Darwin Plus Local

Guidance Notes for Applicants

Round 8

October 2026

Please note: This round of Darwin Plus Local will be available for:

- ***ODA projects that implement tried and tested methods and environmental solutions to contribute towards biodiversity and conservation.***
- ***Non-ODA research and development, capital expenditure projects or projects that implement tried and tested methos and environmental solution to contribute towards biodiversity and conservation.***

Please see Section 2.1 of this Guidance for further clarification on the research and development classification.

In Round 8, we will be welcoming applications for projects that will be implemented between 1 April 2027 and 31 March 2028 (for projects lasting a 12-month maximum duration).

Round 8 opens for applications Monday 5 October 2026

Round 8 application deadline – 23:59 GMT on Monday 23 November 2026

Subject to change and confirmation, Round 9 is scheduled to open in April 2027 (tbc), welcoming applications for projects lasting a 6 - month maximum duration (running 1 October 2027 to 31 March 2028 (tbc)).

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

UK International Development

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

These guidance notes provide information on:

- what can and cannot be funded
- how to apply
- the process used to select projects for funding

Applicants should also read the Finance Guidance, which explains:

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

Applications will be evaluated by JNCC with funding decisions made by Defra. Grants will be administered independently by NIRAS. Applications should be made through the online application portal **Flexi-Grant** at bcfs.flexigrant.com.

Further resources and templates to support your application are available on the website.

Please read all the available guidance. If you require additional assistance, please email DarwinPlusLocal@jncc.gov.uk.

For queries specific to using the Flexi-Grant system, email: BCF-flexigrant@niras.com

https://darwinplus.org.uk

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

Glossary

Biodiversity	"Biological diversity" means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
Capital expenditure	Capital expenditure refers to long life/high value items (assets) such as large pieces of equipment or other assets which have a life span over a year.
Defra	Darwin Plus is a programme of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), UK Government. Defra decides which projects to fund. Defra is the Fund Secretariat.
Evidence	Ranges in format, quality and relevance and include, documented and undocumented experiences, data, studies, policies, best practices etc. but is particularly valued when it is quality assured, accessible and applicable.
Lead Applicant	The individual who leads on the submission of the application and supporting materials and will be the project contact point during the application process.
Lead Organisation	The organisation or individual who will administer the grant and coordinate the delivery of the project, accepting the Terms and Conditions of the Grant on behalf of the project.
Matched Funding	Additional finance that is secured to help meet the total cost of the project, including public and private sources, as well as quantified in-kind contributions. It does not include additional public finance mobilised from UK public bodies, although this can be captured in applications.
NIRAS	Darwin Plus Administrator (the Fund Administrator), and first point of contact for active projects.
JNCC	The Joint Nature Conservation Committee; the public body that advises the UK government on international nature conservation, and Defra's delivery partner for Darwin Plus Local. JNCC will evaluate applications to Darwin Plus Local and monitor delivery of the programme.
ODA	Official development assistance – commonly known as overseas aid – is when support, expertise or finance is supplied by one government to help the people of another country via activities that promote economic development and welfare as a main objective.
OTBS	UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy
Project Partner(s)	Have a formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities.
Project Leader	The individual with the necessary authority, capability and capacity, and a full understanding of their role and associated obligations to take responsibility for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant.
Scale	The ability to take a proven approach and evidence to deliver greater impact either through larger grants or through uptake by stakeholders or other mechanisms.
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment
Stakeholder	Are consulted, engaged and/or participate in project activities as they have an interest or concern in the project and its impact. They can also

	be partners, but if not, they would not have a budget management, or a formal governance role, within the project.
Terms & Conditions	The grant funding terms and conditions which will accompany the grant award letter. An example of these terms and conditions (which Defra has the right to amend from time to time) are found at section 3.10 of this guidance.
UK Overseas Territory	UK Overseas Territories (*UKOTs* or *OTs*), also known as British Overseas Territories, refer to the Territories listed at 1.3.
Value for Money	Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes. Value for money is not about achieving the lowest initial price.

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1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of Darwin Plus Local, its objectives, and eligible countries.

1.1 Context

Darwin Plus is one of Defra's Biodiversity Challenge Funds. The aim of Darwin Plus is to help deliver long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs).

The Darwin Plus programme (Figure 1) now consists of four grant schemes: Darwin Plus Local (to which this guidance applies), Darwin Plus Main, Darwin Plus Strategic (introduced April 2023) and Darwin Plus People & Skills (the new name for the long-standing Darwin Plus Fellowships scheme). For more information and guidance on applying to the latter three grant schemes, please refer to the Darwin Plus website.

The aim of Darwin Plus Local is to support small scale environmental projects exclusively in the UKOTs, with the aim of improving outcomes for biodiversity, building capacity in-territory and contributing to local economies. Darwin Plus Local is continuing to provide grants of up to £50,000 for organisations and up to £20,000 for individuals. The application process for Darwin Plus Local has been streamlined to build confidence and familiarity in the grant application process which, over time, is intended to help more people to apply to the other Darwin Plus schemes.

