



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Appointment of Experts to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Committee and Advisory Groups

Briefing pack for applicants

Closing Date: Monday 23 November 2026



We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment. We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities. We also support our world-leading food, farming and fishing industries.

Defra is a ministerial department, supported by [36 agencies and public bodies](#).



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at Darwin.initiative@defra.gov.uk

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The Biodiversity Challenge Funds

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) are the collective name for three of the UK Government's international biodiversity and environment grant schemes: the Darwin Initiative (DI), Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus (D+).

Funds are allocated through an open and transparent process against clear criteria, with applications scored and recommended for selection by the BCFs expert committee or advisory group.

Darwin Initiative

Established in 1992, the Darwin Initiative is a UK Government grants scheme that supports communities to find just, scalable, and sustainable ways to conserve and restore nature while growing their economies and reducing poverty. Since 1993, the Darwin Initiative has awarded more than £290m worth of grants to over 1,370 projects worldwide, with a live portfolio of over 140 projects across Africa, Asia and Latin America worth more than £104m. The technical committee responsible for assessing applications and providing strategic guidance for the fund is called the Darwin Initiative Expert Committee. <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk>

IWT Challenge Fund

The IWT Challenge Fund supports innovative and scalable projects that tackle illegal wildlife trade (IWT) while reducing poverty. Since 2014, it has supported 187 projects across more than 60 countries, with investment exceeding £68 million. Round 12 marks the first step in taking a broader environmental crime approach, recognising that environmental crimes are growing in scale and severity of impact, share common drivers and enforcement challenges, and are often linked to interconnected organised criminal networks and illicit financial flows. The IWT Advisory Group assesses applications, makes funding recommendations and provides strategic guidance for the Fund. <https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/>

Darwin Plus

The aim of Darwin Plus is to help deliver long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). The fund helps to meet commitments under UKOT and UK policies, multilateral environment agreements and the SDGs. The technical committee responsible for assessing applications and providing strategic guidance for the fund is called the Darwin Plus Advisory Group. <https://darwinplus.org.uk/>

Please refer to each fund's website for more details about the fund and the current list of members.

What are the BCFs Expert Groups?

Our aim is to ensure our Expert Groups are inclusive, diverse, and globally representative.

This recruitment is for Experts to join one of two groups: the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC) and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG). The Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) is **not** recruiting for new Experts this year.

Please indicate in the application which of the two groups you are interested in: you can select both if you believe you can meet the criteria for each.

Each Expert Group is made up of independent experts including academics, practitioners and NGO representatives, along with government officials, all with leadership experience, technical knowledge and experience of international biodiversity conservation and/or multidimensional poverty reduction programmes.

We are looking for individuals who, as leaders in their field, are able to contribute at the highest levels and work effectively as part of a group. Successful candidates will offer sound judgment, excellent interpersonal skills, discretion, the ability to assimilate complex information and preferably come with previous experience of reviewing project applications and justifying their assessment in a committee-type forum of peers.

In addition, Experts are expected to champion the Biodiversity Challenge Funds where possible, with members supporting outreach activities to engage stakeholders and further the objectives of the funds, including attending and presenting at relevant BCF/specific fund events, including workshops/webinars for potential applicants and projects.

Description of the role

The primary role of each Expert Group is to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the specific fund they support.

Members are expected to:

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

We are currently looking for up to 9 people to fill roles across the two funds: indicatively up to 7 for the Darwin Initiative, and 2 for IWT Challenge Fund.

To maintain a breadth of experience in our Expert Groups, we would not expect to appoint more than one member from the same organisation to a single Expert Group except in exceptional circumstances. Please contact us if you are considering applying and someone affiliated with your organisation is already an Expert Group member.

The appointments will commence from 1 June 2027, for a three-year term, reviewed annually.

Representation

We encourage applications from a wide range of backgrounds, including the private sector, academia and professional institutions, non-governmental organisations, independent experts and other stakeholders based in the UK and in countries where projects deliver their impact, i.e. low- and middle-income countries and the UKOTs.

We recognise the challenges that people with (multiple) protected characteristics may experience in their career progression. We want a group of Experts that celebrate and embrace diversity of thought and experience. We are fully committed to being inclusive and ensuring equal opportunities. We hope to attract a range of diverse applicants – particularly people from ethnic minority backgrounds, people with a disability and people with gender diverse identities.

