Connecting project teams with impact evaluation specialists

Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Building and Applying Evidence

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

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Contents

Acronyms

BCFs	Biodiversity Challenge Funds
C&C	Capability and Capacity
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
IWT	Illegal Wildlife Trade
NIRAS	Fund Administrator for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Authorship and acknowledgements

This report was authored by James Kinghorn. Inputs to the planning and execution of the study, and comments on drafts of the report were provided by Hannah Reid, Doug Gibbs, Serene Hargreaves, Jasmine Parkinson, Kevin Seely and Leila McElvenney from Defra and Victoria Reilly-Pinion from NIRAS.

Disclaimer

NIRAS is the fund administrator for the **Biodiversity Challenge Funds** and commissioned this work on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) under Workstream 5 of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

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1 Introduction

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) have an explicit mandate to generate evidence on what works in biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction. NIRAS, Defra and the Expert Groups have observed that impact evaluation has been utilised to a very limited degree by projects as an approach to understand their outcomes. Access to the specialist knowledge required to design and carry out a robust impact evaluation has been identified as barrier to more widespread use of this approach.

As a way to ensure that we are generating as much robust evidence as is practical, this deep dive explores an idea to address this barrier which has previously been suggested by several people in the BCF Expert Groups, as well as emerging as a recommendation from other deep dive studies. The idea is to connect promising projects with specialists who can help them to design and implement projects in a way that generates one of the most robust forms of evidence available – experimental evidence.

Related to the above idea and potential process, the Darwin Initiative Extra, IWT Challenge Fund Extra, and Darwin Plus Strategic schemes all currently require project teams to commission independent final evaluations of their projects. Several project teams have reached out to the BCFs Management Team to request that they connect them with suitable specialists who they could contract for this task. While the focus of this deep dive is on robust impact evaluation, which ideally needs to be integrated into project planning early on, the process that results from it should also ideally be able to facilitate the linking of project teams with specialists who are sought for the more general but potentially overlapping task of conducting final project evaluations.

The following section provides a brief rationale for the introduction of a process to connect project teams with impact evaluation specialists. Section 3 outlines three potential options for a process (N.B. there are many different forms that a process could take, but these three options outline the trade-offs which need to be considered). Section 4 then summarises the strategic decisions that need to be taken ahead of implementing an approach, and provides suggested next steps.

2 Rationale

As competitive grants schemes, evidence and learning is central to the way that the Biodiversity Challenge Funds operate. The funds have a mandate to generate evidence, which is extended to include grantees through guidance and scoring of projects. This evidence has both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. According to the logic of the fund schemes, smaller grants are available for testing innovative ideas and building evidence on approaches towards conserving biodiversity and safeguarding the environment for local people. Those projects which are able to demonstrate that their interventions are transformative and scalable then have the option to apply to larger grant schemes (e.g. Darwin Initiative Extra, IWT Challenge Fund Extra and Darwin Plus Strategic). This system, which effectively operates as a filter for ideas and approaches in conservation and poverty reduction, can only operate effectively when robust evidence is available and accessible to the fund management team, independent project reviewers, and Expert Groups.

Defra, NIRAS and the Expert Groups are committed to strengthening the evidence available for decision making processes in the funds as well as more broadly in the conservation and development sectors. In deep dive

studies conducted to date, in Expert Group meetings, it has repeatedly been noted that project teams, and actors in conservation more broadly, may not have the capability and capacity (C&C) to generate robust evidence[1]. Whilst C&C is not the only barrier to conducting impact evaluation of conservation interventions[2], C&C is a core mandate of the BCFs and is therefore a strong leverage point for the fund management team.

2.1 Impact evaluation deep dive

In April 2023, an 'Impact evaluation deep dive' was commissioned to explore why projects are making little use of impact evaluation. Twenty projects from across the three funds were sampled to understand how they had used a counterfactual approach (synonymous with experimental evaluation and widely considered to be one of the most robust approaches to impact evaluation).