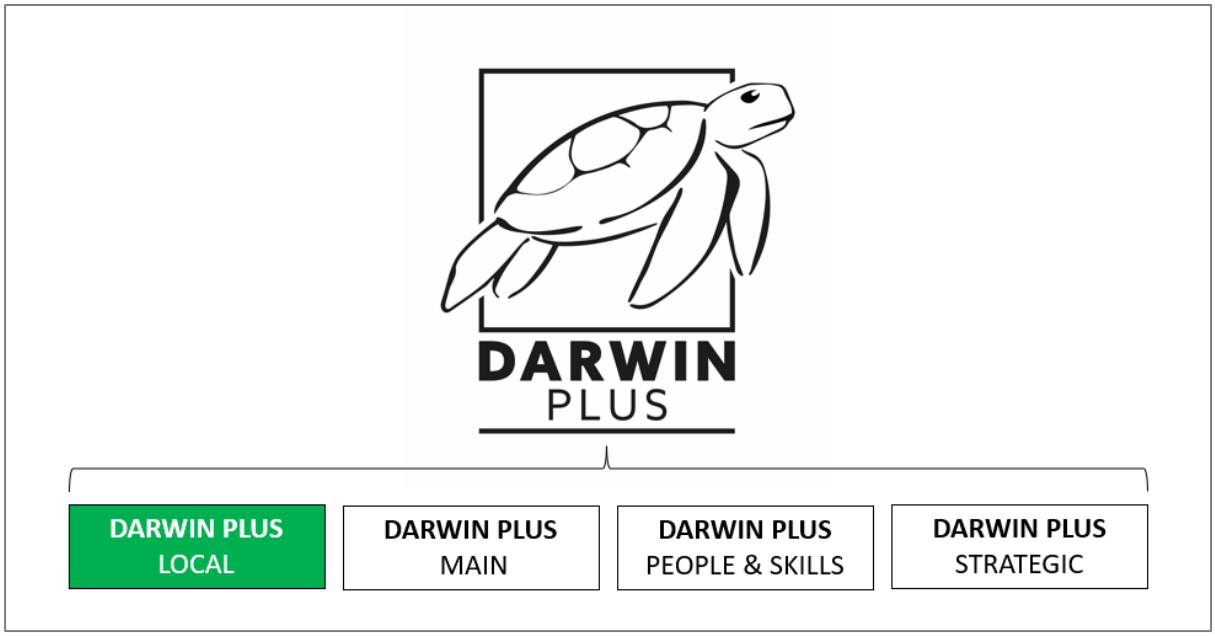


Figure 1: A diagram displaying the four schemes of Darwin Plus: Darwin Plus Local (which this guidance applies to), Darwin Plus Main, Darwin Plus People & Skills, and Darwin Plus Strategic

1.2 Objectives

Applicants to Darwin Plus Local must demonstrate how their project will contribute to measurable outcomes in **at least one of the following Darwin Plus themes and alignment to the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy (OTBS) with a clear focus on biodiversity and the natural environment:**

The broad themes of Darwin Plus are:

- **Biodiversity:** improving and conserving biodiversity, and slowing or reversing biodiversity loss and degradation;
- **Climate change:** responding to, mitigating and adapting to climate change and its effects on the natural environment and local communities;
- **Environmental quality:** improving the condition and protection of the natural environment;
- **Capability and capacity building:** enhancing the capacity within UKOTs, including through community engagement and awareness, to support the natural environment in the short- and long-term.

Please note that the overall focus of the Darwin Plus Local fund is on biodiversity and the natural environment. Projects responding to the climate change theme should, therefore, focus on mitigation or adaptation to impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions. Projects that focus primarily on other areas such as renewable energy, waste or public health may not be eligible.

The UK OTs Biodiversity Strategy (OTBS), published in 2025, outlines 6 common Goals to promote and catalyse the successful delivery of vital on-the ground action in support of biodiversity conservation, protection and recovery. **Successful applicants must demonstrate clear and measurable outcomes against at least one of the 6 Goals.**

