



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups Handbook 2022



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Contents

Acronyms/Glossary	3
Key Contacts	4
1 Introduction	4
2 Programme Board	4
3 Expert groups	5
4 Membership	6
5 Member specific guidance	7
Annex A. Terms of Reference of the Expert Groups	10
Annex B. Members Terms and Conditions [Template]	12
Annex C. Chair Terms and Conditions	17
Annex D. The Seven Principles of Public Life	19
Annex E. Conflict of Interest	20
Annex F. Remuneration and Travel and Subsistence Rules	23
Annex G. Expert Group Membership Privacy Notice 2022	26
Annex H. Grant Application Process	29
Annex I. Grant Assessment Process	31

Acronyms/Glossary

Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCF)	the collective name for the three challenge funds (Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and the IWT Challenge Fund)
Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)	the Expert Group for the Darwin Initiative
Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)	the Expert Group for Darwin Plus
Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG)	the Expert Group for the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund
<i>Ex officio</i> member	membership is a result of their role within a public body
Expert Group	consist of individuals with expertise and knowledge of issues relevant to the focus of the fund, assembled in a group to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds
Funding Round	the process to seek, assess and award grants
Programme Board	high-level oversight and governance mechanism, see Section 2
<i>Recruited members</i>	appointed to Expert Groups based on fair and open competition following UK Government Public Appointments guidelines.
Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)	Defra official with overall responsibility for the fund
Sift Meetings	a meeting of the Expert Group to efficiently and fairly discuss the applications in order to produce a list of recommended proposals to move to the next stage or to Defra for consideration
Strategy Meetings	Expert Group meeting to provide an opportunity to discuss topics or issues of interest, in order to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the funds objectives and strengthen its ability to deliver impact

Key Contacts

Defra Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat

- Senior Responsible Officers (SROs):
 - Darwin Initiative - Graham Symons
 - Darwin Plus - Sion McGeever
 - Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund - Leila McElvenney
- Head of Biodiversity Challenge Funds – Douglas Gibbs
- Darwin Initiative Lead – Ben Yexley
- Darwin Plus Lead – Elliott Miller
- Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Lead – Serene Hargreaves

Fund Manager: NIRAS-LTS International

- Programme Manager, oversight of all funds – Victoria Pinion
- Darwin Initiative Lead – Eilidh Young/Linzi Ogden
- Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Lead – Rachel Beattie
- Darwin Plus Lead – Kelly Forsythe

1 Introduction

This handbook sets out to provide guidance on the purpose, management and activity of the Expert Groups of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds; guidance specific to an individual fund may be set out separately.

Defra has established three challenge funds to strategically deliver grant funds:

- Darwin Initiative
- Darwin Plus
- Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund (IWTCF)

Each fund has a group of experts that fulfil a role with a delivery mechanism, along with the Programme Board.

2 Programme Board

Purpose

Each Biodiversity Challenge Fund has a Programme Board acting as the oversight and governance mechanism. The roles and responsibilities of the Programme Board will include:

- retaining oversight of the delivery of the fund,
- approving annual workplans including the timing and scale of funding rounds,
- reviewing the recommendations made by the Expert Group and awarding funding,
- monitoring the performance and impact of the fund,
- providing strategic insights and guidance on issues escalated by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO).

Awarding Funding

When considering whether to award funding, the Programme Board's role is to ensure that:

- due process is being followed including technical, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), poverty benefits, gender, safeguarding and security, and finance assessments,
- any grant specific high risks (Contextual, Delivery, Safeguarding, Operational, Fiduciary, Reputational) are managed if awarded,
- flagged issues, for example balance of proposals by geography, are considered,
- views from Defra and other government departments are considered,
- sufficient finance is available to award the grants.

The role of the Programme Board is not to duplicate the technical role that the Expert Group fulfils.

Where a decision on awarding funding for an application recommended by the Expert Group is not made, a clear timeline and steps to arrive at a decision should be identified by the Programme Board.

Composition

The Programme Board compositions vary, but will typically include the relevant Defra Deputy Director, Fund Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), Senior Strategic Policy Advisor to the Minister, Expert Group Chair and the Head of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Additional members can be added to strengthen the oversight function if desired.

Members of the specific fund delivery team and the NIRAS-LTS International Fund Manager team will attend the Programme Board to provide advice and support.

3 Expert groups

Each of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds is supported by an established Expert Group:

- Darwin Initiative has the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)
- Darwin Plus has the Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)
- IWTCF has the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG)

These three groups (DEC/DPAG/IWTAG) are referred to here as the 'Expert Groups'.

3.1 Role and remit of the Expert Groups

The primary role of the Expert Groups is to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds, via the fund's Programme Board.

The objectives of the Expert Groups are:

- to assess applications against the published criteria, to agreed timelines and standards, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects,
- to provide strategic advice, and
- to champion the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

The generic Expert Group terms of reference are set out in Annex A, and details of the grant application and grant assessment process are given in Annex H and Annex I respectively.

3.2 Accountability for Expert Groups

The Minister for Pacific and the Environment is the lead minister overseeing Biodiversity Challenge Funds' work.

The Expert Groups will report to the fund lead or the Head of Biodiversity Challenge Funds on a routine working basis, who in turn will report to the respective Programme Board.

3.3 Relationship between Expert Groups

Formal and informal linkages between the Expert Groups is currently being reviewed to strengthen the sharing of expertise, knowledge, and best practices.

4 Membership

4.1 Types of members

Each Expert Group includes a recruited Chair, recruited members and appointed *ex officio* members; current membership of the groups is provided on the websites.

Currently, the size of each Expert Groups is as follows, although some variation around this number may occur to manage peaks in activities and to ensure continuity and standards of practice.

	Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)	Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)	Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG)
Chair (recruited)	1	1	1
Members (recruited)	16	7	10
<i>Ex officio</i> members (appointed)	3	4	3
Total	20	12	14

Ex officio members, who membership is a result of their role within a public body, are currently drawn from:

- Border Force, Home Office
- Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Natural History Museum (NHM)
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew)

4.2 Balance of expertise

Members are recruited as individuals based on their expertise and knowledge of issues relevant to the focus of the funds.

The range of expertise required may change or evolve over time, and therefore, the balance of skills, expertise and experience of members will be regularly reviewed in light of current and anticipated future work programmes.

If necessary, additional experts may be recruited or co-opted for a limited period of time to provide specific input.

