Darwin Initiative Stage 2 Workshop

31st October 2019, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Workshop Proceedings

On 31st October, an in-person workshop was held at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The workshop content focused on the necessary steps for the second stage of the Darwin applications, the importance of gender consideration, the effective use of project design tools and appropriate indicators. The aim of the workshop was to provide advice and support relating to producing a successful application and to provide a forum for applicants to gain a better understanding of the key considerations of the Darwin Expert Committee.

This note covers the frequently asked questions as well as those specific to different areas of the application and answers, and participant feedback on the workshop and activities.

The presentations from the day plus these proceedings can be accessed via the Darwin website here.

Contents

Workshop Agenda

	Agenda Item
09:30	**Arrivals and Registration** (Tea and coffee on arrival)
10.00	**Introduction to the Workshop** - Purpose of the workshop - How the day will work - Introductions - exercise
10:15	**Welcome by the Darwin Secretariat**
10:30	**Overview of Frequently Asked Questions/Common Issues** - Common administrative and finance queries - Collection of questions received from applicants and responses
11:10	**The Importance of Gender and Safeguarding in Darwin Projects**
11:30	**Communicating your Ideas** - Framing your project appropriately - Translating complexity into simplicity - exercise
11:45	**What is the Darwin Expert Committee looking for?** - Presentation from a member of the DEC on key considerations when reviewing applications
12:10	**Lunch**
13:00	**Project Design Tools** - Why use project design tools - Articulating your "pathway to change" - Introducing effective logframe development - exercise
14:15	**Tea and Coffee Break**
14:30	**The Importance of Good Evidence and Appropriate Indicators** - Identifying SMART indicators - Collecting and reporting evidence - Means of verification - exercise
15.45	**Q&A, Feedback and Wrap Up**
16:00	**Workshop Close**

Key points or common issues arising from the morning sessions

FAQs and Common Issues session

Finance and Admin

Q. How much matched funding should a project aim to have? Is there a preferred percentage?

A. While it is not mandatory for projects to have matched funding, it is highly desirable. Although there are no requirements for co-financing/matched funding to be at a particular level, where none has been identified applicants should provide an explanation as to why this is the case.

Q. Is it possible to edit the wording of the Impact statement between Stage 1 and Stage 2?

A. Yes, however this should not drastically change the overall aim that the project had at Stage 1.

Q. Is it possible to amend our budget between our Stage 1 and Stage 2 application?

A. Yes – projects are able to amend their budgets between Stage 1 and Stage 2. However, any significant changes that are made to the budget should be explained in the Stage 2 cover letter. Due to the funding situation for this Round it may be possible to provide funding for additional projects if applications ensure that their budget are not front loaded.

Q. Is there guidance available on what should be included in letters of support?

A. The requirements for the letters of support can be found under section 5.6 of the Darwin guidance. We would recommend that any letters of support are written in English and clearly outline the relevant support for the proposed project, rather than being based on generic statements.

Q. Do you want all details or letters of support for all partners including non-key partners?

A. We would recommend that letters of support are provided for all key partners, but it is not essential to provide information on non-key partners.

Q. What level of co-funding is required/acceptable?

A. There is no mandatory level of co-funding. Remember that in-kind support, for example the use of facilities or staff time, can count. Where no co-funding is proposed your application should explain why this is the case.

following the submission deadline, please share this with us as there may still be scope for it to be considered.

What is the Darwin Expert Committee looking for?

Q. It is necessary to have a lead organisation that is based in the UK?

A. No – lead organisations are not required to be based in the UK. More information on lead organisation eligibility can be found in section 4.3 of the Darwin guidance.

Q. The formatting of logframes on Flexi-Grant can make logframes harder to read, does the formatting impact the decision of the DEC?

A. Applications are assessed on a number of criteria, not only on the strength of their logframes. With all of the applications for the Darwin Initiative now being received via Flexi-Grant, the formatting of the logframe remains consistent for each application.

While we are aware that the format of the logframes is not the most straight forward on the Flexi-Grant portal, we are looking into ways to improve this in the upcoming Rounds.