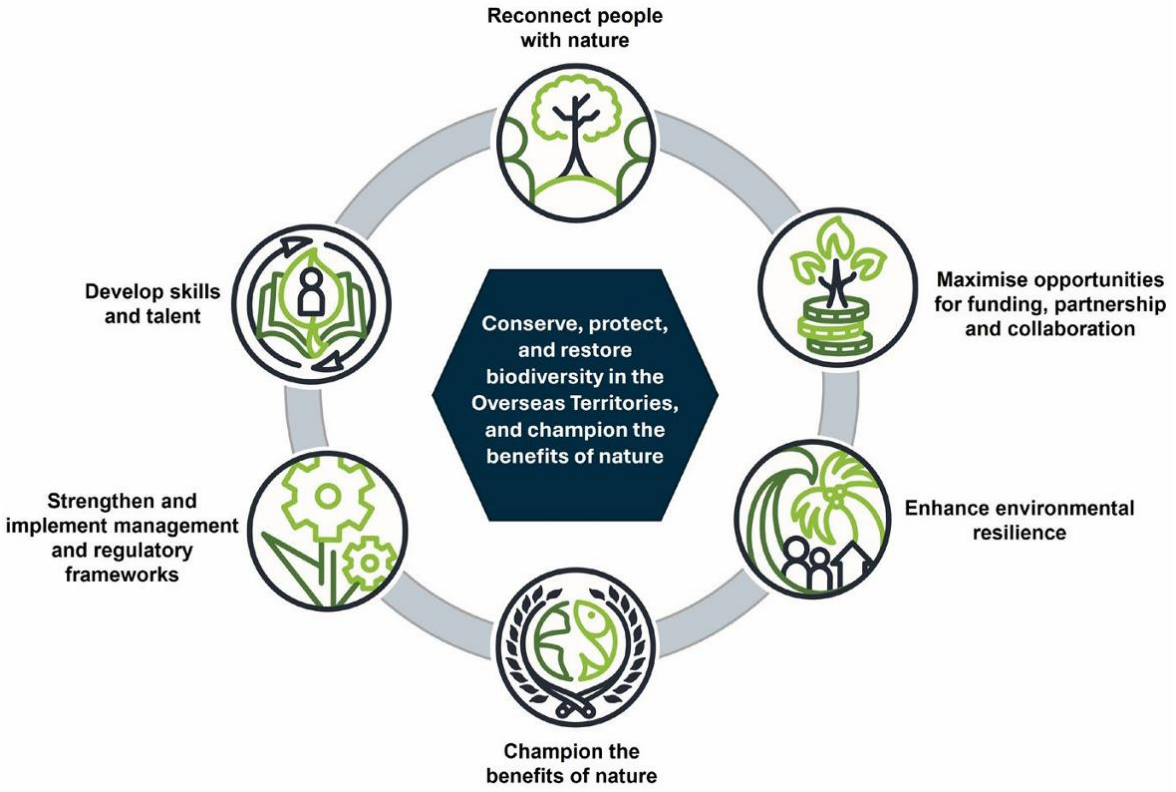


Figure 2: A diagram displaying the 6 common Goals of the OTBS.

The OTBS includes a bespoke chapter for each UKOT – setting out their own national priorities under the six common Goals. **Successful applicants are expected to demonstrate clear and measurable outcomes against at least one of the relevant UKOT's national priorities.** Applications addressing issues that have emerged since the OTBS must explain this is the case and justify why they are a priority.

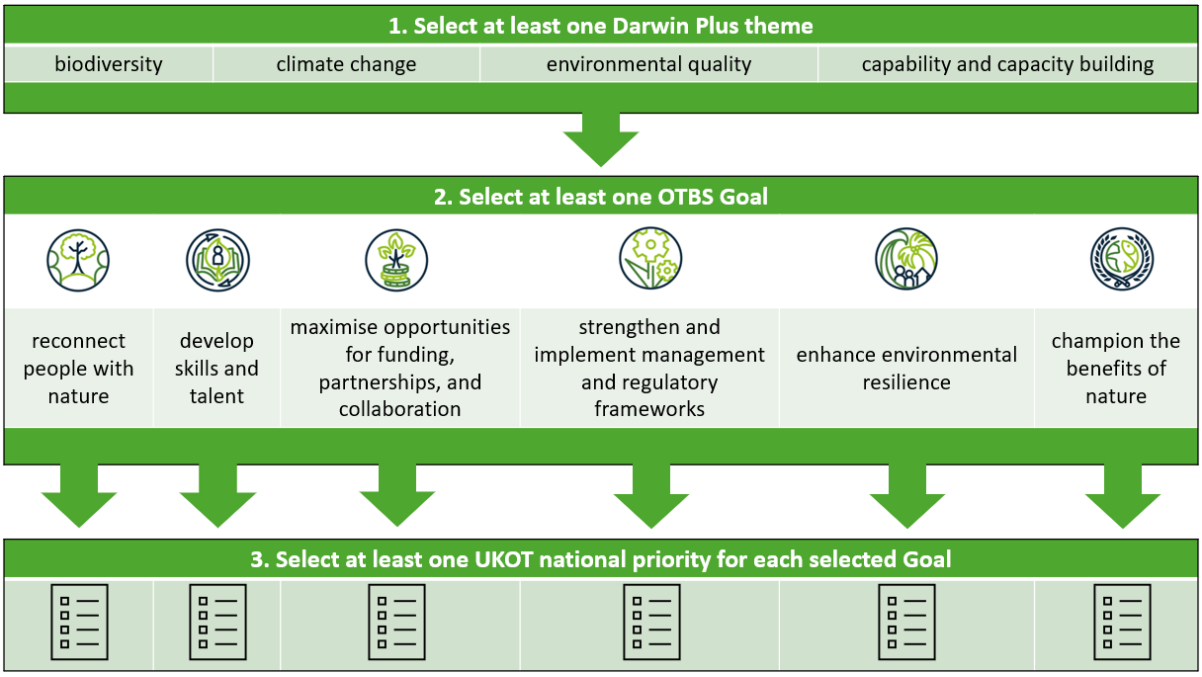


Figure 3: A diagram displaying how projects must align with the Darwin Plus themes and the Goals and national priorities outlined in the OTBS.

1.3 The United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOTs)

Darwin Plus funding is open to applications for projects in all UKOTs. The UKOTs are split between those that are non-ODA eligible and those that are ODA eligible:

Non-ODA UKOTs:

- Anguilla
- Bermuda
- British Antarctic Territory (BAT)
- British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)[1]
- British Virgin Islands (BVI)
- Cayman Islands
- Falkland Islands (FI)[2]
- Gibraltar
- Ascension Island
- South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

[1] Applications for projects in BIOT remain welcome, will be processed as normal, and successful applications honoured.

[2] When completing the application on the Flexi-Grant portal the Falkland Islands is listed as 'Falkland Islands (the) [Malvinas]. This is something that cannot currently be changed within Flexi-Grant but reference to the Malvinas will be removed before any documents are made public.

- Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia
- Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI)

ODA eligible UKOTs:

- Montserrat
- Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie & Oeno Islands
- St Helena
- Tristan Da Cunha

2 Darwin Plus Local Projects

This section provides information on the types, size, and duration of projects which may receive funding through Darwin Plus Local.

2.1 Eligible and non-eligible activities

Projects must contribute to measurable outcomes in **at least one** of the Darwin Plus themes noted in section 1.2 (biodiversity, climate change, environmental quality, and capability and capacity building) and alignment to the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy **with a clear focus on biodiversity and the natural environment**.

