Darwin Plus

Stage 2 Workshop

27th, 28th September and 3rd October 2022

Webinar and Virtual Workshop Proceedings

In September and October 2022 a number of events were held for applicants to Darwin Plus Round 11 who had been invited to Stage 2.

On 27th September a webinar session for Stage 2 Darwin Plus applicants was held via Zoom. The webinar, which included a presentation from Defra Policy Advisor, Seun Alaba, 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 28th September focused on M&E, the effective use of project design tools, and the importance of good evidence and appropriate indicators. On 3rd October a presentation given by Jonathan Hall, 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 raised in the session and includes answers to these.

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

The *"Guidance for applicants" and "Finance guidance"* 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.

Contents

Webinar Agenda – FAQ and common issues

Agenda Item
Welcome from Defra
Administrative eligibility
Meeting Objectives
Finance
Project team expertise and letters of support
Avoiding common issues
Questions
Gender & safeguarding
Questions
Communications
Questions

Overview of Frequently Asked Questions and Common Issues Webinar

A total of 14 people registered, and 12 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, safeguarding and communications.
- Provide the opportunity for applicants to ask questions of the Darwin Plus, administrators and Defra.

The webinar was open to Darwin Plus Stage 2 applicants.

Webinar Q&A

Q. What is the required font type and size for the annex?

A. There is no specific requirement for font type or size, other than to please be reasonable! For example, Size 12 Arial. If you're completing a Theory of Change or other graphic there may be the need for smaller font, however, please think about readability for the Advisory Group.

Q. In the new risk management section of the application form, could you explain a bit more about the gross risk and residual risk definitions?

A. Gross Risk (also known as inherent risk) is the level of risk without any mitigation, so if you "went in cold" and the risk was there, this would be the impact of the risk if it was allowed to run its course. Residual Risk could be summarised, in contrast, as looking at what the remaining risk is once you have implemented the mitigation. Further information and description of the various categories of risk can be found in the Risk Management Guidance and Risk Framework Template (which can be downloaded within Flexi-Grant - please note we don't require this to be submitted at this stage, but you will if you are awarded funding).

Q. What place do the transgender and non-binary communities have within the gender and diversity considerations?

A. If you feel comfortable tackling issues around possible impacts for the transgender community, or more generally regarding wider diversity issues such as intersectionality around race and ethnicity, then please do. Gender has been focused on specifically here due to UK Government Legislation, International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, which sets a simple baseline for how projects should think about gender. One difficulty may be that there is limited space in the application forms for you to talk about your approach to these issues, however please get in touch if you have further thoughts as we welcome insights on how projects can do this more effectively.

For any further questions or comments, please contact: BCF-DPLUS@niras.com

Summarised Webinar Feedback

How useful did you find the webinar?

- Of the 12 people who attended the webinar, 8 attendees provided feedback. 5 attendees reported finding the webinar **very useful**, with 3 finding it **moderately useful**.

How did you find the pace of the webinar?

- Out of the 12 attendees a total of 11 provided feedback during the session on the pace of the webinar. 10 found the pace of the webinar **about right**, with 1 stating it was **a bit fast**.

Please share your thoughts on what you found useful

- The expected content for the Letters of Support (not quite what it reads on the guidelines).
- Gender aspects - good to know you don't expect projects to be too thorough but rather demonstrate how they will take relevant aspects into consideration.
- The Finance information.
- A good review of key points to include in applications and discussed new additions to the application form.
- Clarity on expectations for some sections. Gender, safeguarding and risk.
- Section on gender and safeguarding, as well as general tips and hints such as percentage ranges for M&E etc.
- The email to ask specific questions.
- Going through parts of the applications.

Do you have any recommendations for how we can improve?

- The sound of a couple of speakers was not great.
- Seeing as DPLUS works in the UK overseas territories, perhaps show slides that represent those countries as most (not all!) of your slides seem to show more Darwin Main related countries.
- No, good pitch and content.
- It would be helpful to have a similar session for prospective applicants prior to Stage 1.
- More about feedback from participants as part of process.
- It would have been good to provide examples, specifically on the risk management and the safeguarding parts of the application.
- Please explain more slowly the technical parts of the application, mostly when discussing sections that have been included for the first time. But everything was very clear.