The Importance of Gender in Darwin Projects

Q. How can Darwin projects contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender?

A. The presentation slides provide more information on how Darwin projects can consider gender during both their proposal development and implementation.

Projects should, as a minimum, demonstrate a 'do no harm' approach to gender issues. This requires proposals to demonstrate an understanding of local realities and social norms in the project site.

The Darwin Initiative website contains the project documents for all Darwin projects and can be searched for examples of conservation projects engaging with gender issues. The Darwin Gender newsletter from June 2015, provides further examples of projects engaging with gender.

Q. Are there any factors other than gender than the Darwin Initiative consider especially important when disaggregating indicators? Age, economic status etc?

A. It depends if these factors are important to what the project is trying to measure, while gender plays a key role in Darwin projects this does not solely relate to the inclusion of women. Projects should also consider other inequalities faced by other vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled and children. More information on the importance of gender and safeguarding can be found in the Gender presentation here.

Key points or common issues arising from the afternoon sessions

Project Design Tools

Key observations from participants in the logframe and theory of change exercises included:

- The importance of using consistent language in logframes to ensure the various components of the logframe are as easy to identify as possible.
- It is often challenging to distinguish between project activities and outputs.
- Some outputs don't appear to have obviously relevant activities. This could be an indication that there is a gap in the project logic.

- Assumptions are not always clear – clearly articulating assumptions can help demonstrate the project logic and strengthen the project logframe. In addition, avoiding any 'leaps of faith' between the Outputs and the Outcome.
- Sometimes the problem/impact/outcome statement can seem vague or broad. It can therefore be hard to tie the project activities or outputs back to them, with a risk that there are gaps in the logic.
- Gender and poverty alleviation is an important part of Darwin projects and should not only be included in the narrative but also be reflected in the logframe.

Q. What components make up a good logframe?

A. Ensure that your logframe is concise, has clear logic and that the Outputs are relevant to the overall issue the project is trying to address. When developing indicators ensure that they are SMART. Indicators should be included at the Outcome and Output levels for Darwin projects and should be able to measure key changes and overall project success. Darwin projects should also have a means of verification for each of their indicators.

More information on Darwin logframes can be found in the Logframe specific information note here and in the monitoring and evaluation presentation and exercises from the workshop that can be found on the Darwin website here. Good examples of indicators can be found in the information note as well as the hand out from the workshop. Poverty alleviation is a major component of Darwin projects and this should be reflected in the logframe, our latest information note on poverty may be a helpful resource and can be found here.

Q. Is there any specific guidance on logframes and SMART indicators?

A. The presentation and exercises on indicators can be accessed here. Additionally, the guidance document for Darwin projects provides an example of what a good logframe should look like in Annex F along with a variety of additional resources on effective monitoring and evaluation.

The Importance of Good Evidence and Appropriate Indicators

Key observations from participants in the indicators and evidence exercise included:

- Indicators must be specific. Where they are not, it becomes difficult to identify where on the logframe they should be placed.
- Indicators should be selected that are comprehensive enough to measure all aspects of a project's Outputs and Outcome.
- It is useful to engage the people who will ultimately be tasked with monitoring project progress, in the development of indicators.
- Identify baselines is a crucial part of indicator development. If you do not yet know all of the relevant baselines for your intervention it is important to make it clear when, and how these will be identified.

Q. Can there be more than one Outcome?

A. No – Darwin Initiative projects can only have one Outcome statement which should be achieved within the lifetime of the project.

Q. How do you ensure that your indicators are achievable but also ambitious enough?

A. Having an accurate baseline is key – projects that have a sound understanding of the project context know what is achievable within the project lifetime. Although it may be tempting to have overly ambitious targets, projects that have realistic goals are often more successful. When incorporating indicators into your logframe it is important that any targets show realistic improvement against the baseline.

Q. What do you mean by 'Means of Verification'?

A. Means of verification is the evidence you will use to show that indicators have been achieved. The presentation and exercise on appropriate indicators can be found here.

Q. Can the number of planned activities during Stage 1 be reduced if the original amount is not feasible given the lifespan and project budget?