Time Commitment

You should ensure you have sufficient time to meet the expectations of the role. Some Expert Groups require more time commitment than others. An outline of the number of days and indicative timeline for the next round is presented below:

Fund	Commitment, days	Indicative timing 2027-28
Darwin Initiative	18-20 days split into: • up to 15 days per annum to assess applications • two to three one-day sift meetings • one to two strategy discussion days	Stage 1 reviews likely in July to August (@ 4 days); Other reviews during September to January (@ 10 days); Corresponding sift meetings (2 or 3 days) to take place between August 2027 and January 2028. Strategy day in January 2028
IWT Challenge Fund	Around 10-12 days spit into: • up to 7-8 days per annum to assess applications • two/three one-day sift meetings • one strategy discussion day. Typically one meeting a year (usually a sift day combined with a strategy day) will be held in-person in London, with the remainder being held virtually.	Stage 1 Main / Extra reviews likely September 2027 Stage 2/Main/Extra reviews likely February 2028; Evidence reviews likely January 2028 Sift and Strategy day likely March 2028.

Successful candidates will also be expected to attend an induction event following appointment.

Qualities and experience required

Defra is looking for up to nine people who can demonstrate senior leadership in designing, delivering or evaluating programmes in the countries and territories in which the funds operate.

Successful candidates will offer sound judgement, discretion, and the ability to assimilate and analyse complex information. Candidates will preferably be able to demonstrate previous experience of impartially and robustly reviewing project applications and justifying their assessments in a committee-type forum with peers.

Candidates must be able to demonstrate all the following **Essential** criteria:

1. **Substantial and significant technical expertise and knowledge** of topics relevant to the objectives of the BCFs.
2. **Professional experience of successfully delivering project outcomes** in a variety of low- and middle-income countries over several years from concept to closure. Supported by core capabilities around finance, safeguarding, multidimensional poverty reduction, gender, social inclusion, monitoring & evaluation (including logical frameworks), communicating, risk management, capability building, and delivering through equitable partnerships.
3. **Strong track record of working with, applying and reporting to competitive grant funding schemes.** Ideally including assessing project applications or the ability to articulate technically robust projects that provide strong value for money, can deliver ambitious outcomes in line with the criteria, and provide positive and constructive feedback to applicants.

We strongly encourage applications from candidates from low- and middle-income countries who meet the requirements, as we strengthen the geographic diversity and improve the representation of these countries and their stakeholders in our decision making.

Additional, specific requirements for each fund are set out below.

Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)

Specific Criteria

You are expected to demonstrate substantial specialist and/or generalist technical expertise and experience related to specific biomes, conservation actions, poverty reduction approaches and/or specific threats to biodiversity and human wellbeing.

To help maintain DEC's capabilities and capacity, we are particularly interested to receive applications from candidates who can demonstrate expertise in:

- One or more of our priority biodiversity hotspots, including in terrestrial, freshwater and/or marine ecosystems
- Market systems and systems change
- Nature finance and conservation payments
- Influencing policy at a national or regional level

However, applications from candidates with other expertise are also welcomed.

IWT Challenge Fund (IWTAG)

Specific Criteria

Applicants should demonstrate substantial specialist or generalist technical expertise and experience in tackling illegal wildlife trade and/or other transnational environmental crimes.

- In-depth experience of designing, delivering or evaluating work addressing illegal wildlife trade or other transnational environmental crimes, such as illegal logging, fisheries crime, pollution offences or transboundary waste trafficking.
- Knowledge and practical experience of one or more of the following cross-cutting themes:
 - financial investigations
 - intelligence-led enforcement
 - behavioural and social science approaches
 - forensic science
 - DNA barcoding
 - digital forensics
 - legislative or policy development
 - law-enforcement capacity-building
 - community-led conservation and sustainable livelihoods

Terms and Conditions of appointment

Further details are available in the [Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Groups Handbook](#). You will be expected to abide by the terms in the Handbook if appointed, including operating with the highest standards of honesty, impartiality, integrity and objectivity.

Period of appointment

The initial appointment will be for a three-year term (with annual review points), with the possibility of reappointment for a further term, subject to approval.

The appointment will start from 1 June 2027 with the first application assessments following fairly swiftly depending on the fund.

The BCFs are subject to future spending reviews and in the event the programme does not receive funding in a future spending review, all members' terms will be terminated early.

Individuals who are currently or have previously been members of the Expert Committee or Advisory Group are eligible to re-apply for a further term without a break, subject to open competition.

Remuneration and expenses

We will be offering recruited members a stipend of £350 per day plus reimbursement of reasonable (standard class) travel and subsistence costs for attending committee meetings, and internet costs if needed, based on Defra's T&S policy limits.

The Department has due regard to diversity. Expenses may include reimbursement of reasonable additional childcare or other carer costs that occur due to Expert commitments, and the reimbursement of reasonable additional expenses of disabled people.

Location of offices and meetings

For convenience and efficiency, the default Sift meeting method is virtual, but meetings are expected to be periodically (typically annually) held in person with the options to join remotely if necessary. For our annual strategy discussion meetings, members are strongly encouraged to attend in person, however we will always accommodate remote attendance where necessary. In person meetings are normally held in London, although other locations may be considered.