For sampled projects, 8% of indicators were found to have been evaluated using a counterfactual approach. However, 37% of the indicators could have been evaluated using a counterfactual approach (see Figure 1). Additionally, most of the projects which had taken a counterfactual approach had made some significant sacrifices in the quality of evidence that they were able to generate, with technical capacity and related resource constraints likely to have played a role. So while they had utilised counterfactual reasoning, they had not followed established best practice in generating evidence and their findings were not as robust as they could have been. This suggests that there is potential to incentivise and support wider use of robust impact evaluation within the BCFs, particularly if barriers to its use in line with established best practice can be overcome.

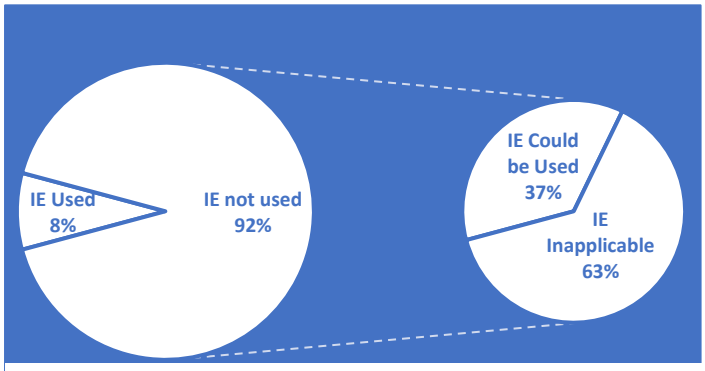

Figure 1: Use of counterfactual impact evaluation (IE) (n=20).
***Left**: The proportion of indicators that were evaluated using a counterfactual approach.*
***Right**: the proportion that could have been evaluated using a counterfactual approach.*

To increase the proportion of projects making use of a counterfactual approach to impact evaluation, the author of the Impact Evaluation deep dive recommended the following[3]:

"If greater and more appropriate use of impact evaluation in the generation of evidence is a goal, it is critically important to ensure that projects either have the built-in capacity to understand which approaches should be used in a given context, or that promising projects can be linked to resources that improve their capacity."

[1]Ferraro, P. J., & Pattanayak, S. K. 2006. Money for nothing? A call for empirical evaluation of biodiversity conservation investments. PLoS Biology, 4, e105; Christie, A. P., Amano, T., Martin, P. A., Shackelford, G. E., Simmons, B. I., & Sutherland, W. J. 2019. Simple study designs in ecology produce inaccurate estimates of biodiversity responses. Journal of Applied Ecology, 56(12), 2742–2754.; Sutherland, WJ. 2022. Transforming Conservation: A Practical Guide to Evidence and Decision Making. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0321

[2] Baylis, K., Honey-Rosés, J., Börner, J., Corbera, E., Ezzine-de-Blas, D., Ferraro, P.J., Lapeyre, R., Persson, U.M., Pfaff, A. and Wunder, S., 2016. Mainstreaming impact evaluation in nature conservation. Conservation Letters, 9(1), pp.58-64 (Online). Available: https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/conl.12180 [Accessed 16/06/2024].

[3] NIRAS, 2023. Building & Applying Evidence in the Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Improving the evaluation of BCF project impacts. Final Report available internally at the following link: Improving the evaluation of BCF project impacts.

2.2 Conservation evidence workshop

In November 2023, the BCFs Management and MEL Teams attended a workshop convened by Conservation Evidence at the University of Cambridge. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss how funders can enable evidence generation in their funded conservation projects. An article intended for submission to the Conservation Science and Practice journal, entitled *Incorporating tests into conservation practice: the role of funders*, is one of the outputs from the workshop. The article identifies 11 different approaches for integrating 'tests' (i.e. experimental approaches) into funding allocations as a means to enhance evidence generation. Figure 2 (on the following page) shows a decision tree to help funders decide on an appropriate approach to incentivising robust impact evaluation.

