Darwin Plus
New Projects Online Webinars and Workshops 2021

In July 2021, three events were held for new projects funded under Darwin Plus Round 9. These events were open to new grantees.

Webinar – Financial, administrative and technical reporting for new Darwin, Darwin Plus and IWT Challenge Fund projects

One 7th July, we hosted a webinar for new projects to introduce the financial and administrative reporting systems for new Darwin Plus projects. The aim of this webinar was to welcome newly funded projects, and provide advice and support relating to financial, administrative, and technical reporting.

Workshop Session –Communications Strategy and M&E Plan

On 14th July, we held an online, interactive workshop. The workshop content built on the webinar, and its aim was to provide advice and support relating to project communications and monitoring & evaluation.

Workshop Session – Common issues & complementarities and sharing experiences on M&E

On 15th July, we held another online interactive workshop. This session focused on providing a forum for projects to network with those working on similar topics and areas in order to foster lesson learning.

This note covers the presentations that were given on all three days, including questions and answers, and notes on the workshop activities carried out by participants. All the presentation slides from the webinar and workshop are also available via the Darwin Plus website here.

DARWIN INITIATIVE

Contents

Webinar Agenda – Financial, administrative and technical reporting for new Darwin Plus Projects

Agenda Item
Welcome and introduction to the webinar
The evolution of the Darwin funds
Introduction to the Darwin and IWT Secretariat and NIRAS-LTS team
Questions
Technical reporting requirements
Technical reporting dos and don'ts
Questions
Financial reporting requirements
Terms and conditions & GDPR considerations
Questions
Project communications
Final Questions & Close

Notes on the new project webinar

In total, 36 people registered for the session and 28 people were able to attend. See Annex 1 for details on the spread of people attending the workshop.

The objectives of the session were:

- To provide an introduction to Darwin Initiative
- To 'meet' the Darwin Initiative key people and understand their roles
- To get an insight into the administration and reporting requirements for Darwin Plus projects

The webinar gave participants the opportunity to ask questions on project administration, finance, reporting, and communications. Questions and responses are summarised in the following section of this report. A poll carried out during the webinar indicated that the pace of the webinar was about right. Following the completion of the webinar more detailed feedback was requested from participants. This is also summarised below.

Webinar Q&A

This section includes questions submitted in advance of the workshop/webinar as well as questions submitted on the day.

Financial and admin questions

You will find most information regarding financial management of your projects in the documents below, which will be an excellent reference resource throughout the duration of your project.

- The "Finance for Darwin and IWT" document and Claims forms can be found here: https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/
- Technical reporting templates for Darwin Plus projects can be found here (N.B. these are updated each year): https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/reporting-forms-change-request-forms-and-terms-and-conditions/
- Technical information notes can be found here: https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/information-notes/

Technical Reporting

The example of Do's seems very general when compared to the Don'ts

Reports are scored based on progress towards their Outputs and Outcome, so clear reporting alone (in line with the "do's" in the presentation) won't mean you'll be allocated the highest score. But there are things you can do to ensure your report is as clear as possible in order to present what your project has achieved in the reporting period.

We encourage you to ensure you read the template and provide clear reporting against the sections outlined there, including clear reporting and signposting of evidence.

The reporting information note includes a bit more information in terms of do's and don't of reporting. This can be found on the DPLUS website here.

"Well ahead of schedule" seems a bit vague

During the webinar we responded to this question on the understanding this might have been in reference to completing reports ahead of schedule. In line with that, we recommend you review the templates as soon as possible (they do change each year but the current templates on the Darwin Plus website should give you an indication of what is expected). It may take you some time to collate inputs from partners and pull together the evidence required for reporting, and we don't advise you leave this to the last minute.

However, we now realise this was in reference to one of the quotations on the slides related to "do's" of reporting where it says "Activities 3.3 and 3.4 have largely been completed in Year 3, well ahead of schedule". This is in reference to the original implementation timetable/workplan submitted with your application form. This project is reporting that it has completed its activities ahead of this schedule.

How long after the report do you get the score?

Both final and annual reports are subject to review by an independent reviewer (half year reports are read but no score or formal response should be expected).

In general, we work towards 8 weeks from submission of your report to return of a review, but this somewhat depends on availability of our reviewers and our quality assurance stages.

How do you choose reviewers?

We have a mix of reviewers we use across the funds, comprising a mix of experts in monitoring and evaluation and environment/conservation, rather than necessarily the specific technical area in which you are working. Reviewers are often selected based on their technical expertise and their geographical experience.

Are the means of verification within our reports also openly accessible by the public?

Your full report is published on the Darwin Plus website, though we redact personal or confidential/sensitive information for data protection/GDPR reasons or because you have flagged it specifically as not to be published online. In terms of annexes shared with your report, if they are submitted as separate documents then these won't as standard be uploaded onto your project page on the Darwin Plus website.

Linked to this, we do encourage that outputs produced through the project are made available publicly as much as possible, though this may not be on the Darwin website.

What MOV is needed for evidence of training?

This will vary depending on your specific training but there are a few different ways you can capture evidence of training. Ideally, we don't just want evidence that the training activity has happened though this can be very helpful as evidence with your report – for example, attendee lists, photographs, and/or examples of training materials. In addition to/instead of these, evidence of some measure of quality of the training is particularly useful, i.e. that capacity has increased or knowledge has improved, you might want to consider post-training feedback or pre-post training evaluations, or some measure that individuals trained are applying their new skills in their roles.

Financial

Should we be commencing project before first claim is approved/payment made?

From our side, there is no reason to delay starting your project (unless of course your organisation does not allow you to do this). We do apologise that the award paperwork isn't yet with you, but it will be issued as soon as possible.

Will the offer paperwork be sent out digitally or on paper? Or both?

All award paperwork will go out digitally and will be sent out to the lead applicant in Flexi-Grant.

There are deadlines for technical reporting, are there deadlines for financial reporting?

There is strong guidance that we would like to see Q1-Q3 advance claims in at the start of each quarter because we like to make sure we pay money out to you as soon as we can. This also helps Defra to manage their internal funding and reporting.

At the end of the year, you are asked to report your actual spend after year end and the deadline for this is 31st May, so there are a couple of months after the end of the financial year (FY) to provide this (N.B. all projects work towards UK Government FYs, 1st April – 31st March) – but please get this in as soon as you can.

More details on the timing and requirements of claim forms/financial reporting is included in the Financial Guidance.

Are electronic signature accepted now?

Whichever signature you include on the grant acceptance form (GAF) as the people who are authorised to sign claims on your behalf are the signatures that we accept. So, if an electronic signature is used on the GAF we will accept this on the claim forms.

Other

When will the call for the next round of funding be released?

We are looking to open the next round of funding in the near future, and will do this as soon as possible. Please keep an eye on social media channels and the mailing list for Darwin where we will share information.

Can you apply for a new grant when your current one is still going?

Yes, you can. In the new application, it would be important to be clear how this new project is distinct or linked to the ongoing project. This is important to ensure we aren't double funding the same work (i.e. new funding shouldn't be sought to finish work which you failed to achieve under an earlier project).

Is there a financial reporting contact that we can discuss more in depth approaches to payroll and internal fees charges as I don't think this forum is geared to individual institution specifics? We've found audit post award to be very intensive and would like to clear any hurdles in advance of any spend.

The best contact related to finance is Darwin-Finance@ltsi.co.uk – please feel free to send any specific questions here. Because of COVID restrictions, we aren't regularly in the office at the moment, but if you would like a phone call to discuss anything please let us know and we can set this up.

How easy would it be to move project officers between project partners, if partners would like to do this, for reasons of, say, one partner having very time=consuming recruitment processes?

This might depend on the nature of the change – for example, if there were financial implications. For a specific change, if you aren't clear if a formal change request is required please feel free to send us an email and we can help advise. The specific guidance in the change request template may also help advise you.

Selected Webinar Feedback

How useful did you find the webinar?

Of the 28 people who attended the webinar, 11 attendees provided feedback. 7 attendees reported finding the webinar very useful and 4 attendees responded that it was moderately useful.

How did you find the pace of the webinar?

10 webinar attendees (of the 11 who provided feedback) found the webinar pace just right and 1 found the pace too fast [particularly the section on Finance].

Do you have any recommendations for how we can improve?

N/A - appreciate you taking time to go through reporting requirements

It would be difficult as you are dealing with people who have little experience with a Darwin Plus grant to those with some experience.

