews DEC's recommendations and awards the grants.

A number of due diligence checks are conducted on applicants at various stages of the process to assess and/or confirm the information provided and compliance with the expectations of the fund, for example financial checks to test and confirm applicant's capability and capacity.

Defra reserves the right to apply more stringent assessment at the Initial Review if the number of applications is high to ensure that the experts can robustly review those with the highest chance of being discussed at the Moderating Panel.

3.1 Results of applications

Once the Funding Decision has been made, **all Lead Applicants** (both successful and unsuccessful) **will receive notification** via email from Flexi-Grant.

If you are successful you will receive an offer of funding.

The Darwin Initiative retains the **right to clarify any issues** raised during the application process or to award funding **subject to required amendments**. If the applicant is subsequently unable to meet the requirements of the award, Darwin Initiative retains the right to withdraw the offer.

Only unsuccessful applicants whose applications were competitive will receive feedback.

3.2 Resubmission of applications

If your application is unsuccessful, you may submit a revised application to a future round.

A resubmitted application will **only be accepted once**, unless there is prior agreement owing to exceptional circumstances or the proposed project is significantly different.

Any resubmission should include a **cover letter** with your application, outlining how you have responded to any feedback to strengthen your application.

3.3 Assessment Criteria

Applications are assessed by members of the Expert Committee against the criteria below. Unless noted, all benefits or impacts are in reference to the host country.

3.3.1 Darwin Initiative Innovation Assessment Criteria

The assessment of the proposal is based the following criteria; Assessors scores are added into a single score to inform the Moderation Discussion.

Assessors are looking for **evidence** that proposals are **innovative and distinctive**, with a strong probability of **delivering sustainable benefits** and a **scalable approach**.

Assessor Score =   Score 1 Technical Merit of Proposed Project (0-6 points) **+**

Score 2 Biodiversity-Poverty Reduction Impact of Project (0-6 points) **+**

Score 3 Innovation Impact (0-6 points)

Score 1: Technical Merit of Proposed Project (0-6 points)

1) The **methodology and budget** outlined is robust, clear and appropriate to meet the identified need and achieve the targeted outcome, with a well-defined exit strategy in place.
2) Is **led by an in-country organisation** and/or involves **substantial participation** of **local partners, stakeholders, and communities**.
3) The project includes work that is **innovative and distinctive**, with targeted **Outputs and Outcomes** that are **new, additional, and measurable** (SMART), **aligned to 2021 Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Guidance**; it will not cut across or duplicate work already being funded or completed.

4) Provides a clear plan of how it will **make evidence** (including data, lessons learnt and best practices etc.) widely and publicly available.

5) Demonstrates how it will strengthen the **capability and capacity of local partners**.

6) Demonstrates **good value for money**, including the ability to **leverage** additional matched funding, in terms of the **scale** and **legacy** of the expected **impact relative to cost**.

7) **Risks** are identified, assessed and managed with **clear mitigation actions**.

8) The **Project Team** has the capability and capacity to deliver a high-quality biodiversity conservation-poverty reduction project as evidenced by the submitted CVs, and includes identified local partners.

Score 2: Biodiversity Conservation-Poverty Reduction Benefits of Project (0-6 points)

1) Improves the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity (including agrobiodiversity) at **genetic, species or landscape/seascape** scales.
2) Addresses how **environmental risks**, with a particular focus on biodiversity, will be appropriately assessed and managed.
3) Strengthens how biodiversity and ecosystem services are **incorporated into development objectives and economic decision making** at the local and/or national level.
4) Strong understanding of Stakeholders through **evidence of engagement**, clearly identifying who, how many will benefit, and how they will benefit.
5) **Risks,** including **Safeguarding and ethical issues**, will be managed to a high standard.
6) **Gender inequality** is understood and reflected in the design, monitoring and evaluation of the project; intentional or unintentional increase inequality will be prevented.
7) Will deliver evidence to strengthen the **awareness and understanding** of the links between poverty reduction and biodiversity.

Score 3: Innovation Impact of the Project (0-6 points)

1) Demonstrates strong **evidence of an identified in-country need for innovation on the biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction challenge.**
2) Demonstrates that the Lead Partner has **recognised expertise and a proven track record** of innovation, and elevated risk management.
3) The proposal is a clear **game-changing, innovative, disruptive, and ambitious**; could lead to **new effective** products, processes or services to deliver more desirable and useful solutions than currently available.
4) The innovation, if proven, has the potential to be replicated and taken up and **deliver impact at scale**.
5) If successful, the resulting product, process or service is likely to be **cost efficient** in delivering impact.
6) The **uncertainty and probability** of different outcomes is understood and will be managed effectively.
7) The proposed innovation is appropriate to the local context and has potential to be sustainable in the longer term.

3.3.2 Assessment Scoring

Points	Description
6	*Strong Demonstration.* Substantial evidence presented that it **meets all the of assessment criteria, with no concerns raised**; the majority of which are met to a high standard. There may be a few minor issues which if addressed may improve the project, but they are unlikely to be detrimental to the delivery of the project and should not prevent it from being funded without changes being made.
5	*Good Demonstration.* Good evidence presented that it **meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified.** The met criteria are mostly to a high standard. There are minor issues that could improve the project, but should not prevent it from being funded. It is likely to significantly contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Initiative.
4	*Acceptable Demonstration.* The proposed project **meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified.** The criteria it does meet are often to a good standard. There are a few minor issues that would improve this project which they would be advised to consider if funded. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Initiative.
3	*Moderate Demonstration* that the proposed project **meets many of the assessment criteria, some concerns raised.** Those met criteria are largely to an acceptable standard, and the concerns can be addressed. It has the potential to contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Initiative, if the issues are addressed to strengthen it.
2	*Weak Demonstration.* The project **meets some of the assessment criteria, or has raised concerns**. Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard, but the application requires important changes to address the concerns and assessment criteria in order to make it competitive.
1	*Minimal demonstration.* The proposed project is unsatisfactory and **meets only a few criteria, or raises important concerns.** The proposal is likely to require significant revision.
0	*Not demonstrated.* The projects **fails to meet any of the criteria outlined and raises serious concerns** e.g. flawed approach, subject to serious technical difficulties or risks, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative.