Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund – Covid-19 Rapid Response Round

Guidance Notes for Applicants

October 2020

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1. Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has had environmental, economic, and societal impacts all over the world. The Covid-19 Rapid Response Round has been designed to respond to the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the priorities of the Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus (referred to collectively in this guidance as "Darwin") and the IWT Challenge Fund (IWTCF) and support the early stages of recovery. Successful projects will be expected to represent either the Darwin or IWT Challenge Fund brand in the same way as projects funded during the regular funding cycle.

These guidance notes provide information on:

- what can be funded by the Covid-19 Rapid Response Round

- how to apply to the Covid-19 Rapid Response Round

- the process used to select projects for funding

Applications will be made through the online application portal Flexi-Grant at ltsi.flexigrant.com. There is additional guidance to support applications through Flexi-Grant. **All** of the relevant guidance documents can be accessed through Flexi-Grant, however important information and all key documents can also be accessed on GOV.UK. Applications will be administered independently by LTS International.

Please read all guidance notes and the Finance for Darwin/IWT document before requesting additional assistance, as these provide answers to most queries. If you can't find the answer, please contact the Darwin/IWT Administration Team:

Email: Darwin-applications@LTSI.co.uk or iwt-fund@LTSI.co.uk

Telephone: Please email in first instance and we can arrange a telephone conversation if required.

For queries specific to using the Flexi-Grant system, email: Flexigrant@LTSI.co.uk

2. Introduction

There is a clear opportunity for the Defra international biodiversity grant schemes to respond to the Covid-19 crisis. The pandemic has highlighted the need to confront how environmental degradation endangers economies and societies, and to manage this crisis and prevent future ones we must work harder to address this collision between human and natural systems. Recent engagement with the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC), Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG), and Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group (IWTAG) highlighted a variety of ways that the funds could, and should, be part of this response. A survey of current project leads also showed that, of 75 respondents, 95% reported that their project could respond to Covid-19 in one or more of the following ways: short-term response, longer term recovery (social, economic or environmental), or by reducing the risk of future zoonotic diseases.

The Defra survey to project leads found that 93% of the projects had been affected by Covid-19. The primary objective of the Covid-19 Rapid Response Round is to extend existing projects where they have potential to form part of the response to the pandemic, for example by adapting projects where there is clear scope to provide emergency relief while delivering on Darwin and IWTCF objectives. There is a secondary benefit of retaining capacity within local systems and the NGO community to be able to carry out future work.

Discrete projects, such as projects proposing highly targeted research, are also in the scope of this round. There are a number of research questions emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic that need to be addressed. Further information can be found in section 3.2.

3. What kind of projects can be supported by the Covid-19 Rapid Response Round?

Criteria for projects:

- The lead organisation must be either a current or recent (within the previous 12 months) recipient lead organisation of Darwin/IWTCF main project funding
- Maximum two project applications per lead organisation
- Projects must directly address the impact of Covid-19 on biodiversity or IWT, and sustainable livelihoods
- Project must begin no sooner than 1 January 2021 and end no later than 31 March 2021
- Budget £15,000 – £60,000
- Project are encouraged to involve at least one local organisation
- Projects may be linked to existing projects funded by Defra or other funders, but should deliver additional value over and above existing projects
- Projects may be short-term research projects (see section 3.2)
- Standalone projects will need to have a clear pathway to rapid implementation
- This fund is **not** to support salaries or the core costs of organisations, unless they are linked to measurable outcomes.

3.1 Initiative, Darwin Plus, and IWTCF projects

Projects should apply to the Covid-19 Rapid Response Round under the heading of the most appropriate fund to their project:

- Darwin Initiative
- Darwin Plus
- IWT Challenge Fund

You may apply to a different fund to the one your current project is supported under if you wish.

Further information on each fund can be found in the relevant individual guidance for the main round. The guidance for the Rapid Response Round should be read in conjunction with this guidance:

- **Darwin Initiative Guidance**
- **Darwin Plus Guidance**
- **IWT Challenge Fund Guidance**

Examples of the type of project (or extension to existing project) that could sit under each of the initiatives can be found below, but are not restricted to these examples:

- ○ **The Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus -** Projects could cover immediate research and/or data gathering to understand the links between biodiversity and Covid-19, the immediate impact of the crisis on biodiversity and conservation, and investigating the drivers and risk factors related to zoonotic diseases. Policy and legislation focused projects could also be useful in the short term to support and promote green recovery and ensure recovery strategies benefit both biodiversity conservation and protect human health. Key issues for projects to address could include food security, support for livelihoods, biodiversity and health, including understanding the role of indigenous medicine, and continued effective resource management.