Slightly confused about how the finances work, but hopefully this will be clearer when grant agreement documentation is received.

No, was a good refresher

Perhaps in your invitation include what will be covered and if there is anything new. We run many D+ projects and it was all known information for me. it is more tailored for newbies or to go through any changes.

The finance reporting section was too fast for me (but I grasped so little that I struggled to form a question). I will go away and look at the resources mentioned. The pace of the other sessions was fine.

Do you have any suggestions for future webinar topics?

Dealing with reporting in more detail.

Not really, might be good to have something on partnerships, how they are viewed as strengthening/ weakening bids due to partner costs, money going out of territory etc. Not a significant issue, but something we discuss on occasions when the call comes out.

This is more of an application topic than project financials & reporting 'Creating the logframe for Darwin applications'.

I think your current series covers everything.

Case studies where there have been 'mistakes' and how those can be avoided.

Workshop Session - Communications Strategy and M&E Plan

Agenda

Morning session/Afternoon session	Agenda Item
2:00	Communications Strategy – Presentation on Zoom then group work on Miro
3:15	Short 15 minute break
3:30	M&E Plan – Presentation on Zoom then group work on Miro
4:30	Finish

Notes on session

We held one interactive workshops session focused on communications and M&E planning. We used a combination of two software packages to maximise collaborative working and simulate an in-person experience. Zoom conferencing software was used as its breakout room feature facilitates group work. We used Miro whiteboard software in combination to enable collaborative note taking.

Communications

The first half of the session focused on project communications. The aim of this session was to emphasise the importance of effective communication at the project level, and to outline the communications channels through which this can be achieved. The presentation outlined the key elements of a simple communications strategy and introduced the idea of using interest and influence tools for stakeholder analysis. It also outlined the existing Darwin communications channels of use to projects.

Group work allowed attendees to map their key project stakeholders on an interest/influence tool and develop the key elements of a communication strategy for their project. The groups found that it was particularly important to focus on those stakeholders that were categorised as having low interest but high influence, as they might have the potential to increase their interest/engagement in the project through effective communications.

Developing an M&E Plan

The second half of the session focused on project M&E. A short presentation was given focused on how to systematise the collection of evidence using a monitoring and evaluation plan. The presentation looked at what an M&E plan is, why they are a useful tool, and how to develop a simple M&E plan. The value of revisiting Stage 2 application logframes and indicators, and updating as necessary, was emphasised.

The M&E plan presentation was followed by a group activity. Workshop attendees were asked to complete a basic M&E action plan in small groups using the template provided.

During the feedback to the plenary the following points were discussed:

- Several workshop attendees found it useful to share their logframe with others or have another pair of "fresh eyes" viewing their logframe helped with suggestions on how it could be improved. It was found that keeping the wording simple helped in the overall understanding of what the project was trying to achieve.
- Participants found that ensuring that logframe indicators were capable of measuring not only the number of meetings but also the level of engagement (through surveys or questionnaires) were particularly important.
- How your logframe is understood depends on who is viewing your logframe – some attendees felt that would be helpful to have additional guidance on logframes.

Feedback received

What did we do well?

Excellent as usual! Nothing to suggest on improving. Thank you.

New to this, enjoyed it and the small group integration was instructive, driving good constructive learning.

What could we do better?

No feedback received in this section.

Workshop Session - Common issues & complementarities and sharing experiences on M&E

Agenda

Timing	Agenda Item
2:00	Commons issues and complementarities – Presentation on Zoom then group work on Miro
3:15	Short 15 minute break
3:30	Technical themes and measurement challenges – Presentation on Zoom then group work on Miro
4:30	Finish

Notes on session

We held an interactive workshops session focused on project complementarities and M&E challenges. The aim of this sessions was to provide the opportunity to make connections between projects with similar themes and/or geographies. We used a combination of two software packages to maximise collaborative working and simulate an in-person experience. Zoom meeting software was used as its breakout room feature facilitates group work. We used Miro whiteboard software in combination to enable collaborative note taking.