4.3 Appointments

Members are appointed for a fixed term, with the potential to renew for another fixed term of membership. The Terms of Reference for members is provided in Annex B, with the Terms of Reference for the Chair provided in Annex C.

Consideration is given in appointment and reappoints to:

- the performance and availability of the member to continue to contribute,
- the phasing and length of appointments to ensure continuity and fresh perspectives,
- the diversity of membership, and
- meet the strategic expertise and knowledge required by the fund.

To serve more than two terms, members are required to apply again through open and fair competition.

5 Member specific guidance

5.1 Code of Conduct

Members of the Expert Groups (Chair, recruited and *ex officio*) must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide. Members must at all times:

- comply with their Terms and Conditions of appointment (Annex B and Annex C), and this handbook (all subject to change);
- follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life (see Annex D);
- not misuse information gained for personal gain or for political purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations; and
- declare and register any interests they have that are relevant to the remit of the Expert Group (Annex E).

Any appointment can be terminated early if the appointee fails to perform their duties to a satisfactory standard. In addition, members or the Chair can stand down if they so wish by providing three months' notice in writing to the Head of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

5.2 Ministers

Members are not restricted from communicating with Ministers and others in their capacity as private individuals. However, if communication takes place in this individual capacity, it should be made clear that the individual's view is not necessarily that of the Expert Group.

Where possible, please make the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat aware of any such meetings or on-going relationships with Ministers or other government representatives.

5.3 Media

The Chair will be the primary spokesperson for any contact with the media unless the Chair or Defra has made other specific arrangements.

If a member receives an approach for an interview connected in any way to their role on the Expert Group, the request must be referred to the Head of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds. The Secretariat will liaise with the Defra press office, and the Chair.

The Expert Groups follow a “no surprises” policy when dealing with the media. This is to ensure that Defra remain informed and are able to respond or offer their own input to the media as appropriate.

Chairs and members may be invited to speak to the media independently of their membership of an Expert Group and it is their choice to accept or reject such an offer. When speaking in a personal capacity, this should be highlighted at the beginning of any interview and individuals should refrain from commenting on the Expert Group or the fund. Members may contact the Defra Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat for further guidance and support on setting rules of media engagement.

Social media is a public forum and therefore the same considerations apply. Where any personal social media accounts used by Chairs or members make reference to their role on an Expert Group, they should ensure that it is clear in what capacity they are communicating.

Social media biographies should include an explicit line which makes clear that all views communicated via social media are the account holder’s own.

5.4 Political Activity

In accordance with the Terms and Conditions (Annex B and C) provided with their appointment letter or updated subsequently:

Members will not:

- occupy paid party-political posts or hold particularly sensitive or high roles in a political party; or
- lobby against Government policy;

Members will:

- inform Defra of any intention to accept a prominent position in any political party and should understand that their Expert Group membership will be terminated; and
- resign from the Expert Group if they accept nomination for election to the House of Commons, Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Government or the Welsh Government.

Members must be, and be seen to be, politically impartial. Guidance, leading up to key political events such as local and general elections, may be issued by the Cabinet Office and shared with members.

At all times, members must remain conscious of their general public responsibilities and exercise proper discretion.

5.5 Activities during an election period

Members will undertake their duties with due regard to the Cabinet Office guidance for civil servants during an election period¹ and published at the time.

5.6 Time commitment

Members will be expected to commit to the expectations that are detailed in the Terms and Conditions (Annex B and Annex C). Where this may be a challenge, members are encouraged to discuss this early with the Fund Manager and/or Chair.

5.7 Claiming remuneration and travel expenses

Claiming remuneration and travel expenses for fund related work is optional for recruited members. Current remuneration rates (subject to review) along with Defra's policy on claiming travel expenses are at Annex F. Any queries regarding claims should be referred to the Fund Manager, NIRAS-LTS International.

5.8 Register of Interests

All members must declare interests that are relevant to the remit of the group. To ensure the register is accurately maintained, members will inform NIRAS-LTS International of any changes as they occur. Further information about the Register of Interests can be found in Annex E.

Conflict of Interests

The Register of Interests is utilised to ensure that discussions are not influenced, or applications assessed by a member with a potential Conflict of Interest, reinforcing the need to keep it up to date and accurate (see Annex E).

An annual record will be kept, with the potential to be published, to support a robust approach on how conflicts of interest have been addressed and managed.

5.9 Transparency

To support transparency and trust in the work of the funds, we publish details (including the names of members) on the websites and in associated materials, see the Privacy Notice (Annex G).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/election-guidance-for-civil-servants>

Annex A. Terms of Reference of the Expert Groups

Objectives

The primary role of the Expert Groups is to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

The objectives of the Expert Groups are to:

- to assess applications against published the criteria, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects,
- to provide strategic advice, and
- to champion the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Membership

Recruited members are appointed to Expert Groups based on fair and open competition following UK Government Public Appointments guidelines.

The initial appointment will normally be for three years; the duration of the term takes into consideration continuity, diversity and strategic needs of each Expert Group, so the term may vary in order to manage these considerations.

Typically there is a possibility of extension or reappointment for a further term, subject to approval and the needs of the Expert Group at the time.

Members are limited to 2 terms (typically 6 years); before they would need to seek reappointment through an open and fair competition for new members.

Ex-officio members, where membership is a result of their role within a public body, also sit on the Expert Groups and are not subject to a defined term length; they cannot claim remuneration.

Notice of Meetings

The Defra Secretariat will endeavour to give as much notice as possible with regards to meetings dates, and at least 6 months wherever possible.

The agenda items for discussion and supporting papers will be emailed to the Expert Group members, and any other person required to attend, before the meeting.

Frequency of meetings

Meetings are typically held 2 to 3 times a year, depending upon the work programme for example:

- Single Stage Funding Call will require a single Sift Meeting.
- Two Stage Funding Call will require two Sift Meetings separated by a number of months.
- Strategy Meeting will be held once a year, but additional meetings may be held.

For convenience and efficiency, the default meeting method is currently virtual, but meetings can be held in person. Discussions between the members, Chair, Fund Manager and Defra will determine the approach. A meeting is considered to be a full day (09:00-17:00) meeting unless otherwise specified.

Members are expected to be available for and participate in all Sift and Strategy Meetings.