Other comments submitted as feedback

- To schedule the webinars in the morning, if possible.
- All useful information and am looking forward to the other sessions.

M&E Virtual Workshop session: Project design tools and importance of good evidence and indicators

Agenda

Agenda Item
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

A total of 15 people registered, and 12 people were able to attend.

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 being aware of the tensing and wording used in Outcome or Output statements vs activities vs indicators, as this can help distinguish between different logframe elements (e.g. past tense more appropriate for Outputs, present tense more appropriate for activities). Good, clear, concise phrasing is necessary for them to be distinct. The project used in the example exercise left us with lots of questions, highlighting the importance of being clear.
- Considering implicit assumptions is important. For example: will individuals be willing to provide data, or will management respond to a project's provided output?
- It was challenging to differentiate between Outputs and the project activities which were presented for the exercise. As the Outputs and activities provided were vague, it was difficult to align them against each other, and the process of grouping activities together was helpful in understanding the Outputs. This highlighted the importance of ensuring applicants’ own logframes were clear in distinguishing between these elements.
- The Problem/Impact/Outcome statements were easier to locate than the Outputs and activities. These higher-level statements helped frame an understanding of the other elements in the logframe. Once the exercise was completed, revisiting the Problem Statement to be clear that the outlined project addressed all elements in the Problem Statement was a useful exercise.

- It was slightly unclear how one Outcome can achieve the desired impact of a project. It is likely that there was a big “leap of faith” between these two statements that needed to be revisited/considered.

The Importance of Good Evidence and Appropriate Indicators

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

- It was challenging to differentiate between Indicators and Means of Verification presented in the exercise. Because the wording of the indicators in the example was not SMART, they were hard to identify and interpret. This exercise therefore helped to emphasise the importance of language in presenting clear and concise indicators and Means of Verification, as it should be clear how they are distinct and link together in your application’s logframe.
- Indicators must be SMART and consider baselines and specific targets for expected change. As part of this, discussions focused on metrics of change vs desk-based outputs, and how indicators for each would look.
- The importance of discussing and sharing opinions while developing logframes. By drawing on a ‘critical friend’ you can help develop a stronger overall design which stands up to external scrutiny.
- The importance of contextualising the logframe: readers unaware with the project should know why things are being included, and be able to easily piece together the components. This is best tested by someone unfamiliar with the project reading over a draft.

Summarised Workshop Feedback

What went well?

- Group size.
- Miro application worked really well.

What could we improve?

- Font size and fitting.
- More time to think through (or have less activities).
- Give good solutions as examples.
- Include activities in Round 1 to better link all items in the logframe.

‘What Makes a Good Application?’ Darwin Plus Advisory Group Presentation

A total of 17 people registered, and 14 people were able to attend.

Q&A

Q. When talking about the importance of referring to other past projects, do you mean other Darwin projects specifically (in terms of understand and build on), or projects/research more widely?

A. Darwin Plus projects are probably the most relevant when considering how your project ‘fits in’. Think about how your project might build or complement on other Darwin Plus projects that may have touched upon the same issue. If you do have more space or there is particularly wider relevant research, then do show how yours builds on that as we are interested in both.

Q. In terms of capacity, if skills are available from people in-country, can they be written in to show continuations/retention of staff?

A. Where in-country capacity exists to deliver on a project, it is great if they are included in the project, however the Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) often see the same people written into multiple projects over several years, and it can make them slightly sceptical in terms of that individual’s capacity to deliver on all of their commitments. We are not saying that an individual would find it impossible to be involved in several projects, but we would urge you to consider their capacity to deliver and we may ask you for reassurance that this individual has the availability to work on the project.

Q. Could you expand on the regular deliverables in terms of output indicators?

A. Indicators can enable more effective, iterative project management if you include measures at regular intervals – if you only have measures in years 3 and 4 it can be too late to realise something hasn’t really worked. It's good to see if you can have some regular measurement to check that the indicator is being fulfilled, for example at the mid-way point. This allows your project to be responsive to the inevitable changes that come with working in remote small islands.