A. Yes – your proposal should be as realistic as possible given the context that your project will be working in.

Q. What is the difference between an Output and the Outcome?

A. The Outcome statement is the project's overall objective, it outlines what you expect to achieve as a result of the project. For Darwin projects there is only one Outcome which identifies the changes and beneficiaries. Outputs are direct deliverables of the project and provide the conditions necessary to achieve the Outcome – therefore it is paramount that the link between the Outputs and the Outcome is clear.

Q. How directly are indicators supposed to be linked to biodiversity with projects that can't realistically expect changes in the project's lifetime?

A. Being able to clearly articulate your project's Theory of Change – how its activities link to the outputs, how the outputs will work together to achieve the project outcome, and how, post project, the outcome will contribute to the overall project impact – can help identify appropriate indicators able to capture progress towards an improved biodiversity status, even if this change itself can't be measured within the lifetime of the project.

Other questions received

The "Guidance for applicants" should be your first reference point if you have queries when developing your application. This can be accessed via Flexi-Grant and also on the GOV.UK website: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/darwin-initiative-applying-for-main-project-funding

Finance & Admin

You will find most information regarding financial requirements for your applications and, if successful at Stage 2, financial management of your projects in the document below.

- The "Finance for Darwin and IWT" document can be found here: http://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects

Q. How do you access the guidance documents and seek help during the application development stage?

A. The guidance documents can be accessed on the Darwin website here. The documents are also available on the Flexi-Grant application portal. If you experience any technical or administrative difficulties during your application, you can get in contact with the LTS team throughout this time period either by email at Darwin-applications@ltsi.co.uk or flexigrant@ltsi.co.uk or by phone at +44 131 440 5500.

Q. How do you fill the budget and implementation table out and is there any guidance on how to correctly do so?

A. Your budget should be based on realistic actual costs. As far as possible, work within the budget lines provided, and leave lines blank if you don't need them. Remember to account for costs in the year in which you expect them to be incurred. Use your own organisations financial processes (assuming they are tried and tested and robust) rather than create new systems for your project. Make sure you remember to include your matched funding on the final tab of the spreadsheet. All the information you enter should pull through to the summary page. If you cannot group items together and need more lines added, please contact LTS with enough time to allow them to add the lines for you.

The Implementation Timetable shows how your project activities are set out – use the quarters to show when the activity is taking place and the number of months to indicate how many months you are doing the work. Feel free to use shading or simple Xs to indicate your plans.

Q. What guidance can you provide on successful monitoring and evaluation?

A. One of the best places to look for further information on monitoring and evaluation is the Darwin and IWT guidance document. Annex E outlines the different components of the logframe, additional information on monitoring and evaluation can be found in our logical framework information note here.

Q. How do applicants respond to feedback from Stage 1, given the very tight word counts?

A. Applicants should ensure that they are able to clearly and concisely demonstrate what their project is aiming to do in their Stage 2 applications. The word limit in Flexi-Grant is strictly enforced and therefore effective communication is key. More information on communication can be found in the workshop proceedings here. If you need to show how you are responding to feedback, you can do so through the cover letter to ensure it is clear that you have considered all the comments – but do put as much as possible into the application form.

Q. What scale of biodiversity benefits are required to make a successful application?

A. The Darwin Expert Committee review each application in detail and expect your proposed benefits – both in terms of biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation – to be both ambitious but also realistic within your proposed budget and timescale. You may wish to look at past examples of recently funded Darwin projects on the website to give you an idea of the level of their scale.

Q. Although projects are required to be well researched and planned, they can often experience unforeseen challenges. To what extent is the Darwin Initiative flexible with respect to the project plan?

A. We understand that it is not possible to plan for everything and recognise that projects can and often do experience things outside of their control. In these situations, any technical or financial changes projects may need to make should be done so via the change request form that can be found on the Darwin website.

Q. Are there good examples from previous Darwin projects that demonstrate exemplary practices in development of value?

A. We would recommend having a look at past examples of Darwin projects, which can be found on the Darwin website here.

Q. What are the technical and financial reporting requirements for Darwin projects?

A. The best place to look for financial reporting requirements would be in the finance guidance and under section 9.3 and in Annex B of the Darwin guidance. Details of both technical and financial reporting are available in the available guidance and also referred to in the Terms and Conditions available through Flexigrant.