Additional meetings may be held to discuss arising issues, updates on the funds, or workstreams, however attendance at these meetings will be voluntary.

Format of Meetings

The format of meetings will be agreed between the Chair, the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat, and the Fund Manager in advance, and will depend on the objective of the meeting.

Sift Meetings seek to efficiently and fairly discuss the applications in order to produce a list of recommended proposals to move to the next stage.

Strategy Meetings, typically annually, will provide an opportunity to discuss topics or issues of interest, in order to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the funds objectives and strengthen its ability to deliver impact.

Decision making

Expert group recommendations will be made following open discussions at the sift meetings and ideally based on the general consensus of the group and policy input.

Where members are unable to reach a consensus view on any aspects of the assessment process or the resulting selection of applicants and recommendations for funding, the Chair, whilst clearly acknowledging the different views, will take the final decisions as necessary on what to include in the recommendations.

The recommendations made by the group are presented to the fund's Programme Board, which makes the decision on which grants to award and which strategic recommendations to respond to.

The Programme Board is the governance body of each fund, retaining delivery oversight, monitoring performance, as well as awarding grants. Each Programme Board consists of senior Defra representatives and the Chair of each group (see 2 above).

Chair

The Chair is appointed based on fair and open competition, following UK Government Public Appointments guidelines.

The Chair is responsible for:

- Acting, along with Ministers, as the principal figurehead for the respective Biodiversity Challenge Fund. Representing and promoting the Fund and its interests at the most senior levels across all sectors including public, business, academic and non-governmental;
- Chairing Expert Group meetings, including application sift meetings, and ensuring consistent standards of assessment are applied, Conflicts of Interest managed and that recommended projects align to the objectives of the fund and demonstrate strong value-for-money;
- Guiding strategic discussions of objectives, priorities and developments to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the funds and strengthen its ability to deliver impact;
- Where possible, to attend, chair or speak at Biodiversity Challenge Fund events, including workshops and webinars;
- Advising the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat on preparations for application sift processes, advisory meetings, and other matters;
- Sitting as Chair on the recruitment panel for new members of the relevant Expert Group.

Annex B. Members Terms and Conditions [Template]

Commencement of Appointment

Your Appointment will begin on date provided in your appointment letter.

Period of Appointment

Subject to earlier termination, your appointment will be for a fixed period of three years with the possibility of extension. It will run from [xxx] and will automatically expire on [xxx], unless terminated earlier.

There is no presumption of reappointment. Any reappointment or extension of your appointment will only be made subject to an assessment of your performance over the period of the initial three-year period.

Duties of the members

You are appointed as a member of the Expert Group

You and you alone must carry out your duties set out below to a high standard and always act in accordance with our reasonable instructions and in line with the Terms of Reference.

Your role, as a member of [EXPERT GROUP] is to:

- to assess applications against published the criteria, to agreed timelines and standards, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects,
- to provide strategic advice, and
- to champion the [Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus/Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund]

Remuneration

Recruited members can claim remuneration for the duties listed above; *Ex officio* members are not eligible to claim.

Recruited members can claim for time taken to assess applications and participate in Sift and Strategy meetings at £250/day.

The number of days you can claim will be communicated to you in advance and be dependent upon the number of assessments that you conduct (by type) and meetings you participate in.

To be eligible for the remuneration, assessments of applications and participation in the meetings must be timely and in line with the standards and procedures set out in the guidance materials.

Tax

Any expenses and remuneration received may be taxable. Members are entirely responsible for compliance with any tax rules applicable to these and any other payments or benefits provided in relation to your appointment. Please consult your local tax office if you have queries.

Expenses and Subsistence

Defra will reimburse all reasonable expenses (including travel, subsistence and other expenses) properly and necessarily incurred in respect of your appointment.

Each member is entitled to claim the following:

- reasonable travel expenses to and from home to the meeting;
- travel and subsistence expenses incurred as part of the work of the group.

Annex F provides more detail on eligible costs. In accordance with Defra policy, travel and subsistence rates for the Chair and members will be the same as those agreed for staff in the Department. Defra policy on travel and subsistence rates may be reviewed and updated.

Code of Practice

All members have a duty regarding conduct, propriety and confidentiality.

It is essential that you are, and are seen to be, honest, objective and impartial in the exercise of your duties. You must not allow your judgement or integrity to be compromised or permit there to arise any reasonable grounds for suspicion as to the compromise of your judgment and integrity. The Seven Principles of Public Life provide good guidance in the standards expected of members.

You must not misuse information gained in the course of your membership for personal gain or for political purpose.

If you believe you are being required to act in a way which:

- is illegal, improper, or unethical;
- is in breach of constitutional convention or a professional code;
- may involve possible maladministration;
- is otherwise inconsistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life

you should report the matter to the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat. You should also report to the appropriate authorities as evidence of criminal or unlawful activity by others.

You may also report if you are required to act in a way which, for you, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

Confidentiality and Information Disclosure

You must not disclose any information on the fund which is confidential in nature, or which is provided in confidence without authority. This duty continues to apply after your appointment has ended.

This is unless it is already lawfully in the public domain, or it becomes a legal requirement to disclose it.

All personal data provided to you as part of the applications, or other forms, should be destroyed at the end of each Funding Round, or on the completion of your three-year appointment at the latest.

Members will provide all necessary assistance to enable the Secretary of State to comply with his or her duties on disclosure under applicable freedom of information legislation.

Gifts and Hospitality

You must not accept any gifts or hospitality which might, or might reasonably appear to, compromise your personal judgement or integrity or place you under an improper obligation.

You must never canvass or seek gifts or hospitality.

You should inform the NIRAS-LTS International of any offer of gifts or hospitality and where a gift or hospitality is accepted, that might be connected or perceived to be connected to this role, above the value of £25.

You are responsible for your decisions on the acceptance of gifts or hospitality and for ensuring that any gifts or hospitality accepted can stand up to public scrutiny and do not bring the fund into disrepute.

Attendance

Each member is expected to attend all planned meeting(s), and the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat will consult with members on suitable dates as far in advance as practically possible.

The meeting(s) may be changed or cancelled, without notice, if it becomes apparent that non-attendance will interfere with the good running of the Fund or Expert Group.

Conflicts of Interest

It is the responsibility of the members to declare in the Register of Interests, any private financial or non-financial interests of your own, or of close family members which may, or may be perceived to, influence your judgements in performing your functions.