- ○ **The IWT Challenge Fund -** Projects could focus on addressing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the illegal wildlife trade, including law enforcement and sustainable livelihoods. Projects could respond to reduced enforcement capacity across the length and breadth of the supply chain and build capacity in agencies and businesses to respond to changes in trade patterns and criminal activity. Projects could also consider sustainable alternative livelihoods, such as projects aimed at strengthening community incentives for protection of wildlife.

3.2 Research projects

There are a number of research questions emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic that need to be addressed, from seeking ways to reduce future pandemics through

to how we can build resilience within organisations to withstand them when they do arise.

Immediate research should gather information to inform future policy priorities, and look to understand changes to IWT, biodiversity, and sustainable livelihoods on the ground as a result of Covid-19. Examples of potential research questions can be found in Annex D.

Longer term research questions will arise from the early evidence building, but are not explicitly covered through this Rapid Response funding round. Future work carried out through the normal Darwin Initiative and IWTCF funding rounds will continue to expand the evidence base, and look to address and understand the themes that have emerged.

3.3 Countries eligible for Covid-19 Rapid Response Funding

Please refer to the individual guidance relevant to your project listed in section 3.1.

4. Project requirements

Existing requirements on Gender Equality, Value for Money, Monitoring and Evaluation, Ethics, Safeguarding, Fraud Bribery and Corruption, Working with UK Embassies and High Commissions, Open Access Policy and Information Sharing, and Communications will all still apply. Please refer to individual guidance for further information.

5. Covid-19 Rapid Response projects

5.1 Size and length of project

- Projects must directly address the impact of Covid-19 on biodiversity or the illegal wildlife trade, and sustainable livelihoods.

- Applicants must either be a current or recent (within last 12 months) recipient of Darwin or IWTCF main project funding.

- Projects should be a minimum of £15,000 and a maximum of £60,000

- Projects are encouraged to involve at least one local organisation.

Any Defra budget commitment for Rapid Response projects **must be spent by 31 March 2021**, and Defra will not be able to make payments before 1 January 2021. The usual change request process does not apply, and budget cannot be moved into the next financial year. Applicants should take this into account in designing project proposals, considering carefully the level of risk of delay with any activities proposed.

This is not an opportunity to apply for capital expenditure to support the day to day running of your organisation; for example to refurbish facilities or support core salaries. If you are applying for finance relating to a salary you will need to demonstrate a measurable outcome from the role in your application to justify this additional salary cost. Projects must be able to produce evidence of their contribution to address the impact of Covid-19 on biodiversity, or the illegal wildlife trade, and sustainable livelihoods.

You should have a realistic budget and timeframe for your project. Do not be overambitious.

5.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

Projects must be able to produce evidence of their contribution to biodiversity conservation and supporting the economic development and welfare of people in developing countries in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This will take the form of a short 4 to 6 page final report produced at the end of the project in a template to be made available.

5.3 Applicant organisations

Applicants must either be a current recipient of Darwin or IWTCF funding, or have been a recipient in the last 12 months. This means applicants will recently have passed our Due Diligence checks, allowing both applicants and Defra to meet the short timeframe of the Covid-19 Rapid Response Round.

5.4 Project Leader

The CV for the Project Leader should demonstrate evidence of relevant expertise and experience. The Project Leader should usually have a minimum of around 10 years' relevant experience.

The Project Leader will be the main point of contact for the project and will be the person responsible for ensuring any grant meets the relevant Terms and Conditions.

However, at the application stage, the Lead Applicant (i.e. Flexi-Grant account holder) will be the core contact point regarding the application. The Lead Applicant and Project Leader can be the same individual.

Applications may have a co-Project Leader if appropriate, and both individuals should be named on the application form.

We would expect the Project Leader allocate at least 10% of their time to the project.

Project Leaders and their organisation are responsible for the health and safety of all staff working full and part time on their project, and Project Leaders should ensure that the same rigorous standards for assessing health and safety risks are applied to all staff on the project, regardless of nationality.

The Project Leader for your Rapid Response project does not need to be the same individual as the current project or previous project undertaken by the lead organisation.

5.5 Matched funding/Co-Finance and other financial questions

Matched funding is not obligatory, but is desirable.

See the Finance for Darwin/IWT document, for additional information on financial questions.