The amount and type of budget available for Darwin Plus has changed and Defra is now required to split project funding across different internal allocations. This means that:

- Non-ODA eligible territories will be funded through this route for:
    - Projects which carry out planned research and development to provide new and creative approaches to biodiversity conservation, producing documented results and methods that can be shared and reused for future projects. *Examples can include wildlife or habitat surveys, public consultations and workshops, capacity baseline assessments, projects to trial new interventions, citizen science.*
    - Projects for capital expenditure items, such as large pieces of equipment or other assets which have a life span over a year.
- Projects that implement tried and tested methods and environmental solutions to contribute towards biodiversity and conservation, and do not have a strong research and development focus.*

  Subject to ODA budget availability in Defra, territories eligible for ODA funding will be funded through this route for:

- Projects that implement tried and tested methods and environmental solutions to contribute towards biodiversity and conservation, and do not have a strong research and development focus*.

* Please see Annex A for guidance on whether a project is classified as research and development.

Please note that any capital expenditure in projects must be clearly justified.

Please note the importance of health and safety and environmental risk assessment in the design of your project. If there is any possibility that your project may have negative impacts on the environment or human health, it is important that you provide a comprehensive analysis of potential environmental and human health risks, and the prevention measures you will take to ensure the work does not cause harm.

There are some activities and costs **which will not be eligible** for funding through Darwin Plus Local. Activities that are not eligible for funding through Darwin Plus Local include:

- Activities that would normally be classified as business-as-usual, or part of a UKOT government's core functions (such as full-time staff salaries or routine management activities);
    - Note that funding might be used for discrete pieces of work that provide data to feed into core activities, for example, mapping OT priority habitats and soils to inform future environmental management.
- Ongoing maintenance of habitats or protection of species;
- Work where the main focus is not on biodiversity or the natural environment, such as built heritage, waste, or renewable energy;
- Where a project is generating an income or profit, you are expected to re-invest the money into the project or local environment or return it to the Fund Administrator.

Please see Annex A of the Darwin Plus Local Finance Guidance and the Terms and Conditions (which can be found on the Darwin Plus website) for a list of costs that are not eligible for funding, such as gifts, bribes, and fruitless payments, and costs that are not normally acceptable for funding, such as excessive hospitality and tips, bonuses, alcohol, etc.

Darwin Plus Local is not intended to fund several applications to make up one big project, and all applications will be screened and evaluated with this in mind. If you submit several project applications instead of one overall project application (which may be more suitable for Darwin Plus Main or other bigger funds), there is a risk that all of your applications will be deemed ineligible. Proposed projects can be part of an existing larger programme of activity, but only if it is made clear in the application how this project will be a distinct project, with results attributable to Darwin Plus Local funding.

Please also be aware that your application to Darwin Plus Local will be considered within the context of the wider Darwin Plus funding programme, and if appropriate, you may be advised by the assessment panel that your project is more applicable to *Darwin Plus Main*, *Strategic* or *People & Skills.* Please ensure you apply to the scheme you feel is most applicable to your proposal.

2.2 Funding from any other UK Government body

Applicants are required to indicate (in Q3 of the application form) whether they have received, applied for, or plan to apply for any other UK Government funding for their proposed project or a similar project. If this is the case, applicants are required to disclose details of their applications, explaining how the activities funded by Darwin Plus Local are distinct and complementary. However, applicants cannot make multiple funding applications for the same or similar project in the same year to Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus, IWT Challenge Fund and/or Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature (OCEAN) Grants Programme. Failure to declare multiple applications for the same or similar project could result in all applications being rejected.

2.3 In-territory spend

Darwin Plus Local was designed with the idea of building capacity and capability in the UKOTs. Therefore, we expect that at least 80% of the grant is spent in-territory. Spending in-territory means using the grant to, for example, purchase local equipment or skills, employ local contractors or staff, use local materials or resources as far as practical and available. In-territory spend also includes purchasing equipment, materials, or training services from outside the UKOT which will remain in-territory after the end of the project. In exceptional circumstances, there may be exemptions to the

80% rule, for example if expertise and skills are not readily available in the territory and must be brought in by engaging consultants, partners or contractors from outside the territory (see section 3.2 below). In these cases, please provide the justification in Question 10 (Costs) of the application form. See section 1.8.4 of the Finance Guidance for more information.

In-territory spend is defined in Darwin Plus Local as including funding spent on:

- Equipment purchased in-territory;
- Equipment that cannot be acquired in-territory and is therefore purchased abroad, but will remain and be used in-Territory beyond the life of the proposed Darwin Plus Local Project;
- Training or skills that cannot be acquired in-territory and are therefore purchased abroad but skills will remain and be used in-territory beyond the life of the proposed Darwin Plus Local project;
- Time for consultants or staff based in-territory.

In-territory spend does not include:

- Time for consultants or staff who are based abroad, even if they travel to the OT to undertake the work;
- Shipping and import costs for equipment purchased abroad;
- Travel and subsistence costs where they incur spend outside the OT.

2.4 Size and duration of projects

Darwin Plus Local is open to applications from organisations for funding requests up to £50,000, and from individuals for funding requests up to £20,000.

Projects in this Round (Round 8) can last for a maximum of twelve months and should plan to begin activities from April 2027, and all projects must be completed by 31 March 2028. Applicants should design their projects to be completed within this timeframe. This measure is to ensure that all funds are spent within the 2027-28 financial year (**1 April 2027 – 31 March 2028**). Applicants should budget according to the 2027-28 financial year. **Budgets cannot be moved between financial years, except in very exceptional circumstances and change requests may not always be accepted.**

Please be aware that, as a UK Government funder, the Darwin Plus programme budget is bound by financial years; unspent programme funds cannot be saved for the following year. As a consequence, moving individual project budgets to subsequent years reduces the total programme budget available to award new projects in the future. Applicants should take this into account when designing their projects.