These interests will be included in the Register of Interests maintained by NIRAS-LTS International, and you must ensure that your entries are kept up to date. Should a particular matter give rise to a conflict of interest, the member is required to inform the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat in advance and withdraw from discussions or consideration of the matter.

You are encouraged to register your own non-pecuniary interests and interests of close family members and persons living in the same household which are closely related to the activities of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

You must inform the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat in advance of any new appointments which may impinge on your duties as a member.

Political Activity

In your public role, you should be, and be seen to be, politically impartial.

Members should not occupy paid party-political posts or hold particularly sensitive or high roles in a political party. You should abstain from all controversial political activity, including lobbying against Government Policy.

Subject to the above, you may engage in political activity but should, at all times, remain conscious of your responsibilities as a member of an Expert Group and exercise proper discretion.

Members should inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat before undertaking any significant political activity.

If you have any remaining doubts about your activities, you should seek advice from the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat prior to undertaking significant political activity.

You are expected to inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat of any intention to accept a prominent position in any political party and to understand that the membership of the Expert Group will be terminated.

Specific guidance, leading up to key political events, such as local and general elections may be issued by the Cabinet Office and shared with members.

Status

Members are not an employee of Defra nor NIRAS-LTS International. Accordingly, nothing in these Terms and Conditions shall be construed as, or taken to create a contract of employment between yourself and Defra, or yourself and NIRAS-LTS International.

Appointments to Defra's Expert Committees and Advisory Groups are not ministerial appointments regulated by Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA).

Media

All requests received by members from the media relating to Biodiversity Challenge Funds must in all circumstances be directed to the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat. Where members are asked by Defra to speak to the media, guidance and support will be coordinated by the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat.

Privacy

The names of all members will be made public, in the interests of transparency. This will include, for example, the inclusion of your name on the GOV.UK and fund websites, and in relevant reports and publications published by Defra.

Please refer to Annex G of the Handbook for the Privacy Notice.

Notice and Termination of Appointment

Either you or the Department may terminate this appointment for any reason before the expiry of the fixed period by giving three months' notice in writing to the other.

No notice period is applicable if this appointment is terminated early by mutual consent.

Should the Biodiversity Challenge Fund(s) be dissolved, restructured or wound up during the period of your appointment, your appointment would cease with effect from that dissolution, or such other date as is specified in any relevant legislation.

The Department may terminate your appointment immediately by writing to you to that effect if:

- you become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are made bankrupt),
- your estate has been sequestrated in Scotland or you enter into a debt arrangement programme under Part 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 (asp 17) as the debtor or have, under Scots law, granted a trust deed for creditors,

- you have been absent from meetings of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund for a period of more than 6 months without the permission of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat,
- your absence interferes with the good running of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group,
- you are disqualified from acting as a company director (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are disqualified from acting as a company director),
- you have been convicted (whether before or after appointment) of a criminal offence, (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are convicted of a criminal offence), the conviction not being spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (c. 53),
- you become subject to a debt relief order (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are subject to a debt relief order),
- or if you are, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, unable or unfit to discharge the functions of the appointment for any other reason of whatsoever nature.

If Defra is considering whether to terminate your appointment prior to the expiry of the fixed term, you will be notified of the proposal and of the reasons for it and will be offered an opportunity to have a meeting with the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat before any final decision is taken. If your appointment is subsequently terminated you will receive notice in writing of this fact, such notice will contain a statement of reasons for termination.

On termination of this appointment, you shall only be entitled to accrued fees as at the date of termination together with reimbursement of any expenses properly incurred prior to that date.

In the event of you being notified that Defra is considering whether to terminate your appointment, it may be required that you do not carry out your role for the Biodiversity Challenge Fund.

Annex C. Chair Terms and Conditions

Specific Duties of the Chair

The Terms and Conditions for members also apply to the Chair, with additional specific duties of the Chair outlined here.

The Chair of each Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group must carry out their duties set out below to a high standard and always act in accordance with Defra's reasonable instructions and in line with the Terms of Reference.

The Chair is not required to take part in the assessment of applications conducted by the members, but must take all reasonable steps to ensure that due process is followed, and that conflicts of interest and bias are avoided.

The Chair of each Biodiversity Challenge Fund has the following additional duties relating to the Fund that they chair:

- To act, along with Ministers, as the principal figurehead for the respective Biodiversity Challenge Fund. To represent and promote the Fund and its interests at the most senior levels across all sectors including public, business, academic and non-governmental;
- To act as an independent chair for all meetings of the Expert Group and ensure that they are run correctly to give effect to the objectives of the Fund and in line with the Terms of Reference; to ensure consistent standards of assessment are applied and that the high-quality projects are maintained. To take all reasonable steps to ensure that both yourself, the Chair, and all other members follow due process, declare all conflicts of interest in advance and take decisions independently, honestly, objectively and impartially and without bias.
- Where members are unable to reach a consensus view on any aspects of the assessment process or the resulting selection of applicants and recommendations for funding, the Chair will take the final decisions as necessary on what to include in the recommendations.
- To support the recruitment and retention of members through participating or contributing to the associated processes including sifting/interviewing prospective members, and assessing the performance of existing members.
- Occasionally, as and when instructed by the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat or consulted, to advise on revisions to approved projects or the Terms of Reference and/or terms and conditions of appointment of members.
- To guide strategic discussions on Biodiversity Challenge Funds aims, priorities and further development; and advise on recommendations to be made to Ministers
- Where possible, to attend, chair or speak at Biodiversity Challenge Fund events, including workshops and webinars;
- To advise the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat on preparations for application sift processes, meetings and other matters.

You are required in any event to make yourself available for your duties as Chair for approximately 10 complete days (based on a 7.5-hour day) annually to cover the following "core duties" including:

- attendance at two or three sift meetings and one or two annual strategy meeting[s] for the Biodiversity Challenge Fund, with one day's associated preparation time for each.

- attending the Programme Board and ad hoc meetings with the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat and Biodiversity Challenge Fund Manager;
- meeting the Defra's Chief Scientist, who oversees all of Defra's expert committees and groups;
- attending and, if required, assisting in the organisation of Biodiversity Challenge Fund-related events instigated by the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat, and speaking at and/or chairing such events;

Recruited Chairs can claim for time taken to deliver the agreed duties at £300/day, up to 10 days per annum unless agreed in advance.