Commons issues and complementarities

Projects discussed the common challenges they were seeking to address and whether or not they had stakeholders in common – many projects found they were addressing the same threats to biodiversity conservation / environmental issues and were working with similar stakeholders in their focus countries. The specific challenges COVID-19 presents to project delivery were discussed, including:

- The common issue of weather was particularly notable, with attendees explaining that hurricane season and unfavourable sea states could adversely impact fieldwork and the effectiveness of field equipment.
- Challenges around the quality and accessibility of current data were also discussed and how this may affect data collection during the project lifetime.
- COVID-19 and related implications such as factoring in time and additional costs for quarantine, the importance of working with local stakeholders already present, and the further delays to shipping given the remote locations of some of the UKOTs.

- The importance of sharing experiences and any issues faced related to technical challenges such as the use of similar field equipment (such as underwater cameras) and locally sourced materials.
- Networking with other projects and having the opportunity for lessons learned is particularly helpful as projects may be in different phases and those in the earlier stages could learn from those that are more advanced.
- Remote meetings also present problems in terms of aligning timings (dependent on the location of the team vs project sites) and ensuring key, influential stakeholders participate (e.g. high-level Government officials may also use in-person meetings as networking opportunities so may be less able/likely to engage in online meetings).

Technical themes and measurement challenges

On measurement challenges and sustainability issues, project discussions included reflections on finding similar aspirations with other Darwin Plus projects on capacity building and data sharing and how to overcome challenges faced by COVID-19 and stakeholder engagement. The topic of measuring simple engagement (through the provision of information) in comparison to measuring behavioural change or changes in attitude was also discussed during this session. Capacity building was also relevant to the exit strategies of many projects in attendance, as was clear communication with important project stakeholders – such as focus communities and key government agencies. With regards to the logframe, some new projects found it particularly useful to have an opportunity to receive insights from more experienced teams – which helped to ensure that logframe indicators were both achievable and measurable. In addition, assessing the timeframe of logframe Outputs, evaluating when something had happened and making sure that it was achievable within the lifetime of the project helped to assess whether the indicators were SMART.

Feedback received

What did we do well?

Really useful to meet other DPlus projects.

Good to meet support and other DPlus projects. Really valued having someone present in the breakout groups to facilitate.

The value of exploring the cross linkages was valuable.

The M&E and Communication strategy workshop was also really useful - it has really helped clarify our next steps and how we can maximize our communication opportunities.

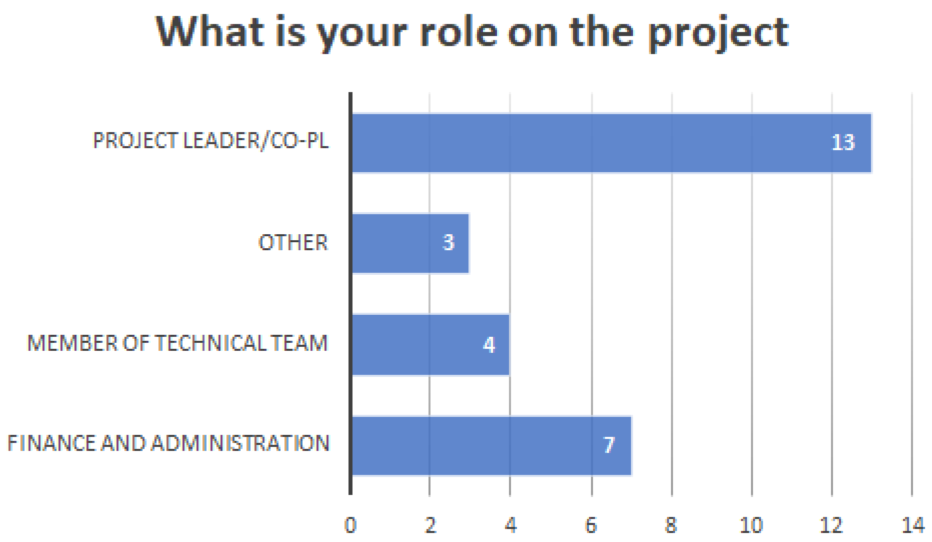
What could we do better?

Would it be worth focusing on the commonalties seen to drive a session on that, around knowledge sharing & learning from each other's mistakes?

Annex 1 - Webinar Poll Responses:

What is your role on the project?

(27 of 28 attendees responded)



What is your history with Darwin?

(26 of 28 attendees responded)