Darwin Plus

Stage 2 Workshop

13th, 14th and 15th January 2021

Webinar and Virtual Workshop Proceedings

In January 2021 a number of events were held for applicants to Darwin Plus Round 9 who had been invited to Stage 2.

On 13th January a joint virtual webinar session for Stage 2 Darwin Plus and Darwin Initiative applicants via Zoom was held. The webinar focused on frequently asked questions and common issues encountered by applicants, and provided the opportunity for applicants to ask any last minute questions related to their applications. The virtual workshop on 14th January focused on M&E, the effective use of project design tools, and the importance of good evidence and appropriate indicators. On 15th January a presentation given by Brendan Godley, a member of the Darwin Plus Advisory Group, provided insight for Stage 2 applicants on what makes a good application and allowed applicants to gain a better understanding of the key considerations of the Darwin Plus Advisory Group.

This note covers the frequently asked questions as well as those specific to different areas of the application process and includes answers to these.

The presentations from the day plus the exercise handout can be accessed via the Darwin Plus website here.

The "Guidance for applicants" and "Finance guidance" documents should be your first reference point if you have queries when developing your application. These can be accessed via Flexi-Grant and also on the Darwin Plus website.

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Overview of Frequently Asked Questions and Common Issues Webinar

A total of 129 people registered, and 115 people were able to attend. See Annex 1 for details on the spread of people attending the webinar.

The objectives of the session were to:

- Respond to a number of frequently asked questions related to eligibility, finance, Flexi-Grant, gender and communications.
- Provide the opportunity for applicants to ask questions of the Darwin/IWT administrators and Defra.

The webinar was open to both Darwin and Darwin Plus Stage 2 applicants.

Webinar Q&A

Finance and Admin

Q. Can the cover letter and letter of support from the lead organisation be combined into a single letter?

A. Yes, you can combine these into one letter.

Q. Does the Project Leader need therefore to request 10% of their salary in the budget, or can this be an in-kind contribution?

A. Both of these are options. If Project Leader salary (and other associated costs) are not requested from Darwin, you should ensure you include these in your Budget spreadsheet as matched funding.

Q. What does capital costs include?

A. Capital costs are long life/high value items, for example vehicles or IT equipment. They are distinct from items which may be consumed within the lifetime of your project, for example stationery or other office supplies. Section 1.7 of the Finance Guidance includes more information.

Q. What are M&E costs?

A. M&E costs are costs related to monitoring and evaluation of your project – this might include staff time or travel and subsistence, or other costs related to carrying out M&E specific activities.

Q. Are the audit costs in the project budgets for the Lead Organisation's own costs or to cover the Darwin appointed auditor?

A. The audit costs are for projects to organise their own audit – Darwin will not appoint an auditor.

Q. 2020 Audit may not be available in time - will 2019 audit suffice?

A. Please provide the latest audit information available. Given the exceptional circumstances of 2020 (and also considering that organisations run to different financial years) we recognise not all organisations will have a completed audits for the last year.

Q. If the audit costs end up being more than £2,000, does Darwin allow applicants to cover the overage by the match/unrestricted funds?

A. Although Darwin only allows you to include up to £2,000 in your budget for audit costs, you may cover any overage through other funding sources.

Q. Can the audit costs be included as a direct cost, or must they come under overheads (as I think the spreadsheet implies the latter)?

A. Please include audit costs against the line indicated in the budget template – this will help us identify these costs when reviewing your budget.

Q. Clarification please: is the audit cost that should be included for the project itself or for the project leader organisation?

A. The audit that Darwin asks for at the end of your project should only cover project costs (not wider organisational expenditure).

Q. As a Government Department, we do not (as far as I am aware) have any audits. will this be an issue?

A. If your project is led by a Government Department then you do not need to provide audited accounts at the application stage.

Q. Can match funding include in kind support?

A. Yes. If you can put a financial value against it, please include these costs in your budget as matched funding.

Q. Are the matched fund and co-financing same or different? Just wondering if the matched fund and co-finance should be cash or in kind?

A. We often use these terms interchangeably – matched funding can be both co-financing or in-kind support.

Q. Is too much match funding actually not advisable?

A. In the presentation we spoke about the difficulties of attribution where projects have a significant level of matched funding. In your application it is important to be clear how your project is distinct or – if part of a wider programme – why Darwin funds are required and how project achievements will be attributable to Darwin funding.