Following the path of the decision tree applicable to the BCFs, we observe the following:

1. The BCFs have not systematically identified knowledge gaps in their portfolio. Some gaps have been identified in an ad hoc way, and these are unique to each of the funding schemes, but gaps have not been explicitly and systematically identified or outlined;
2. The BCFs do have application forms for the various schemes;
3. Some of the schemes have a single stage process, and some have a 2-stage process;
4. For those which do not have a second stage, the options shown on the decision tree are not mutually exclusive. Steps have recently been taken to encourage applications that incorporate an experimental approach (i.e. the introduction of the Darwin Initiative Innovation scheme, and a revising of the MEL Guidance to suggest that all applicants consider whether experimental approaches to project design are appropriate for their projects).
5. A deliberate decision has been taken to not include an obligatory experimental approach for any of the application types (given that many of the project designs are not amendable to these approaches, and the capacity requirements for this could exclude many smaller local/national applicant organisations).
6. A separate stream of funds that the applicant can access for implementing an experimental approach has not been fully considered, and is reflected on below; and
7. For those schemes which do have a second application stage, the decision tree outlines three distinct strategies to incentivising an experimental approach. In two of the strategies, projects are identified directly by the funder. In the other, projects can choose to participate in response to a more general call from the funder. These options are further discussed below.

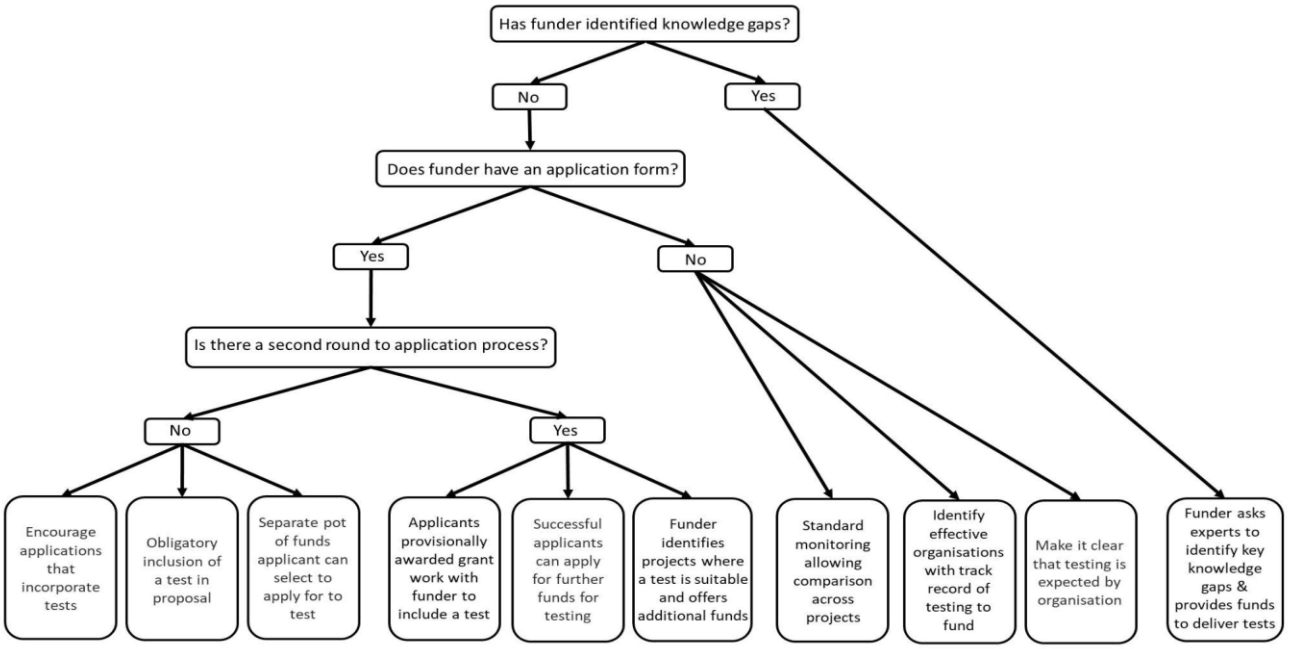

Figure 2: Decision tree for identifying which approach could be used to integrate tests of actions into funded projects. An additional approach could be applied in all contexts: external support from a testing unit that provides training and advice[4].