5.6 Conditions of grant

Successful applicants will be issued a grant award letter. This will set out conditions that will apply to the grant, including the grant purpose, value, period, and reporting and financial arrangements.

You should read the Finance for Darwin/IWT document before making an application to be sure your organisation can meet these conditions. We retain the right to amend the conditions at any time.

6. Covid-19 Rapid Response Round – how to apply.

Please read this guidance before requesting additional assistance. If you can't find the answer, please contact LTS International. Given the current restrictions on office workings, email is recommended and a call can be organised if appropriate.

Email: Darwin-applications@LTSI.co.uk or iwt-fund@LTSI.co.uk

6.1 Completing the application form and eligibility

All applications **must** be submitted through Flexi-Grant and must be in comprehensible English.

Please note that applications must meet the published administrative, technical and financial criteria in order to be considered. This includes, but is not limited to:

- All questions must be completed (N/A is acceptable if appropriate), and all required supporting attachments must be submitted

- Applications must be signed (with a PDF signature uploaded as part of the Flexi-Grant application)

- The start and end dates must be within the funding period stated in the guidance

- The Project Leader (and co-Project Leader if relevant) CV must be **one page only** and must be uploaded as one single PDF document

- Letters of support or other confirmation of support from partners should be uploaded as one PDF document where possible (if your proposed project is directly linked to an ongoing project, you do not need to provide Letters of Support for existing partners)

- The budget must be fully completed using the format provided within the application form. Please note: the financial format uses Defra's financial years: 1st April to 31st March.

These eligibility criteria will be strictly enforced and applications that are incomplete, or do not meet the published criteria, including financials, will be rejected as ineligible.

6.2 Additional materials

You should only submit the materials requested. However, you may include a map to clarify project location. You may also include references, but these should be kept to a minimum, as should weblinks and hyperlinks. You should be able to provide enough information in the space provided on the form. Maps and references should be uploaded as one additional PDF document. They must not be used as a means of providing additional information or avoiding word limits. You should not include reports or scientific papers.

6.3 Submitting your application

Covid-19 Rapid Response projects follow a single stage application process.

Key dates:

- Application (via Flexi-Grant only) deadline - 2359 BST (GMT + 01:00) on **Monday 2 November 2020**.

- Acknowledgement – by midday on **Thursday 5 November 2020**.

- Results – expected by early December 2020.

N.B.: If you have not received an acknowledgement by Thursday 5 November (pm), please call +44 (0)131 440 5181. **Please do not call between 2 and 5 November.**

6.4 Essential and supporting materials

If the following **essential** material is not included with your application it will be rejected as incomplete.

Table 2: Essential and optional supporting material

Essential materials for eligible application	Optional materials for application
Application completed on Flexi-Grant Other materials can be uploaded within Flexi-Grant.	Brief covering letter
Letters or other confirmation of support **from applicant organisation *and*** key partners who are essential to the success of the project combined in one PDF. Please refer to the section below on "Letters or other confirmation of support" for exemptions, which include ongoing projects.	Letters or emails of support from stakeholders
1 page CV for Project Leader.	Details of any dialogue with the relevant Embassy or High Commission in the host country/ies

All material uploaded to Flexi-Grant should be either PDF or Excel.

Additional documents or annexes falling outside of the list above will not be passed to the Board of Experts (see "Assessment Process" below) for their consideration unless they have been specifically requested by or on behalf of the Committee.

Letters or other confirmation of support

If you are applying from a current project and utilising the same partners, you are not required to provide letters of support from partners, but you do require a letter from your own organisation. If your project has now closed, we would expect some evidence that your partners are willing to be involved in this new work.

Letters of support must be in English or with an English translation. Letters written by partners will normally be stronger than those based on a template. For the purposes of this round, we would accept email confirmation of a partner's knowledge of and support of the project in place of formal letters. Letters or emails of support are required:

- as evidence of your organisation's support for your application and the importance of the work to your organisation
- as evidence of your relationship with partners and contacts within the host country
- to support the demand for the work
- to show your ability to meet deadlines and to be able to achieve results with local contacts

Key project staff

In the application form you should list **all** key project staff, i.e. those people/roles that make up the main project team and are critical to project success. You may not necessarily consider these to be staff roles internally, but for the purposes of the application they should be recognised as project staff. You must provide a one page CV for the Project Leader, and for any co-Project Leader.

6.5 Workplan and budget breakdown

All Defra spending must fall within the time-period of 1st January 2021 – 31st March 2021.