Q. Does in kind funding need to match exactly on form and budget sheet? Other projects have large budgets that are partly relevant?

A. Yes, the financial figures included in your application form and budget should match.

Q. Can the letters of support be sent after the proposal deadline? In which cases?

A. As much as possible, please include letters of support when submitting your application as there is not guarantee that late submissions will be considered by reviewers. However, it is recognised that there may be delays in securing letters. Please note in your application if there has been a delay and submit them as soon as you receive them, along with your application reference number.

Q. What needs to be included in the letter of support?

A. The application guidance outlines the key elements that we like to see in a letter of support. Letters of support are expected to include the following elements:

- the extent to which partners have been involved in the development of the proposal
- an outline of how the proposed work aligns with your own organisational priorities and the priorities of the OT – particularly in the case where the partner providing the LoS is a UKOT Government agency. This applies to letters from the lead organisations as well as all partners
- information on the capacity of partners to support the project
- details of any matched funding your organisation is proposing, either financially or in kind, and whether confirmed or not.

Q. For government support letters in a different language (where getting an English letter is not possible) should we provide a translation? If so, what is the best way to provide a translation?

A. Please provide a translation of any letters of support not written in English – this can be a straightforward translation/need not be by a certified translator.

Q. How do we show in the budget that we have built in consideration of currency exchange rate fluctuations?

A. The easiest way to do this is to include a comment in the application form or cover letter to address this. There is no easy way to show this in the budget form itself, since you cannot include any contingency funds.

Q. Do you have any guidance on how to best cost for variations exchange rates?

A. Ensure you have looked a variations in rates in the previous few years and why they occurred, and consider any known issues that may affect rates during the time of your project and use this information to forecast any variations you can foresee as possible and base your costs on those. This is part of financial risk management and should be a standard working practice for all our projects if working in a currency other than GBP.

Q. One of our project partners is a commercial company. We'd prefer them to be a partner as they are critical for project delivery. However, as a commercial company we assume that they will have to be a sub-contractor. Is this correct? Can we have a commercial partner for a Darwin + project?

A. There is no bar to commercial organisations working on Darwin projects if they are the best expertise available to support the project. It is up to you to decide how they can best be included – but there is no bar to sub-contracting the work in the same way that you might do for any other consultant on the project. We would expect their costs to demonstrate value for money and we would expect them to be able to agree to the terms and conditions of award, in the same way we would any other partner,

Q. If accounts are done in a different language do we need to get them translated for audits? Many audit reports contain thousands of entries so this would probably not be feasible. Can we just get the audit report translated?

A. We do not need a full translation, but would ask for a translation of the audit letter itself and a translation of the balance sheet as a minimum so we can understand the financial implications. And if there are any other significant explanations about the budget, or concerns from the auditor, we would expect them to be translated so we can understand them.

Q. Would there be a percentage of funds going to partner orgs that you would view as too high?

A. We recognise that our projects work in different ways and that the balance of funds going to partners can vary. There is no level that is too high or too low as long as it is clear in the application how the funding will work and that the partners are benefiting from the work.

Q. I could not upload the audit reports because they are too large - what can I do?

A. If they could be compressed and uploaded that would be ideal. If this is not possible, clearly explain why they are not uploaded and send them directly to the Flexi-Grant mailbox (Flexigrant@ltsi.co.uk) with the application number so that we can add them to the application paperwork for you.

Q. Can we change the partners in stage 2? Also, what if the lead organisation is unable to meet the annual turn over? Can we select a new lead organization from among the partner organisations, that meets the financial conditions?

A. Yes – we recognise that partnerships can change for various reasons. You can change or add partnerships between Stages 1 and 2. If you have concerns about the original lead organisation meeting the financial conditions, you are welcome to change the lead if that makes best sense for management of the project and you are all happy with the change. You may want to explain the reason for the change in a cover letter.

Q. What if additional organisations partner with us for Stage 2, can we include them in our application?

A. Yes, you should include new partners at Stage 2, but may want to acknowledge/justify this change in your cover letter.

Q. Are we allowed to adjust budget figures we had submitted in Stage 1?

A. Yes, we would expect some changes to the budget to happen between Stage 1 and Stage 2, however if your budget is significantly different please provide an explanation for this in your cover letter.

Q. Do all the training related costs come under the consultancy costs?

A. Not necessarily – it depends who is providing the training for your project. If you are bringing in external trainers, then they are likely to fall under consultancy costs, but if you are organising training from project partners, these costs may appear in a variety of places such as staff costs, operating costs or other costs depending on what is required.