Q. Will further clarification on the feedback we have received at Stage 1 be provided?

A. The Stage 2 workshops offered an opportunity for applicants to ask any application related questions they may have. Due to the high level of applications we received at Stage 1, it is not possible to offer any additional specific feedback from that outlined in your feedback letter, although we can help clarify the intention of the comments if they are not clear. If you have any other admin, finance or technical questions, these can be answered by getting in touch with LTS.

Q. What are the M&E requirements for Darwin projects?

A. We recently carried out an assessment of Final and Annual report reviews for Darwin Initiative projects, which follow a similar structure to IWT Challenge Fund projects. Outlined below are some factors that provide guidance on how to successfully plan, implement and report for your proposed project.

Planning:

- Develop a realistic M&E framework, taking into account the length of the project
- Evaluate Outputs and Outcomes using indicators – ensure to highlight any indicators that may not meet the SMART requirements.
- When it comes to partnerships, focus on quality over quantity – it is often better to have fewer partners and better relationships. Fewer partners may result in better coordination, communication and performance.
- Clear and defined baselines – and ability to recognise gaps in baseline knowledge

Implementation:

- Utilise technical change requests – allows projects to continue to score highly and re-establish targets despite unpredictable changes.
- Engage with local communities – providing materials in local languages, encouraging community ownership, and community consultations were proven to be the most successful forms of engagement
- Project adaptability – ability to overcome unforeseen challenges/changes to original project plan

Reporting:

- High quality reporting - outline the reasoning behind project successes, focussing not just on strengths but also shortcomings
- Include sufficient evidence in annual and final reports – if possible translate/summarise key documentation being used as evidence

Q. Is LTS able to provide additional feedback on any amendments to the logframe or pathway to change made to the Stage 2 application before it is submitted?

A. No – LTS is not able to review or comment on draft applications, either in part or in full. However, if you have specific questions on the feedback you received please get in touch.

Q. Our exit strategy focuses on community capacity building, staff capacity building and empowering communities, are these the types of things that should be included in an exit strategy?

A. Yes – For example, consider how you can ensure individuals trained remain in their roles. Are you able to provide tools/materials to enable future training? Ensure you recognise any risks you might perceive to sustaining your project's achievements after the project ends, recognise these in your exit strategy, and propose a solution that mitigates against these risks.

Q. What advice would you provide on effective financial management for a Darwin project?

A. Ensure you have a clear system set up from the start. Use what you are used to, as long as it is already robust and can provide the information you will need to report against. Ensure you understand the financial reporting requirements so that you can set up financial reporting from the start. Ensure there is good communication between the project team and the lead organisation's financial team to ensure there is a clear understanding of costs and financial management for the project.

Q. What is required to complete a Stage 2 application?

A. The Stage 2 application asks for more detail than its concept note like Stage 1 counterpart. More detail on the project budget, the logframe and theory of change as well as CVs, letters of support for project partners and lead organisation accounts are required. Additionally, applicants will have to outline how their proposed projects intend to incorporate gender and address issues of safeguarding. More information on the eligibility criteria

Q. How do you make your project application stand out?

A. There are a few key criteria which help get your application noticed by the DEC. Ensure you answer the questions, that your application is clearly written and concise, and provide evidence on the success of your proposed strategy.

A good logframe will enhance your technical score but any uncertainties and risks should be outlined upfront rather than leaving this for the reviewers to figure out. More information on what the DEC is looking for can be found in the "What is the Darwin Expert Committee looking for" presentation here.

Q. Will provisional Outputs be accepted as a basis for assumptions within the next stage application?

A. The logframe provided as part of your Stage 2 application forms the basis of your project if it is successfully funded – therefore the logframe should accurately reflect what the project aims to achieve if funded as any changes will need to be made through a formal change request process.