Annex D. The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public officeholder. Expert group members are expected to apply these principles in their approach to their term on an Expert Group.

Selflessness

Act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Be truthful.

Leadership

Exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Annex E. Conflict of Interest

Members are valued and appointed to the Expert Groups as individuals for their capabilities, knowledge and experience.

Applications for funding for grant support can come from organisations with which the members may have personal and/or professional connections with, potentially resulting in a conflict of interest, as they have the ability to influence decisions and the allocation (or not) of grants.

Conflicts of Interest have the potential to impact on the quality of assessments/recommendations that will result in reputational damage, or reduced value for money and impact of the fund. The perception of a Conflict of Interest is considered as serious as an actual Conflict of Interest.

To be able to mitigate the risk, it is vital that each member proactively identifies and declares at the earliest opportunity any potential conflicts of interests by keeping the Register of Interest up to date and complete.

The Register of Interests will also capture the interests of Defra's and NIRAS-LTS International's team working on the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Definition of a Conflict of Interest

A connection or relationship where a member's objectivity, integrity or judgment can be or be perceived to be compromised or impaired, and potentially attract perceptions of bias and unfair treatment.

Register of Interests

To manage and prevent conflicts of interests from impacting the objectives or reputation of the funds, it is the responsibility of the Expert Group member, Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat and NIRAS-LTS International Fund Manager Team to identify and declare at the earliest opportunity any factor or interest that may result in a real or perceived Conflict of Interest.

On behalf of Defra, the Fund Manager (NIRAS-LTS International) maintains a Register of Interests to support the identification of potential conflicts of interest.

The Register of Interest will be reviewed prior to the assessment of proposals, but can be updated at any point to ensure it is kept up to date. Members must actively confirm, at a minimum annually, that the information held about them is correct.

In support of transparency, Defra will make available the Register of Interests, via the fund websites.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Members must declare any private financial or non-financial interests of your own, or of close family members which may, or may be perceived to, influence your judgements in performing your functions.

Each member should consider and declare the following examples of potential sources of Conflicts of Interest:

- The organisation which employs or has employed the member within the past 5 years;

- On the board of, or a trustee of, an organisation;
- Consultant or unpaid advisor to an organisation, including recent collaborations;
- Personal connection with an applicant, partner or project team;
- Post-graduate level teaching collaboration with an organisation or an individual named in an application;
- Close relative, extended family, friend or household member, neighbour employed or involved in the organisation.

The member's connection with an organisation can be paid or unpaid.

This list is not exhaustive, and where a member has a doubt as to whether there is a potential conflict of interest, the interest should be declared to support transparency.

Managing Declared Conflicts

Defra and the Chair, supported by the Fund Manager (NIRAS-LTS International), will seek to assess and mitigate any risks arising from the register of declared interests for the Expert Group members, Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat and NIRAS-LTS International Fund Manager Team.

In assessing the Conflict of Interest:

- *Low Risk Interest:* The interest is on record, but no further action is required, as the interest is not significant enough to warrant concern, for example the connection has not been active for a number of years, or contact is minimal.
- *High Risk Interest:* Where a member has a connection to a proposal, including but not limited to being named (as an individual or an organisation) on the proposal, or having advised on the development of the proposal, or other close connection as deemed by Defra, then they will play no role in the assessment or discussion of the proposal. If the proposal is discussed at a meeting, the member must leave the room and not seek to influence its consideration.

Where the assessment is unclear or there is insufficient time to assess the interest, the interest will be considered to be high-risk.

If a member is considered to have a number of high-risk interests that it significantly limits their ability to contribute equitably to the work of the group, then discussions may be held to consider the value of their continued membership.

Handling Conflicts of Interest

Given the range of projects and partners involved in each proposal, an interest may only be identified once the assessment of the proposals begin or during the discussions at a meeting.

If this occurs, it is the responsibility of the member to declare the interest quickly so that the application can be reallocated and assessed by a different member, or they can leave the room and cease to play a role in the consideration of the proposal.

During Expert Group meetings, all members will be expected to be present unless there is a Conflict of Interest that requires their absence.

The Chair is responsible for managing the Conflicts of Interest during the meetings, requiring members with conflicts to leave the room while proposals are discussed.

If the Chair has a Conflict of Interest, then they will nominate another member to Chair the discussions while they are out of the room.

A record will be kept, with the potential to be published, where members have withdrawn from a discussion due to a Conflict of Interest.

Other matters

All discussions and all written comments on applications are to be treated as confidential; any requests under the Freedom of Information Act will be handled by Defra.

If discussing the application process and/or assessment process, members should seek not provide any unpublished advice or details that they have as a result of their membership of the Expert Group that would give one applicant an unfair advantage over another.

Annex F. Remuneration and Travel and Subsistence Rules

Remuneration rates

Recruited members will be remunerated for Expert Group duties; but not for travelling time to and from meetings (although travel and subsistence costs are payable – see below).

Recruited members shall be responsible for compliance with any applicable tax rules to remuneration and any other payments or benefits provided in relation to your appointment. Please consult your tax office if you have queries.

Travel and Subsistence

The following rules are based on Defra's Travel and Subsistence (T&S) Policy which apply to all officials: a copy will be provided.

The policy seeks to strike an appropriate balance between the costs and the benefits, taking into account: Cost, Convenience, Carbon Emissions and Care of Staff.

Members will be reimbursed for travel and subsistence relevant to the remit of the group (excluding insurance), but are asked to consider sustainability, emissions and environmental issues when planning journeys, and contribute to achieving value for money by following the T&S Policy.

Safety

Members should be able to feel safe when travelling on Expert Group business. We encourage you to plan for your safety and take all necessary health and safety precautions before and while travelling. Defra recognises there are times when you may, for a variety of reasons, feel unsafe when travelling and it is not practical to seek prior approval before taking additional steps. In such cases approval can be obtained retrospectively. Additional guidance on travelling safely within the UK and internationally is available on request from Defra, via NIRAS-LTS International.

Rail travel (preferred)

Travel by second (standard) class rail is Defra's preferred method of travel within the UK, and should be from the closest station to the traveller's home or work address. If you do not have an Oyster Card you should ask for your train ticket to include the underground (Zone 1) travel where required.

Use of private vehicles

Public transport should always be used when available.

Cars should only be used for short journeys and with prior approval from the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Secretariat. If you are based a long way away from a public transport service, the cheapest, secure car parking should be used close to your destination or departure station.