Q. How important are Letters of Support from stakeholders?

A. They are vital from project partners and territory government/civil society to show local support. Projects without appropriate letters of support are looked on with caution. Letters of support are also useful from wider stakeholders. For example, if you are looking to engage fisherman, you could get a letter signed by 15 local fishermen to show that you already have lots of engagement and strong relationships.

Q. Can the Letter of Support from the lead organisation and the answering of feedback be combined in one letter, or should it be separated in two separate letters?

A. The Lead Partner should submit both a cover letter and a letter of support as they cover two separate things. In addition, the Letter of Support needs to come from someone in the organisation who has the authority to indicate official support from the organisation, while the Cover Letter ideally includes your response to feedback received. Although both can be signed off by the same individual, in some cases they are not, which is another reason why we encourage two separate letters.

Q. Will it be beneficial to link the letters from stakeholders with findings during the actual project to evidence progress and/or findings along the way?

A. Letters have to go in with Stage 2 applications, so, ideally, stakeholders would include in their letter:

- evidence for wanting a project to take place and what they will contribute to it,
- an indication of how evidence or findings from the project will be of beneficial use to them,
- and how they will intend to use them in the long-term/post-project to answer the sustainability question in the application form.

Q. What % are you wanting to see spent in territory?

A. As much as possible! With the recognition that it varies and will be territory specific, especially regarding territory population and capacity. For example, if a territory has a lot of advanced capacity, then more justification would be needed if large amounts are spent on UK, desk-based capacity.

Q. You said that the first year might have lots of set up costs, but could you say something about Darwin liking to see even spread across financial years?

A. The first year is one of the easiest places for budgets to overlook costing – for example related to set-up costs like new staff costs and having equipment shipped and equipped. Overall, Darwin Plus does like to see even spread across the years, which Defra and NIRAS-LTS consider, and reviewers make recommendations which are then approved by Defra – so if you do have time to make sure that the budget is equal over the three years then you can. However, from a reviewer's perspective, the most important thing is to see appropriate spending to deliver the objectives, which most frequently means ensuring that you aren't underbudgeting. If it is the type of project that necessitates a large first year spend, such as an eradication project, then uneven financial spread won't be discriminated against.

Q. How are the 3 DPAG members selected for project evaluation/score?

A. NIRAS-LTS does this by aligning applications with the DPAG's expertise, interests, and spread of OT experience. Conflicts of interest are also taken into account, with DPAG members being excluded from decision-making processes where there is any direct conflict of interest. In-Territory DPAG members, for example, would not review anything at all from that same Territory, regardless of whether or not they are in that project.

Summarised Webinar Feedback

How useful did you find the webinar?

Of the 14 people who attended the webinar, 8 attendees provided feedback. 6 attendees reported finding the webinar **very useful**, with 2 finding it **moderately useful**.

What did you find useful?

- To understand what the evaluation panel would be looking for, especially in relation to the context of the project and the environment in which the problem exists.
- Methodically went through all aspects of the project rationale, design and review process. Gave feedback based on past projects reviewed which made listeners relate more.
- Good opportunity to get an overview of what is needed in the new Darwin Plus Round. Nice to get to know the NIRAS/LTS team too.
- Very useful because it covered all sections of the application.
- The ability to ask questions was useful.
- The short discussion on the four areas of criteria was useful.

Do you have any recommendations on how we can improve?

- I think it may be beneficial for these webinars / workshops to be held for Stage 2 applicants within the first week of being invited to submit the S2 application, just a matter of timing.
- Maybe state that now there are reviewers based in the Territory they will not review any projects from that Territory, regardless of whether they are involved in that project directly.
- Include real examples of past projects as a case study. 'Do/Don't' examples.
- Perhaps have a FAQ that the speaker could refer to. Could have spent more time on the Log Frame as perhaps the most challenging part of the application.
- Possibly allowing microphone usage so participants can clarify questions they have?
- I liked the presentation by Jonathan but would find actual application links to be more relevant. [Darwin Plus response – examples of successful past projects can be found on the Darwin Plus website here: https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/project-search/]

Any other comments?

- Great presentations, really informative. Thank you.
- I liked the presentation by Jonathan but would find actual application links to be more relevant. I did think the short discussion on the four areas of criteria was useful.
- 1hr feels about right.

Annex 1 – FAQ and Common Issues webinar attendee summary