Awards are paid in two instalments as outlined in Section 4.2 of the Darwin Plus Local Finance Guidance: an advance of **up to** 60% of the grant and a final payment of 40% after the project has ended successfully (and the final report has been accepted). **Variations from this standard approach may be possible if agreed in advance.** The final payment should be based on actual spend.

Darwin Plus Local is not intended to be a multi-year grants scheme.

3 Project requirements

This section provides information on project requirements.

3.1 Lead Organisation and Project Leader

Applications must be made by the Lead Organisation. This can be an organisation or an individual who agrees to the Terms and Conditions including managing the grant, its finances, reporting and governance. **The Lead Organisation must be based in one of the UKOTs.** Where a UKOT has no permanent population, the applicant must demonstrate their long-term meaningful connection to that territory.

The **Project Leader** is the individual with the necessary **authority, capability and capacity**, and a full understanding of their role and associated obligations to take **responsibility** for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant. The Project Leader and Lead Organisation can be one and the same person: if this is the case, they must be based in one of the UKOTs, unless otherwise justified as above.

There is no limit on the number of applications a Lead Organisation may submit in each Round, but we would encourage internal co-ordination to ensure all submissions are competitive. Defra may consider the number of applications from a single organisation as part of their decision-making process.

3.1.1 Applying as an individual

As an individual you can apply for Darwin Plus Local grants of up to £20,000. If the application is successful, the Fund Administrator will ask the individual for verified proof of identity such as a passport, ID card or driving licence as well as for a proof of solvency such as a personal bank statement and a police check. The applicant must also open a separate project bank account if the application is successful in order to receive the grant. This will be checked by the Fund Administrator**.**

3.2 Partners and stakeholders

Applicants may benefit from partnering with other individuals or organisations to increase the skills, knowledge, experience and resources available to them. There is, however, no requirement for applicants to partner with others. Applications will not be assessed more favourably for having project partners.

Applicants may receive support from partners, consultants or contractors based outside a UKOT when expertise or capacity is not readily available within the territory. In such cases we would expect at least 80% of the grant to be spent within the territory (see 2.1.2 above). If more than 20% of the grant is expected to be spent outside the territory, applicants must clearly provide their justification in Question 10 (Costs) of their application form.

Applicants should list project partners. Project Partners can be based elsewhere and differ from stakeholders as they have a **formal governance role** in the project (for example, representation on a Project Board or Management Committee), and a **formal relationship** with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities. In contrast, **Stakeholders** do not have a budget management, or a formal governance role, within the project but are engaged and participate in project activities.

3.3 Conflicts of Interest

A Conflict of Interest is a situation in which a person or organisation is in a privileged position (i.e. has access to information or influence over an activity or decision) and could use that position to give themselves or someone they are connected to an advantage (financial or otherwise) elsewhere.

It is often important to consult those involved in a particular field of work in order to get key information and to achieve objectives. Therefore, the identification of a possible conflict does not always lead to the exclusion of that person or organisation in the activity in question, however it does allow all parties involved to make an informed decision about how they should proceed.

Illustrative examples of conflict of interests include but are not limited to:

- A project partner holds a position (for example as a consultant, director or advisor) in an enterprise that may also have an interest in influencing government or other policy.
- A project partner has a financial interest in an output developed by a project.
- A researcher holds a position in an enterprise that may wish to restrict or otherwise manage adverse research findings for commercial reasons.

Should a potential or perceived Conflict of Interest arise during the lifetime of the project, the project should immediately inform NIRAS as the Fund Administrator.

3.4 Gender equality and social inclusion

Applicants to Darwin Plus Local should make all reasonable and adequate efforts to address inequalities, including gender inequality and other power imbalances in project design, implementation and reporting.

3.5 Value for money

Projects must demonstrate good Value for Money in terms of the scale and legacy of the expected impact relative to cost. Value for Money is delivered through a combination of:

- responsible budget management;
- efficient and effective use of funding to deliver the desired outputs;
- sustainability of the intervention;
- equitable distribution of any results.

Each project should have a realistic budget and achievable timeframe for delivery: overly ambitious projects may be rejected. Projects can demonstrate Value for Money by (but not limited to):

- Showing that the proposed work does not significantly cut across or duplicate work, especially work being funded through other environment or research programmes;
- Showing matched funding from other organisations, where matched funding has been sought;
- Considering evidence, including lessons learnt, from relevant historical and existing initiatives, and reflecting this in project design;
- Showing project activity will be new and additional, above and beyond what might otherwise have occurred without the project;
- Showing that funding is for a distinct project with a clear end date and specific, measurable results.

Value for money is a more important consideration than overall project cost. For further guidance, see the Darwin Plus Local Finance Guidance on the Darwin Plus website.

3.6 Prevention of bribery, corruption, fraud and other irregularity

Applicants to Darwin Plus Local agree to at all times comply with all applicable Laws, statutes and regulations relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption.

Applicants must have a sound administration and audit process, including internal financial controls to safeguard against fraud, theft, money laundering, counter terrorist financing or any other impropriety, or mismanagement in connection with the administration of the Grant if successful. They must be prepared to report all cases of fraud or theft (whether proven or suspected) relating to the Project by notifying Defra at fraudanderror@defra.gov.uk as soon as they are identified.

3.7 Safeguarding

Defra has a zero tolerance for inaction approach to tackling sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH). If successful in applying to the Darwin Plus Local grant scheme, the Lead Organisation and its Project Partners will need to take all reasonable and adequate steps to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment of any person linked to the delivery of their project by both their employees and any Project Partner and respond appropriately when reports of such activity arise.

Applicants should include the risk of SEAH within Question 12 acknowledging the risk of SEAH and what mitigations the project will put in place to prevent harm. Describe how the project will prevent and respond to allegations of SEAH should they occur.