Travel using private vehicles is discouraged unless essential e.g. on grounds of disability or where there is no practical public transport alternative.

Car parking, congestion charges, and toll charges necessarily incurred on official business are reimbursable. Members will not be reimbursed for any penalties such as parking fines, or speeding tickets incurred whilst travelling.

Use of taxis

Members may only travel by taxi in exceptional circumstances - where there is no other suitable method of public transport available or if you are unable to use public transport due to health reasons.

Please inform the Fund Manager in advance of your intention to travel by taxi otherwise reimbursement may be refused.

Flights

Members may travel by air if necessary. Please discuss with the Fund Manager in advance of your intention to travel by air and provide an estimate of the cost (economy class).

Please use public transport connections to travel between the airport and meeting location using the rail travel principles above.

Subsistence

Subsistence will be paid where the expense incurred is reasonable and additional to the members' normal expenditure.

For all day meetings, lunch/refreshments will be provided so subsistence rates should not normally be claimed.

Where this is not the case and has previously been agreed in advance with the Fund Manager, payment will be for actual expenditure within the ceiling limits.

The upper ceiling limits for subsistence claims are:

- £5 (when on Expert Group business for 5 hours or less; one meal);
- £10 (5 to 10 hours; two meals);
- £15 (10 to 12 hours, three meals); and
- £20 for a 24-hour period.

Optional tips and gratuities and costs relating to alcohol will not be reimbursed. Original receipts for all costs must be provided.

Staying overnight

Where possible overnight stays should be avoided to keep costs down. If you need to stay overnight, please refer to the T&S Policy for the upper limits.

If you are having difficulties sourcing appropriate accommodation within these rates, please contact the Fund Manager.

How to claim

Travel and subsistence claims must be made on the supplied forms, supported by evidence and returned to NIRAS-LTS International.

Please note that travel and subsistence claims, and remuneration must be set out separately on the claim form to ensure they are dealt with correctly.

Receipts must be provided for all expenses claimed (except for remuneration).

Receipts or tickets for rail travel must show the departure and arrival stations. A copy of your Oyster card journey history (available through the Oyster Card website), or annotated bank statement, and price is accepted as a travel receipt.

If you have any special circumstances, requirements or have a query, please contact NIRAS-LTS International Fund Manager team for further guidance.

Annex G. Expert Group Membership Privacy Notice 2022

The purpose of this Privacy Notice is to inform you of the use that will be made of your personal data in connection with the Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus.

1. Who is collecting my data?

The data controller is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). You can contact the Defra Data Protection Officer at:

Address: Defra Group Data Protection Officer, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, SW Quarter, 2nd floor, Seacole Block, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.

Email: DefraGroupDataProtectionOfficer@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Any questions about how we are using your personal data and your associated rights should be sent to the above contact.

2. What of my data is being collected and how is it used? What is the legal basis for the processing?

Defra may collect your name, address, email, phone number, job title and details of your current and past professional experience, organisations and interests. Defra will use this personal data for the purpose of managing your membership and activities as a member of a Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group, including the management of conflicts of interest. Processing of this data is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in Defra under Section 153 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the International Development Act 2002.

We would like to include your name on our website listed below. We will process this on a public task basis (Article 6(1)(e)).

<http://www.darwininitiative.org.uk>

<https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/>

<https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/>

We would also like to include your email address in the Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus mailing list to send certain communications to you in relation to details about the funds; newsletters; events, and general communications about the funds. We will process this on a public task basis (Article 6(1)(e)).

We may be required to release data in certain circumstances to comply with legal obligations placed upon us including under the 2004 Environmental Information Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3. Who will my data be shared with?

For purposes of administering, monitoring and evaluating your membership of an Expert Group, your personal data may be shared by us with:

- our Fund Manager (currently NIRAS-LTS International or a similar if new Fund Manager is secured);
- Darwin Expert Committee / Darwin Plus Advisory Group / Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group members;
- other governmental bodies (including Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Cabinet Office, Border Force, Home Office, Ministry of Defence);
- for Darwin Plus, UK Overseas Territory Governments; and
- IT contractors for purposes of managing our website if you give your consent for us to include your personal data on our website.

4. If you are relying on my consent to process my data, can I withdraw my consent?

You have the right to withdraw consent at any time, where processing is based on your consent.

5. How long will my data be held for?

Your personal financial data will be kept by us for a period of up to 7 years after project end in line with the retention period for financial information, as this may be required for auditing purposes. Personal data provided on application forms may be kept for a period of 5 years for the purposes of independent evaluation and programme assessment.

6. What will happen if I don't provide the data?

Failure to provide the personal data requested would prevent our ability to manage your membership and the conflicts of interest and would therefore prevent you membership to continue.

7. Will my data be used for automated decision-making or profiling?

The information you provide is not connected with automated decision making (making a decision solely by automated means without any human involvement) or profiling (automated processing of personal data to evaluate certain things about an individual).

8. Will my data be transferred outside of the EEA? If it will, how will it be protected?

We may send personal data to parties listed in Section 3 above, including those outside the European Economic Area to a country without an adequacy decision. This will be to support the administering, monitoring and evaluating of your membership.

Prior to transferring your personal data to a country where no adequacy decision is in place we will ensure suitable safeguards are in place.

If you would like more information on such safeguards, please contact the Defra Data Protection Officer.

9. What are my rights?

A list of your rights under the General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), is accessible at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/>

10. How do I complain?

You should first raise any concerns with the Defra Data Protection Officer.

You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the ICO (Information Commissioners Office) (supervisory authority) at any time. Should you wish to exercise that right full details are available at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/>

Personal Information Charter

Defra's Personal Information Charter, which gives details of your rights in respect of the handling of your personal data, is on the Defra section of Gov.uk. If you don't have access to the internet, please telephone the Defra helpline 08459 33 55 77 and ask to speak to the Data Protection Officer for a copy of the Information Charter.

Annex H. Grant Application Process

The funds typically adopt either a single stage or two stage application process. The Expert Groups primary role is during the assessment of the applications and the following Sift Meeting, although strategy and technical advice from the Expert Groups will feed into the design and detail of each funding round.

The Chair of the Expert Group will represent the Expert Group at the Programme Board stage.

Figure 1: Single Stage Process with Expert Group activities in orange.