Q. Can a project underspend in one year due to starting delays perhaps, and overspend in the subsequent year? If there is an underspend in year 1, is the balance of funds carried forward to the subsequent year(s)?

A. Under Darwin funding, the budget agreed for each year is standalone, and you cannot assume you can move funds into different years. Defra will consider requests to rebudget funds as required, but there is no guarantee that they will be able to agree all requests. You should budget each year carefully to ensure that as far as possible costs will be incurred in the relevant year.

Q. Can we submit the one page CVs as part of our application in any format?

A. Yes, please use whichever format you would like but avoid including personal information (e.g. contact details) and ensure the CV is tailored to the role in your project.

Q. Can the operational costs be grouped as per the project outputs or should they be under other budget lines such as workshops, etc?

A. We allow you to keep flexibility to organise your budget as makes most sense to you/in line with your standard organisational processes. However, you should use the template provided and as far as possible stick to the amount of detail expected by the number of lines available.

Q. Re supporting documents that can be submitted - is it OK to submit a reference list AND a diagram on the pathway to change?

A. Yes, but please be reasonable and don't use the "supporting document" feature to circumvent word counts or provide information which isn't in your application form

Q. Can a flow chart be given in methodology portion and attached separately as PDF to stay with in word limit of 750 words?

A. All key methodology information should be included in the main body of your application form – you should not rely on additional materials. You may want to include a diagrammatic representation of your methods in addition.

Q. Will hyperlinks carry over into the PDF shared with reviewers?

A. You can test the PDF functionality by exporting your application form as a PDF and testing this yourself. Hyperlinks in your additional materials should work, but we don't think it is possible to include hyperlinks in the main application form. If you would like to include URLs / references in your additional materials, you may.

Q. Any detail about what exactly you mean by % of time involvement in man power area?

A. We would expect you to know how many days someone is expected to be working on the project and that your budget would reflect this. For example, if someone was working 25% of their time on the project, the budget for their time (Darwin or other) would be equivalent to 25% of their costs.

Q. What is budget schedule to consider in planning activities, considering delays in the start of this round?

A. You should plan for what it realistic and fits the guidance available and your best understanding of what may change. We recognise that the later start date may affect seasonal work and you should take this into account in your planning.

Q. Should we include the actual papers and reports in the referencing? Or a list of the references?

A. Please list references/provide links but do not submit the actual papers in your referencing.

Q. For our Stage 2 application, we have included a project as similar previous contract, but it is older than the 5 year threshold, however very relevant to the aims of proposal. Can we include this?

A. If it is of significant relevance it could be included but please explain why and recognise that it is outside the normal 5 year limit.

Q. Q22b asks to list other similar projects applying for funding. Is that only Darwin Plus funding or any funding?

A. When referring to other work in this question, please ensure you discuss all relevant work, not just that supported by Darwin Plus.

Q. For the FCDO notification question, should this be a letter of support for the project generally, or to specifically to discuss security?

A. This can be either, although it is important that we understand you have considered the security issues if relevant. We also recognise that some FCDO posts are unable to provide responses to all applicants so you may not be able to get a direct response. In this case, explain that you this and show that you have at least considered the published information on the FCDO website.

Technical

Q. Is peer reviewing considered M&E?

A. This will depend on the structure of your project. The slides from the separate M&E workshop sessions might provide some steer on what we are expecting here. As much as possible, evidence provided in support of M&E should be objective and independent.

Q. Regarding addressing the Convention on Biological Diversity, is it worth referring to the Aichi targets, given that they are soon to be revised?

A. Given Aichi targets were only intended to set the agenda to 2020, they will be less relevant for your projects.

Project Staff

Q. Is it OK to list a consultant in the roles table and add their CV?

A. Yes – anyone who is providing expertise in a key project role should be included.

Q. Can key team members be people who do not receive salaries from the project?

A. Yes – but you should still include them in the budget form showing their salary costs being met as matched funding, or comment on how their costs are being met.

Q. If the M&E team is different from the delivery team, are they considered as core staff in the project team section?

A. This may depend on the amount of time allocated to your project and the specific skills required (this could vary depending on your M&E structures). If, for example, you are proposing in-depth household surveys or socio-economic research as a core M&E activity, it may be appropriate to include this individual in the team/provide their CV in order to demonstrate their expertise.