Q. Can project plans for 2020-2023 be adapted based on the feedback from Darwin on the 2017-2020 project?

A. Yes, we would expect your proposed projects should clearly build upon previous efforts (also including your own organisation's work not funded through Darwin and the work of other organisations). Ensure your application does not assume knowledge of previous initiatives and clearly outlines how this proposal builds upon them.

Q. How should applications deal with indicators where the baseline information is uncertain?

A. Although we encourage projects to have prior understanding and knowledge of their project context, we understand that having a reliable baseline is not always feasible. In this instance there are several options for projects.

- To get in contact with local project partners to gain a better understanding of the project context
- To conduct a scoping study through a Darwin Initiative Partnerships project before conducting a Darwin main project
- To collect data and establish the baseline in the project's first year

Q. Does the Darwin Initiative require applications to address both livelihood and conservation issues? If so, what is balance is needed?

A. Yes, all Darwin projects are expected to address both livelihood and conservation issues. It may be helpful to look at the scoring criteria for the applications that can be found in the Darwin guidance under Annex A. How well projects consider gender and poverty in their applications is a key component of the assessment criteria, with successful projects adequately addressing both.

Q. How much risk is acceptable in achieving our results?

A. In terms of financial risk, you should work within the limitations and guidance of your own organisation and be able to justify decisions made relevant to financial risk. Remember, the grants are public money and all funds need to be transparently managed.

In terms of other risks, you should consider your organisation's willingness to take risk, the risks associated with all people working on the team, as well as advice from local partners and UK government. For example, if you are experienced and very familiar with a risky environment and supported by good intelligence from local partners, you may feel confident to undertake work that others, less experienced, may not be willing to undertake. Be realistic and be safe.

Q. Is there a limited budget for capital items that can be supported by Darwin projects?

A. Capital costs paid from Darwin funds should be no more than 10% of the total grant, except in specific cases where higher capital expenditure is essential for the project and justified in the application. Please note, the purchase of land or the erection of permanent buildings are not eligible under this budget line.

Q. Is the project start date flexible?

A. Yes, however projects should aim to be realistic about these dates as it may not be possible to start the project as soon as funding has been confirmed. It is recommended that projects aim to have any project related travel commencing after May 2020 as applicants will not hear the outcome of their applications until the end of March 2020 at the earliest. For more information on project start dates and grant duration, please see section 6.5 of the Darwin guidance.

If your application successfully receives funding, any changes to the start or end date will need to be approved using the change request feature.

Q. What is the best support material to provide confidence in long-term/post project continuation?

A. Strong letters of support from in-country/government agencies (particularly if your organisation is not based in-country) can help demonstrate engagement in the project. Outline your exit strategy clearly in your application form, and include reference to any ongoing matched funding you have secured (or plan to secure) for longer-term continuation if required.

Q. Are higher budgets viewed unfavourably?

A. Over the years Darwin projects have had a variety of budget sizes, however having a higher budget will not negatively or positively impact your application as there is no minimum or maximum award size. When thinking about the project budget it is important for applicants to consider if their projects represent good value for money and if the budget is spread relatively evenly over the project lifetime. Further information on the size and length of Darwin projects can be found under section 4.1 of the Darwin guidance document. For this year, particularly, we would recommend not frontloading your budget – the funds available this year are restricted, so spreading your costs into later year may allow more projects to be funded.

Q. What is the importance of the percentage of budget dedicated to project partners?

A. It is important for reviewers to be able to see easily how much of the budget will be going to partners – particularly to partners in host countries. Defra is keen to see a reasonable amount of funding directly benefitting local people, but recognises that projects are different.

Q. What is the level of detail needed in the budget?

A. The Finance Guidance and the spreadsheet are your best guide. We expect the space provided in the spreadsheet will be adequate, however if you need to add individual lines please get in touch and we can help.

Q. At the second stage do we have an opportunity to amend the budget?

Yes, but if the overall or annual figures differ significantly, make sure it is clear why this is the case.

Q. Can you provide an overview of key financial requirements and formats for Stage 2?

A. The key financial requirements at Stage 2 are to complete the budget spreadsheet (ensuring the figures here match the figures included in your application form) and submit your organisation's accounts.