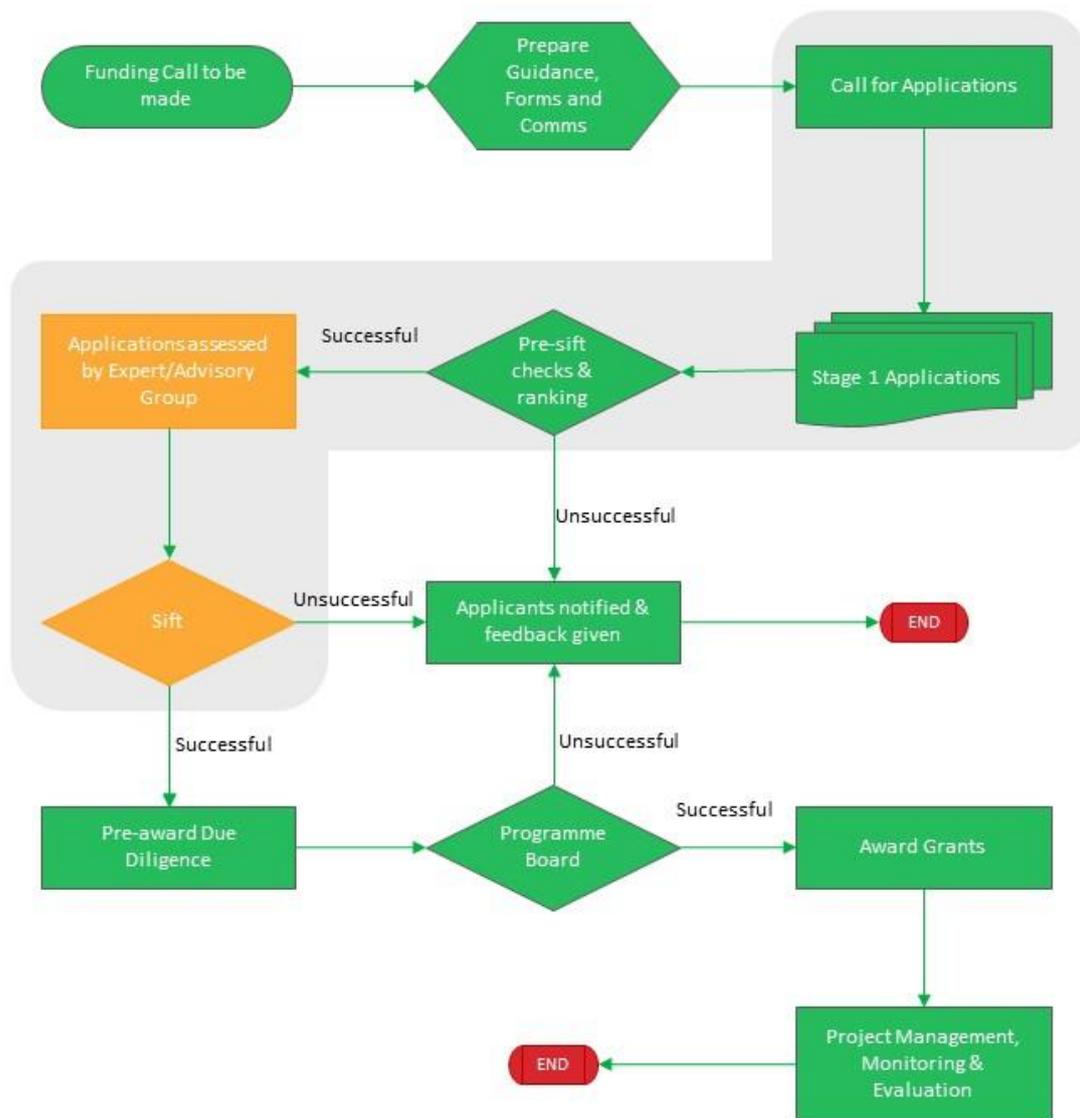
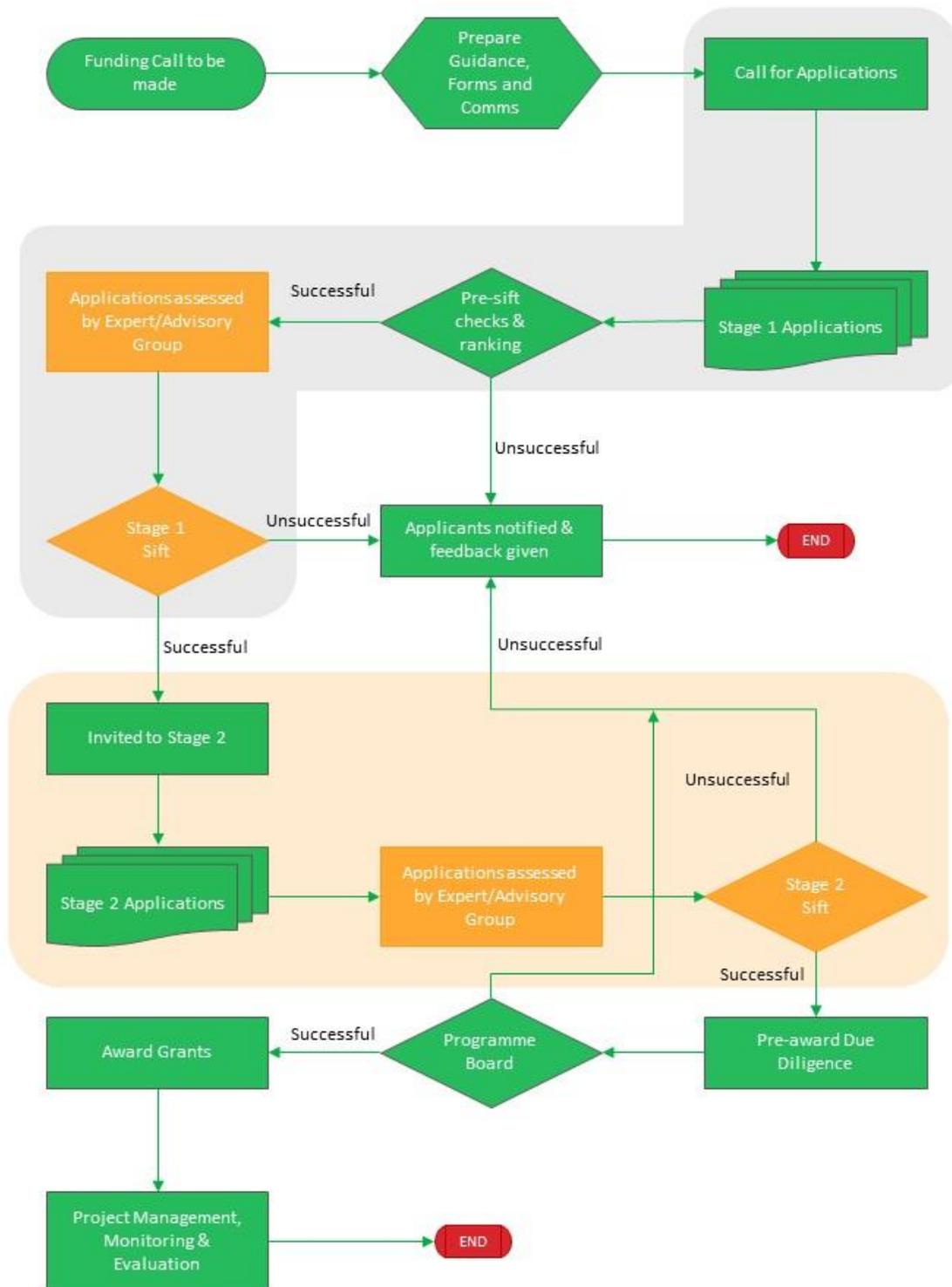