Should the Lead Organisation and/or Project Partners become aware of suspicions or complaints of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, they should take swift and appropriate action to stop harm occurring, investigate and report to relevant authorities (for criminal matters) when safe to do so and after considering the wishes of the survivor. They should also promptly contact Defra at ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk to report any allegation of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment related to their project. Further information is detailed in the grant terms and conditions.

3.7.1 Safeguarding: Iran conflict

Due to the ongoing conflict within the Middle-East, projects seeking to operate within BIOT and the Sovereign Base of Akrotiri and Dheklia (Cyprus) must ensure they have contingency plans in place to minimise the risk presented to those involved within projects. Projects must have the full support of OT government and administrations to operate safely. Given the possibility of escalation, Defra strongly recommends that projects do not operate if it is not safe to do so. We recommend that you keep in contact with Defra to notify us of any changes to your project due to the Iran conflict within the Middle East.

3.8 Communications

Applicants should clearly communicate how funding will be utilised. Applications must include a short, plain English summary in Question 6 of the application form of what the project will do, which if successful, may be used in communication activities. This summary should be written for a non-technical audience with little or no prior knowledge of the issue, and clearly describe the project plan and intended outcome.

During delivery, successful applicants will be engaged to support wider communications and awareness raising activities.

3.8.1 Open access policy and data sharing

The UK government is committed to “push for a global transparency revolution” in the availability and use of data to improve accountability and decision making. It is also a crucial part of our commitment to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

All outputs from Darwin Plus Local projects should be made available online and free to users whenever possible. This includes all derived and raw data on species, land cover and land use, through appropriate national, regional and global databases.

Applicants should consider their project outputs and how this information can be shared with others. This fund will not cover costs for open access publishing as it is unlikely that data can be gathered, analysed, written up and published in the timescales of this fund.

Further information on open and enhanced access can be found on GOV.UK.

3.8.2 Transparency

To support transparency, successful project **applications**, along with subsequent **reporting**, **will be published** on the Darwin Plus website and potentially elsewhere.

If publishing **sensitive information** such as location data risks increasing the threat to certain species or habitats, please bring this to the Fund Administrator's attention and this can be considered for **redaction prior to publication**.

3.9 Monitoring and evaluation

Robust monitoring frameworks support both the efficient delivery of the project as well as the capability to demonstrate the impact and value for money achieved. Darwin Plus Local projects will be asked to submit one short final report, along with any appropriate supporting materials (such as photos, videos, or other supplementary material to demonstrate project activities, impacts, and results).

We may also request information and/or materials on project activities and successes for use in communications and publicity to promote Darwin Plus Local and project work. Further information can be found in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance.

3.10 Health, Safety and Security

The applicant is responsible for all security arrangements in relation to the project including the health, safety and security of any person employed or otherwise engaged as part of the project, including those employed or engaged by any delivery partners, and any equipment purchased or deployed as part of the purposes of the Grant Agreement. Applicants should include relevant health, safety and security risks within Question 12, outlining how the project will prevent incidents occurring.

Darwin Plus funding cannot be used to fund any project-specific insurance premiums intended to cover medical expenses, injury or disablement, and or death unless, by exception, these are explicitly approved by the Authority in writing in advance.

3.11 Terms and conditions

Successful applicants will be issued a grant award letter containing the Terms and Conditions of their grant, including the grant purpose, value, period, and reporting and financial arrangements. Defra retains the right to amend these Terms and Conditions at any time. Applicants to Darwin Plus Local are agreeing to adhere in full to the grant Terms and Conditions (which can be found on the Darwin Plus website). Applicants are encouraged to note the clauses on: safeguarding, gender inequality and prevention of bribery, corruption, fraud and other irregularity.

An example of the grant award letter provided to successful applicants, and the Terms and Conditions which they are required to meet, is available on the Darwin Plus website. A document summarising

the key Terms and Conditions is also available. This has been created for the benefit of Darwin Plus Local applicants, however you should read the document in full.

4 How to apply to Darwin Plus Local

This section contains information on how and when to apply to Darwin Plus Local.

4.1 Completing the application form

All applications must be submitted:

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

Competition for funding is strong. Applications which:

- Are incorrect or incomplete
- Do not match all published criteria, including eligible dates and page limits on supporting materials
- Are submitted using incorrect templates
- Do not support work in a UKOT
- Are not submitted by a UKOT Lead Organisation
- Do not include a Letter of Support when required

Will be rejected as ineligible.

4.2 Supporting evidence

The following table lists the essential and optional supporting evidence:

	Essential evidence: All applicants will be required to submit the following evidence as part of the application process:	**Optional evidence**: Depending on their project proposal, applicants may also wish to submit the following evidence:
Cover letter – to explain why the project is a strong match for funding and to explain the role, capability and capacity of the Project Leader/Lead Organisation (and partners, where involved). The cover letter should clearly reference any conflicts of interest and demonstrate how feedback has been acted upon, if received. The letter should be presented on headed paper, kept brief	**x**	

and succinct (a maximum 2 pages), and submitted as a single PDF file.		
Letter of support from the relevant UKOT Government – should funding be sought for activities: taking place on Government owned land and water, involving biocontrol or Invasive Alien Species eradication projects, or where projects will require Government-issued permits for their completion.	**x**	
Budget as requested in the Darwin Plus Local Finance Guidance (part of the application form).	**x**	
Darwin Plus Local Workplan, using the template provided and uploaded in the application form.	**x**	
Map(s), a **list of references, or site images** can be **optionally** submitted as a **single combined PDF** file to support your application; but these **must not exceed 5 sides of A4 in total**, or it will make your application ineligible.		**x**

If this material is not correctly submitted, submitted on a modified/incorrect template, or exceeds the required file or page limits, then the application may be rejected as incomplete.