Q. What is a downstream partner?

A. A downstream partner is any organisation which Darwin funding supports – this will include your project partners but may additionally include anyone your partner sub-contracts.

Gender & Safeguarding

Q. Does safeguarding focus on social risks as opposed to environmental risks?

A. Safeguarding is primarily focused on social risks. Considerations of environmental risks should be considered elsewhere in your application form.

Q. Do we need to submit a gender and safeguarding policy with our application?

A. You need to submit a safeguarding policy with your application form. There is a separate question on gender equality in the application form.

Q. Should the lead and partner organisation both submit their own separate safeguarding policies?

A. We only require you to submit the safeguarding policy for the lead organisation, however you should make clear in your application form how you flow these requirements down to partners.

Q. In places where equal female and male participation is not possible but the project makes every effort to encourage as high female participation as possible, is this OK?

A. Depending on the context, we recognise that equal female/male participation may not be possible or appropriate. Please be clear on how your approach is the most appropriate for your context in your application.

Q. What is the expectation around equitability versus equity in the projects? Please explain it a bit more.

A. You should consider how your project can contribute to reducing inequality. In order to do this, you will also need to consider gender equity – i.e. when working in a context where equality does not exist, you will need to consider equity (i.e. fairness) in order to make change (i.e. move towards equality).

Q. Is the project required to develop grievance mechanism?

A. You should ensure you follow best practice in looking after project staff and all those associated with the project. Refer to the safeguarding guidance for more information.

General

Q. We are in uncertain times, how flexible will Darwin be in terms of activity timelines if we find it difficult to achieve them in the timeline?

A. As much as possible you should consider uncertainty in your project design. For funded projects, there is a change request facility which will allow you to make changes to your project timeline if needed – however it is not guaranteed that all requests are approved so as much as possible you should propose a realistic budget and timeframe at the application stage.

Q. How can we deal with the CV-19 uncertainties in terms of starting dates of the project?

A. You should consider what start date best suits your project within the dates in our guidance for this round and if it is significantly later than July, please explain why.

Q. Are you able to comment on the success rate at stage 2?

A. The total number of projects we are able to support depends on the overall budget and budget spread of the highest scoring applications, so we are unable to give a specific number.

Virtual Workshop Agenda

Agenda Item
Introduction to the Workshop
Project Design Tools - Why use project design tools - Articulating your “pathway to change” Group Exercise: Introducing effective logframe development
Break
The Importance of Good Evidence and Appropriate Indicators - Identifying SMART indicators - Collecting and reporting evidence Group Exercise: SMART indicators and means of verification
Workshop Close

Key points or common issues arising from the virtual workshops

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.
- Assumptions are not always clear – clearly articulating assumptions can help demonstrate the project logic and strengthen the project logframe.
- 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.

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.
- Means of verification should also be specific, and having more than one means of verification for an indicator can be helpful to provide adequate evidence.
- Means of verification such as reports or papers can potentially be used to support more than one indicator.
- Indicators should be selected that are comprehensive enough to measure all aspects of a project's Outcome and Outputs.
- Identifying 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.

‘What Makes a Good Application?’ – DPAG Presentation Q&A

Q. Is there any variance allowed in the budget from stage 1 to stage 2? If yes, how much variance is allowed?

A. Yes, we would expect some changes to the budget to happen between Stage 1 and Stage 2, although there is no strict rule on the variance any significant differences should be explained in your cover letter.

Q. Is there a standard format for CVs?

A. No, please use whichever format you would like.

Q. How do you suggest we deal with the impact of Covid-19 on travel required in projects for example?

A. We would encourage applicants to be realistic on what they are able to achieve with regards to travel limitations, quarantine requirements and to consider the associated costs. You should also consider possible alternatives should it take longer to reduce social distancing or travel than currently expected to ensure that your project is able to adapt and keep on track. You need not include this detail in your application, but confirmation that you have considered alternatives would be encouraging.

Q. Is there anywhere in particular in the stage 2 application where we should demonstrate ethics considered in our project?

A. In the Darwin Plus Stage 2 application form, there is not a specific question that focuses on ethics. Please consider ethics throughout your application form where relevant for your project .

Q. Has the upper limit of project costs increased because of Covid-19?

A. No, the upper limit has not increased due to Covid-19. The decision to increase the upper recommended limit of projects was made independent of the pandemic.

Annex 1 – FAQ and Common Issues webinar attendee summary