Figure 2: Two Stage Process with Expert Group activities in orange.



Annex I. Grant Assessment Process

All eligible applications that meet the required standard will be assessed by the Expert Group, who are independent experts in the area that the fund operates.

The Expert Group 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 must **declare their interest** and play no role in its assessment.

A basic overview of the typical assessment process:

- 1) **Initial Review:** Applications that are poor quality, incomplete or do not meet the eligibility criteria will be rejected. Applicants will be informed of the reasons for rejection.
- 2) **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are scored by at least three Expert Group members, against the assessment criteria to inform the discussion at the Sift Meeting.
- 3) **Sift Meeting:** Members discuss applications and agree the strongest proposals to recommend to Defra or invite to Stage 2 (followed by a second assessment and sift meeting).
- 4) **Funding Decision:** Programme Board reviews the Expert Group recommendations within the context of Defra's principles (risk, political economy, finance etc.) and awards the grants.

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 Sift Meeting.

In some cases, the assessment process will be adapted, for example where a rapid response funding round seeks to provide time sensitive grants in response to an opportunity or risk such as in the case of COVID-19 Rapid Response Round of grants.

Assessment Criteria

Applications are assessed by members of the Expert Group against the fund's criteria on a 0-6 scale for each score. Unless noted, all benefits or impacts are in reference to the host country.

Assessment Scoring

Points	Description
6	<i>Strong Demonstration.</i> 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	<i>Good Demonstration.</i> 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 fund.

4	<i>Acceptable Demonstration.</i> 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 fund.
3	<i>Emerging Demonstration</i> 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 fund, if the issues are addressed to strengthen it.
2	<i>Weak Demonstration.</i> 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	<i>Minimal demonstration.</i> The proposed project is unsatisfactory and meets only a few criteria, or raises important concerns. The proposal is likely to require significant revision.
0	<i>Not demonstrated.</i> The project 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.

Sift Meeting

Defra will provide guidance on the number of applications that could potentially progress to Stage 2 or could be awarded grants. Using this number, the Chair will structure the discussions in order to provide Defra with the appropriate number and standard of recommend projects.

All recommended projects must meet a standard, for example in ambition, value for money, quality of design, capabilities and capacity, matching the requirements as set out in the guidance.

Some principles used to structure the time include:

- Prior to discussing any application, members with Conflicts of Interest will leave the room and play no role in the discussion or decision.
- The ambition is to reach consensus of the group on the assessment of each application, but the Chair will make the final decision where consensus is not possible.
- To make robust recommendations, each application must be treated fairly and consistently.
- Irrespective of each application's score, any member can challenge or champion any application, supporting its case for consideration or flagging risks/issues.
- Discussions often focus on applications that have received a range of scores from the assessors to challenge, test and understand the assessment scores.
- Where possible, the assessment notes and discussions at the Sift Meeting are used to provide constructive feedback to the applicants in support of strengthening the standards of projects and future applications. It is not always feasible to provide lower scoring applicants with tailored feedback.

Results of applications

Once the funding decision has been made, **all Lead Applicants** (both successful and unsuccessful) **will receive notification**. If successful they will receive an offer of funding or, in the case of a two-stage process, an invitation to Stage 2.

Defra 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, Defra retains the right to withdraw the offer.

Normally, only unsuccessful applicants whose applications were competitive will receive feedback in support of strengthening the standards of projects and future applications.

Resubmission of applications

If an application is unsuccessful, it may be resubmitted in a future round, but it:

- **can only be resubmitted once**, unless there is prior agreement owing to exceptional circumstances or the proposed new project is significantly different.
- **must include a cover letter**, outlining how the applicant has responded to any feedback or gaps to strengthen the application.

Feedback

Feedback is a valued method to support the development of capability of potential applicants, and strengthen current or future proposals in support of the objectives of the funds.

Based on the assessments conducted and the discussions at the Sift Meetings, tailored feedback is provided to many of the applicants.

However, where the application is considered non-competitive (e.g. low scoring) it is considered too resource intensive to provide tailored feedback, and they will receive more generic feedback.

This feedback, amongst other sources, is utilised when reviewing funding guidance.

Table 1: Feedback Table

	<p><u>Applicants awarded grants</u> are provided specific feedback that may require a response prior to award, or by the first half-year report and/or becomes a condition of funding to further strengthen their project.</p> <p><u>Applicants invited to submit a Stage 2 application</u> are provided specific feedback from the Sift 1 Assessment this is designed to highlight strengths and opportunities to further strengthen their proposal. This should be responded to in the Stage 2 application and covering letter.</p>
	<p>Near-misses: the proposals that are considered competitive but narrowly miss being invited to Stage 2 or recommended for funding are provided specific feedback on their strengths and how to strengthen future applications.</p>
	<p>Non-Competitive applications that are significantly below the expected standard and would require substantial work to be competitive, are provided non-specific feedback highlighted general areas of weakness and where to find further guidance.</p>