4.3 Darwin Plus Local Round 8 Timetable

The timetable for applying to Round 8 of Darwin Plus Local will be as follows:

Applications open 5 October 2026.

Deadline – **23:59 GMT on Monday 23 November 2026**

In Round 8, we are accepting applications for projects that will be implemented from April 2027 to March 2028 (twelve - month maximum duration)

Results will be announced by February 2027**.**

Project start dates will be agreed from **April 2027,** subject to completion of the necessary due diligence checks.

All applications will be acknowledged via an email from Flexi-Grant within 5 working days of the funding round close. If you have not heard after 5 days, please contact the fund administrator at: BCF-flexigrant@niras.com.

The timetable for Round 8 gives successful applicants a maximum of twelve months to spend their grants before the end of the financial year (31 March 2028). Please refer to section 2.4 for further advice on this requirement.

5 Assessment process

Applications will be assessed by JNCC in two parts:

- **Initial review:** to progress applications which meet the essential eligibility criteria.
- **Expert review:** to score eligible applications against the assessment criteria in section 6.

Final decisions will be taken by Defra, on consideration of the advice received from JNCC and on the funds available. Defra has the right to consult the relevant OT government for feedback on prospective projects to assist the JNCC experts in their overall assessment and recommendations. Arrangements are in place to ensure there are no potential conflicts of interest in the evaluation of applications. JNCC are only involved in scoring applications for Darwin Plus Local and will not be eligible to apply for Darwin Plus Local projects, nor as a partner.

5.1 Results of applications

Once the funding decision has been made, **all Lead Applicants** (both successful and unsuccessful) **will receive notification** via email from Flexi-Grant. Successful applicants will receive an offer of funding.

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.

5.2 Resubmission of applications

If your application is unsuccessful, you may submit a revised application to a subsequent Round of Darwin Plus Local. While all unsuccessful applicants will be provided with some feedback on their applications, we also encourage you to be proactive in seeking further feedback on any unsuccessful applications by contacting the JNCC Darwin Plus Local mailbox (DarwinPlusLocal@jncc.gov.uk) and to incorporate any feedback into your new submission.

Applicants should re-submit in the correct format and in accordance with the guidance applicable to the Round in which the resubmission is made. Please outline how you have addressed previous feedback in your **cover letter** (ensuring your responses have been included throughout your application as relevant).

6 Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed by JNCC according to the following criteria. In order to be considered for funding, projects must meet all of the essential criteria, and at least one criterion from each of the three sections listed as desirable criteria (policy priorities; impact; and technical excellence). JNCC will use these criteria to generate a score (see Annex C), which Defra will use to determine the suitability of applications for funding. The more desirable criteria a project meets, the higher the score and the more likely it will be successfully funded.

Essential Criteria

- **The project demonstrates measurable outcomes in at least one of the themes of Darwin Plus (see section 1.2), and at least one of the UK OT Biodiversity Strategy 6 common Goals, and at least one of the relevant OT national priorities laid out in the OTBS (unless justified with a letter of support from the relevant UKOT Government that this is a new priority that has emerged since OTBS publication), either by the end of the project's implementation or via evidenced mechanisms for post-project delivery;**
- **The project does not cause negative environmental impacts;**
- **The project applicant has the capacity and capability to deliver the project;**
- **The project represents value for money**;
- The project aligns with 1 or more OTBS goal AND 1 or more national priority.

Desirable Criteria

Policy Priorities

- The project has good local ownership, as evidenced by commitment from relevant local stakeholders including UKOT Governments or UKOT civil society;
- The project outcomes will contribute to embedding good environmental decision-making in UKOT policies and processes;
- The project delivers measurable benefits for the local environment by tackling identified environmental problems;
- The project implements existing proven environmental solutions or tests promising innovative solutions;
- The project builds capacity, contributes to the local environment and supports an environmentally sustainable economy in-territory;
- Expenditure is clearly justified and shows how it will be applied for meaningful environmental outcomes on the ground.

Impact

- The project is sustainable – the outcomes will be sustained after the funding is finished;
- The project demonstrates how it will strengthen the capability and capacity of local partners;
- The project contributes to environmental goods and services within the UKOT(s).