6.6 Results of applications

Once the results are agreed, all successful Lead Applicants will receive notification via email from Flexi-Grant. The Covid-19 Rapid Response Round retains the right to clarify any issues raised during the application process or to award funding subject to amendments to the project. The Covid-19 Rapid Response Round also retains the right to withdraw an offer if the applicant is subsequently unable to meet the requirements of the award.

On this occasion, it will not be possible to provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

6.7 Resubmission of applications

As this is a one-off individual emergency response round we do not anticipate any opportunity to submit to a subsequent similar application round at this stage. Reworked applications from this round, will not be considered a resubmission if later presented to one of the main rounds.

7. Assessment Process for Covid-19 Rapid Response projects

All applications will be assessed by a Board of Experts consisting of members from the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC), Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG) and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group (IWTAG). Members are experts in biodiversity, conservation and sustainable development.

The DEC, DPAG and IWTAG follow a strict code of practice. If any member has been involved in the development of an application or is closely associated with the applicant or with a partner institution or organisation, they will declare their involvement and will not assess or be involved in discussions of that particular project.

An overview of the process for assessment is:

1) **Initial review:** Applications that do not meet the essential eligibility criteria will be rejected.

2) **Expert review:** Eligible applications are scored by at least two Board of Experts members against the assessment criteria set out below.

3) **Final result:** Defra staff make recommendations to the Minister on which projects should be funded, based on the strongest applications identified by the Board of Experts.

7.1 Assessment of costs

Costs are rigorously examined during the assessment process and decisions are based on realistic and justifiable budgets to deliver the work plan as well as the value for money justification in the application. Final awards may be subject to negotiation with the relevant Secretariat.

8. Assessment criteria – Covid-19 Rapid Response Projects

The application will be assessed by the Board of Experts from the DEC, DPAG, and IWTAG against the criteria below to generate a score (see Annex A). The Board of Experts will use these scores to determine the suitability of your project for funding.

Score 1: Need for Covid-19 Rapid Response Project

- The project clearly addresses the short-term response or longer-term recovery (social, economic or environmental) to Covid-19, or reduces the risk of future zoonotic diseases.

- The project directly addresses the impact of Covid-19 on biodiversity or the illegal wildlife trade, or sustainable livelihoods, by addressing issues and questions similar to those set out in section 3.

Score 2: Technical Merit of Covid-19 Rapid Response Project

- Does the project have a clear pathway to rapid implementation and the creation of change?

- Is the methodology outlined scientifically robust, clear and sufficient to achieve the outcome?

- Do the outlined objectives of the project seem achievable within the lifetime of the grant?

- Does the project demonstrate good value for money?

- Does the project outline a strong ethics statement?

- If the project is an extension or closely linked to an existing or past project, is it clear how additional benefits will be delivered through this project?

The Darwin Initiative/ Darwin Plus - where relevant. Projects should address at least one of:

- Does the project address the immediate impact of the crisis on biodiversity and conservation?

- Does the project look to support and promote a green recovery, ensuring recovery strategies benefit both biodiversity conservation and protect human health?

- Does the project look to enhance the understanding of the links between biodiversity and Covid-19, for example by investigating the drivers and risk factors related to zoonotic diseases?

- Does the project address at least one of these key issues: food security, support for livelihoods, biodiversity and health, including the role of indigenous medicine and continued effective resource management?

The IWT Challenge Fund – where relevant. Projects must address at least one of:

- Does the project address the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the illegal wildlife trade, including law enforcement and sustainable livelihoods?

- Does the project respond to reduced enforcement capacity across the length and breadth of the supply chain, building capacity in agencies and businesses to respond to changes in trade patterns and criminal activity in light of the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Does the project consider sustainable alternative livelihoods, strengthening community incentives for protection of wildlife?

Research Projects – where relevant:

- Does research gather information to inform future policy priorities, and look to understand changes to the illegal wildlife trade, biodiversity, and sustainable livelihoods on the ground as a result of Covid-19?

- If the proposed project is a research project, is it clear how the results of the project will be applied in practice?