Q. Are you able to provide further advice and recommendations for efficient budgeting?

A. We recommend applicants follow the processes of their own organisation as far as possible and remember that you should be able to evidence all costs through receipts, timesheets, etc. Don't make your budget planning too complicated and do ensure you keep clear records of foreign exchange rates used. The number of rows in the budget template provides an indication of the level of detail we are looking for. Review your budget regularly and ensure that you can track Darwin spend separately from funding from other sources, as you will need to report on Darwin only costs.

Q. Please address the importance of letters of support and which letters are key?

A. Letters of support (LoS) outline appropriate involvement and buy-in from organisations included in your application. See Darwin Guidance sections 5.5 and 5.6. LoS are required from all main partners, PLUS the applicant organisation.

Q. Are questions 22 and 29 asking the same thing? What is the difference between fraud, bribery and corruption?

A. Question 29 is specifically about financial risk and you should demonstrate how you have considered this. Question 22 is about non-financial risks and specifically about corruption that may affect your project. Corruption may involve offering rewards that are non-financial for example.

Technical

Q. What is most important to the Darwin Initiative when deciding which projects to fund?

A. There is no single characteristic which is the most important when deciding which project to fund. The assessment criteria used by the DEC when reviewing applications is included in section 11 of the Guidance for applicants. As a general point, applications should be well written, robust and have clear objectives, meeting at least one of the criteria for the round.

Q. What is the best way to answer Q12 of the Stage 2 application form: "links to biodiversity conventions, treaties and agreements"?

A. Be clear about which Conventions/Treaties your project will address and how i.e. don't just list the numbers, but explain how the project will address them. Involve the local focal points if possible.

Q. How to write a logframe for a project with indirect impacts on biodiversity and poverty (i.e. a project focussed on production of evidence, training, inputs to policy making, rather than actions "on the ground").

A. Similarly to policy related projects, a clear Theory of Change can support here. Indicators related to training should not just relate to attendance at training courses or the quality of training but, at the Outcome level, how this changes how people carry out their jobs.

Q. It would be nice to have demonstrated examples of good practice monitoring and similarly, interesting to see tools used in project reporting

A. If you are successful at Stage 2 we also host a workshop for New Projects which has a focus on project reporting tools. However, it is important to consider how you will use a logframe whilst it is under development – for example, by considering how you will measure your indicators and who will take responsibility for this to ensure it is a realistic tool.

Q. How do we make sure that our logical framework is up to Darwin's standards?

A. Ensure you respond to Stage 1 feedback if received and check that your indicators are SMART. If successful at Stage 2, you may also be provided feedback to help you strengthen your project's logframe before beginning implementation.

Q. Examples of good and not so good logframe indicators?

A. The indicator exercise has a number of good and not so good logframe indicator examples. Additionally, an example logframe in Annex F of the Darwin guidance document may also be a useful resource.

Q. Should broader project issues be included or addressed in the logframe?

A. Any broader project issues should be addressed in the project narrative and preferably be reflected under question 11 in the Stage 2 application form which asks for more detail on the problem the project is trying to address.

General

Q. Can a project be adapted over the course of implementation as lessons are learned from M&E?

A. Yes, and we very much encourage projects to adapt their approach as needed based on findings from M&E.

Q. How are we expected to adapt things based on Stage 1 feedback?

A. You should use the feedback to strengthen your application but if you do not believe the advice given is appropriate to your situation, please comment on this in a cover letter.

Q. Alongside the feedback received from the Stage 1, would it be possible to also know the strengths of our application?

A. Additional feedback apart from that received in your letter at Stage 1 is not available. Any aspects of the application that have been highlighted as needing improvement for Stage 2 may be more useful to strengthen your application.

Q. If we are not aware of any sensitivities that should be brought to the FCO's attention at the time of submission, what should we do?

A. It may be beneficial for projects to get in contact with the British Embassy in the target country to gain a better understanding of any potential sensitivities.

Selected Workshop Feedback

"Every aspect of the workshop was done well!"

"We loved the location – any future workshops should be in Edinburgh and held nearer the weekend so that we could see more of the city"

"The first presentation was a little too quick and quiet"