Where possible, Sift and Strategy meetings will be held on consecutive days to make in-person attendance easier. Members are expected to be available for and participate in all Sift and Strategy Meetings.

A meeting is considered to be a full day (09:00-17:00, UK time zone) unless otherwise specified, please consider this if joining remotely from a different time zone.

How to apply

Appointments to Defra's Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups are filled through open competition.¹

To apply candidates must complete the application form on Flexi-Grant which seeks the following information:

1. **Statement of suitability:** It is essential that your statement of suitability gives full, but concise, information relevant to the appointment, clearly demonstrating how you meet each of the essential criteria. Please provide specific examples to establish how you meet each of the criteria. **You are asked to address the essential criteria (up to 500 words) and the specific criteria for each fund you wish to be considered for (250 words per fund).**
2. **CV:** should include education, professional qualifications and employment history, and the names and contact details for two referees. CVs **should not exceed two sides of A4 pages.**
3. Completed Section 2 on Conflicts of Interest, Conduct and Advertising and Section 3 on Diversity Monitoring.

For an informal discussion about the role please contact NIRAS on BCF-Darwin@niras.com or BCF-IWTCF@niras.com.

Applications should be submitted through the online application portal Flexi-Grant at <https://bcfs.flexigrant.com/>. This is the same system that applicants to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds use. All guidance is available via the Flexi-Grant portal, and replicated on the three BCFs websites.

The deadline for receipt of application is **23:59h** (UK time) on Monday 23 November 2026.

¹ Appointments to Defra's Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups are not ministerial appointments regulated by Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA). The posts will, however, be filled through open competition, in line with OCPA guidelines on best practice for making public appointments.

Selection process

Selection Panel

The panel will be selected from officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Panel Chair), the Chair of the relevant Expert Group (or delegated member) and the Fund Manager.

Shortlisting

The selection panel will assess candidates based on the written application against the essential and fund specific criteria (pages 9-10 above), as well as consideration of experience and expertise to ensure the overall capability and capacity of each Expert Group to assess and advise on the breadth of areas covered by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Candidates may be invited for interview, or appointed on the basis of the evidence supplied in the application. It is therefore essential for your application to give full, but concise, information/evidence/examples relevant to the appointment.

Disability

We guarantee to consider anyone with a disability whose application meets the minimum criteria for the post. By 'minimum criteria' we mean that you must provide a full application with evidence which demonstrates that you generally meet the level of competence required for each criterion, as well as meeting any of the qualifications, skills or experience defined as essential.

Defra are committed to the employment and career development of disabled people.

More information about Disability Confident Leaders is available by clicking the logo on the cover page. We have a duty to make reasonable changes to processes where possible to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged.

If you need a change to be made so that you can make your application, please contact NIRAS on BCF-Darwin@niras.com.

Interviews

Interviews are likely to take place during February 2027 and will take place via MS Teams. Further details will be provided at the time.

Reserve List

A reserve list may be agreed for a period of 12 months from which further appointments can be made to Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Groups, or the OCEAN Expert Committee².

Ineligibility criteria

You cannot be considered, or will cease to be a member, if:

- you occupy a paid party-political post or hold a particularly sensitive or high role in a political party;
- you become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors;
- 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 are disqualified from acting as a company director under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, or equivalent in any country;
- you have been convicted of a criminal offence anywhere, the conviction not being spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (c. 53), or equivalent;
- you become subject to a debt relief order or a bankruptcy restrictions order or equivalent;
- you fail to declare all relevant conflicts of interest.

How we will handle your application

You will receive an automatic confirmation of receipt of your application on submission through Flexi-Grant.

The proposed short-listing will take place week commencing 11 January 2027.

Candidates will then be notified by the week commencing 25 January 2027 by email through Flexi-Grant, whether or not they have been shortlisted.

References may be taken up if candidates are shortlisted.

² The OCEAN Grants Programme is another competitive UK government grants scheme, supporting innovative proposals from local coastal communities that aim to deliver marine protection and reduce poverty worldwide.

The interviews, if required, will take place in mid February 2027.

Shortlisted applicants will be informed of the outcome by mid-March 2027.

The successful candidates will be expected to attend an induction event in May 2027 and be available for reviewing applications according to the indicative timings indicated above.

Dealing with your concerns

For queries about the application process, including potential conflicts of interest, please e-mail BCF-Darwin@niras.com.

Privacy Policy

We will keep the data of successful candidates for the duration of their contract with the department and according to our retention policy at the end of that contract.

We will keep the data of reserve candidates for one year, by agreement.

Where candidates are unsuccessful their data will be destroyed within 30 days following the announcement of the results.

The material you submit will be reviewed by Defra, the Chair of the relevant Expert Groups (or a nominated alternative) and the Fund Manager.

The equality, diversity and inclusion information will be treated in confidence.