Annex A: Assessment Scoring for Covid-19 Rapid Response applications

Score	Description
6	The proposed project **meets all the of assessment criteria.** The majority of the assessment criteria are met to a high standard. There are few minor issues which if addressed may improve the project but they are unlikely to be detrimental to the delivery of the project and should not prevent it from being funded without changes being made.
5	The proposed project **meets most of the assessment criteria.** The criteria it does meet 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 the Darwin Initiative.
4	The proposed project **meets most of the assessment criteria.** The criteria it does meet are often 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 the Darwin Initiative.
3	The proposed project **meets most of the assessment criteria.** Those criteria it does meet are largely to an acceptable standard. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Initiative. The project has some issues with design which the team would be recommended to review to increase its suitability for funding.
2	The project **meets some of the assessment criteria**. Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard. Overall however, it is inconsistent in terms of the assessment criteria. The application requires 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	For special cases e.g. flawed in scientific approach, subject to serious technical difficulties, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, success depends on the project student or is duplicative of other research. **Fails to meet any of the criteria outlined.**

Annex B: Awarded Grants

The award is made to the applicant organisation, not to an individual. The Project Leader 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.

Contact details will be required for a nominated individual from the finance section of the institution to whom the award is made. This person may be identified once the grant has been offered.

Reporting Requirements

All projects are required to submit a Final Report at the end of the award.

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, Covid-19 Rapid Response Round 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.

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 latest copy of the Privacy Notice for Darwin, Darwin Plus and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund available on GOV.UK. 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 the Covid-19 Rapid Response round including project details (usually title, lead organisation, project leader, location, and total grant value) on the GOV.UK and other websites.

Information (including personal data) relating to the project or its results may also be released on request, including under the 2004 Environmental Information Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. However, Defra will not permit any unwarranted breach of confidentiality nor will we act in contravention of our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679).

Annex C: Demonstrating Poverty Alleviation

Covid-19 Rapid Response projects must clearly demonstrate how they will contribute to, or have a direct impact on, the economic development and well-being of poor people in ODA **eligible** developing countries, by reducing poverty. Note that this criterion does not apply to Darwin Plus projects working in the non-ODA UK Overseas Territories. However, if projects working in these territories are able to draw out any economic development or welfare benefits this would be encouraged.

Successful applicants will demonstrate a clear understanding of development needs in their target situation and explain how their project will help address these needs. Benefits can be both direct and indirect (see the guidance for the relevant fund for further information on this). Projects will need to consider relevant social, cultural or political processes.

In this round, it is likely that poverty alleviation will be demonstrated through the project's response to the Covid-19 crisis, for example by one or more of:

- supporting existing projects to achieve outputs where there has been genuine and unavoidable disruption from the pandemic, for example to mitigate reduced enforcement capacity against IWT or deliver a biodiversity outcome that would otherwise have been missed due to Covid-19

- extending existing projects to increase biodiversity, food security and livelihoods impact in the light of this disruption

- by helping communities to respond to Covid-19 in a sustainable way

- by establishing an evidence base and priorities for future biodiversity ODA and OT funding, for example linking to human health or green recovery.

Annex D: Examples of research and evidence questions

- Rapid surveys of new bushmeat consumption practices
- Risk analysis for legal/illegal/sustainable/unsustainable trade and zoonotic diseases/health – noting that each of these will be different
- The likelihood of previous gains being lost and understanding threats to this
- Hygiene practices in both trade and farming, especially when it comes to transport, slaughtering and preparing animals, offering for sale, and then consumption
- Understanding which species are important for food security, and then what diseases they may carry
- Understanding and mitigating risk of disease transmission, including an understanding of the risks from legal and illegal wildlife trade associated with high disease/transmission risk areas and the food supply chain
- What is happening to livelihoods in key regions – e.g. are some communities proven to be more resilient than others, and what can we learn from these cases? How are community and local systems adapting to lack of tourism?
- Changes in legal and illegal trade patterns and demand
- To understand the wider impact of Covid-19 on projects, organisations, communities, and the wider environment, and the overall impact of the crisis on conservation
- Studying how environmental degradation increases the risk of zoonoses and if/how increased biodiversity might reduce zoonotic transmission risk, identifying locations/location characteristics of where zoonotic disease pandemics are most likely to occur
- The ability of ecosystems to contain the spread of new pathogen agents from their natural reservoirs and how to reduce opportunities for future disease spillovers from wildlife to humans, both by protecting natural habitats from further immigration by humans and controlling wildlife markets
- What kinds of consequences will disruptions to field and lab work during the pandemic have for the species and ecosystems we are studying, monitoring, and protecting?
- What effects will reduced human impacts on wildlife and ecosystems during the pandemic have on wild species (e.g. ranging behaviour, breeding) and ecosystems, and will any of these effects persist into subsequent years?