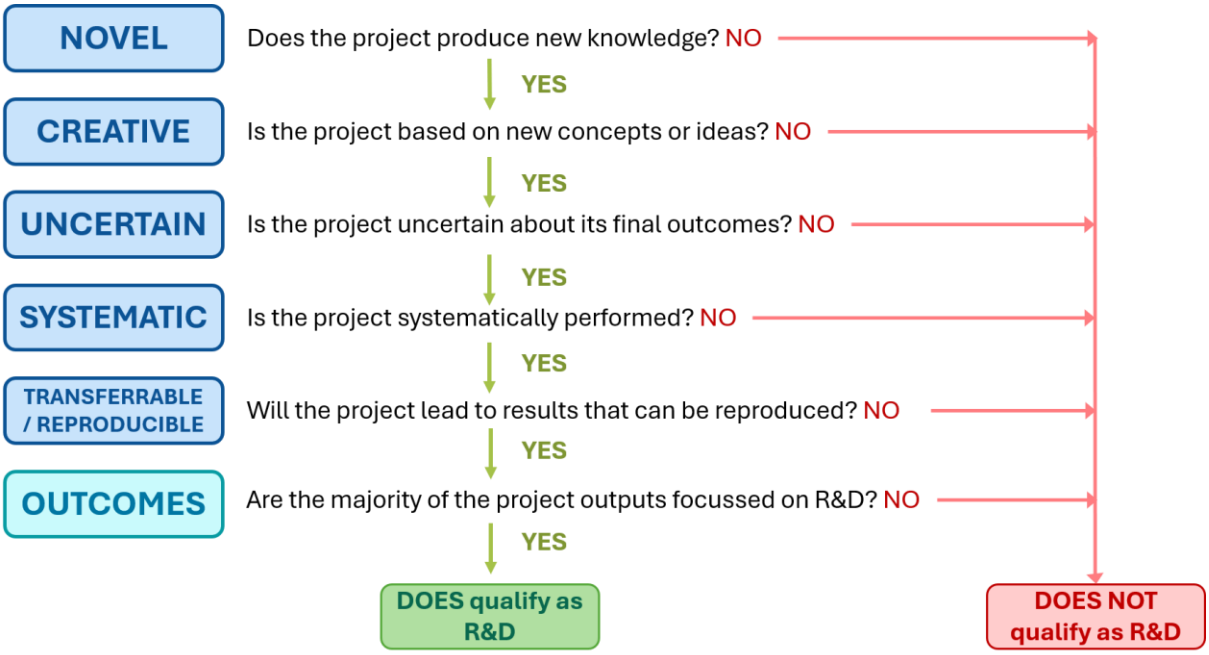
Technical Excellence

- The project has been well-planned and has a clear goal, purpose and outputs;
- The activities are practical and achievable;
- The risks are identified, assessed and have clear mitigation actions;
- The project description clearly demonstrates the intended change(s) the project is aiming to bring about, how these changes will be measured, and exhibits a clear understanding of the evidence needed to demonstrate these changes, and how this evidence will be shared and made publicly available;
- A well-defined exit strategy is in place from the start of funding;

- Addressing inequality, including gender inequality and/or other power imbalances is understood and reflected in the design, monitoring and evaluation of the project so as to prevent inequalities being increased.

As much as possible, you should draw on existing work to provide evidence, where available, to support your application. If you are specifically drawing on experience from past Darwin Plus projects, please include the project (not application) reference.

Annex A. Flow chart to define whether a project classifies as Research and Development



Annex B. Assessment Scoring

Score	Description
6	The proposed project **meets all of the essential assessment criteria and most of the desirable criteria, including multiple from each section (policy priorities, impact and technical excellence).** The majority of the assessment criteria are met to a high standard.
5	The proposed project **meets all of the essential assessment criteria and a number of other desirable criteria, including at least one from each section (policy priorities, impact and technical excellence).** The criteria it met are mostly to a high standard. There are minor issues that could improve the project, but these are unlikely to significantly impact the project's success and should not prevent it from being funded. It is likely to significantly contribute to the objectives of Darwin Plus.
4	The proposed project **meets all of the essential assessment criteria and some of the desirable criteria, including at least one from each section (policy priorities, impact and technical excellence).** The criteria met are mostly 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 Darwin Plus.
3	The proposed project **meets all of the essential assessment criteria and at least one desirable criterion from each section (policy priorities, impact and technical excellence).** The criteria it met are to an acceptable standard. The project is likely to contribute to the objectives of Darwin Plus. It has some issues with design which will need to be addressed in order to increase its suitability for funding.
2	The project **meets some of the essential assessment criteria and some or none of the desired criteria**. The project has failed the need to meet at least one of the desirable criteria from each of the three sections. Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard. Overall, however, it is inconsistent in terms of the assessment criteria. The application requires significant changes to make it suitably address the assessment criteria to make it competitive.
1	The proposed project is unsatisfactory and **meets only a few of the criteria** outlined. The proposed project is likely to require significant alterations to make it address the assessment criteria.
0	**Fails to meet any of the criteria outlined. The proposal is unclear or poorly presented to the extent that it cannot be properly assessed,** e.g. flawed in scientific approach, subject to serious technical difficulties, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative of other research or existing work.

Annex C. Awarded Grants

The award is made to the Project Leader/Lead Organisation. They will be the first point of contact for all aspects of project management (including financial management) and will be responsible for the overall management of the project and accountability of the award, on behalf of the institution they represent. Please ensure you use your project reference in the subject line of all correspondence: you can find this in your offer letter. It is different to your application reference.

Reporting Requirements

All projects are required to submit a Final Report at the end of the award. A template will be available on the Darwin Plus website with details of how to submit. Reports must provide robust reporting against the intended objectives and include information and evidence on outputs and ethics and environmental impact. Reports can be submitted along with any appropriate supporting materials (such as photos, videos or other supplementary material to demonstrate project activities, impacts and results). We may also request information and/or materials on project activities and successes for use in communications and publicity to promote Darwin Plus Local and project work. You can see examples of previous reporting on the Darwin Plus webpage.

To receive all fund payments from Darwin Plus Local, technical reports and financial claims must be complete and within deadlines. If you do not meet these requirements your funding can be stopped.

Project datasets

Data collection, analysis, management and storage protocols should be established to ensure the integrity of research findings and their subsequent use within the research team, Darwin Plus and eventual wider public domain.

The application should demonstrate that the publication of results and secure data storage has been thought about, a plan exists, and appropriate resources are included.

We encourage that where possible and appropriate data is shared directly or indirectly with Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF.org) for wider accessibility.

Data protection and use of personal data

Information supplied in the application form, including personal data, will be used by Defra as set out in the Privacy Notice, available from the Darwin Plus website.

This **Privacy Notice must be provided to all individuals** whose personal data is supplied in the application form. Some information may be used when publicising Darwin Plus including project details (usually title, lead organisation, project leader, location, and total grant value).