3 Process types

In line with the recommendations from the deep dive on impact evaluation, as well as the findings of the Conservation Evidence workshop and article summarised above, this present deep dive study has been undertaken to outline a process for linking promising projects to external resources which can enhance their capacity to design, implement and evaluate projects using rigorous counterfactual approaches.

Figure 3 provides three general options for approaches that can be taken to connect project teams with specialists

[4] Smith, et al. 2024. Incorporating tests into conservation practice: the role of funders. Submitted to Conservation Science and Practice. Manuscript available internally at this link: Incorporating tests into conservation practice.

Funder chooses

Applicable only to schemes with a 2-stage process

Pros: Greater control for the funder, therefore less risk of lower quality evidence generation; no risk of high volumes of interested candidates and associated expectations

Cons: Risk of lower levels of ownership and commitment if the idea did not originate with the project team

Step 1: Identify suitable specialists who are skilled in evaluating the impacts of interventions for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

Step 2: Contract an independent specialist to review the Stage 1 Applications to identify projects which have already been designed in an evaluable way, and which are therefore amenable to impact evaluation.

Step 3: Reach out to evaluable project teams to ask whether they would be open to bringing an expert on board to support with project design, develop a robust MEL framework, work with the project team throughout delivery to ensure robust data collection, and conduct an impact evaluation at an appropriate time before or after project closure

Step 4: For those project teams which are interested, connect them with a suitable specialist and encourage them to update their project design together and submit at the second stage.

Step 5: Publication, sharing and promotion of findings in peer-reviewed journals, the BCFs website and other forums for sharing evidence in conservation and development

Applicants opt in early

Applicable to schemes with both a single-stage and 2-stage process

Pros: More widely accessible. Higher contribution to Capability & Capacity (C&C) as more applicants are engaged. Evaluation embedded in design from early in the design phase.

Cons: Could require more resources, more engagements; Arguably more likely that we could get low quality evaluations and evidence. Potentially overwhelming

Step 1: Identify suitable specialists who are skilled in evaluating the impacts of interventions for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

Step 2: Signal to potential applicants that if they would like to design a project in collaboration with an impact evaluation specialist, that they should let us know well in advance of the application date, so that we can put them in touch with one.

Step 3: Convene a workshop where potential applicants present their ideas for projects to a group of specialists, and specialists are able to ask questions.

Step 4: Use a match-making technique to match potential applicants to specialists based on their respective preferences. Connect them and encourage them to design a project together.

Step 5: Contract an independent, 3rd party expert to evaluate applications submitted to ensure that those which have been appropriately designed, meeting the criteria of the Expert Groups as well as the criteria for impact evaluation, are approved.

Step 6: Publication, sharing and promotion of findings in peer-reviewed journals, the BCFs website and other forums for sharing evidence in conservation and development

Applicants opt in later

Applicable to schemes with both a single-stage and 2-stage process

Pros: More widely accessible. Higher contribution to C&C. Evaluation embedded in design before design is finalised, most of the time this is fine for tweaks needed re evaluability. More manageable than 2.2 given higher quality, smaller pool of projects

Cons: A bit more resource intensive than the funder chooses model

Step 1: Identify suitable specialists who are skilled in evaluating the impacts of interventions for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

Step 2: Applicants who pass Stage 1 are invited to apply to our MEL support facility. Selection criteria are 1) evaluability and 2) extent to which research question is a priority (is this an evidence gap?)

Step 3: Convene a workshop with projects which opt for the facility, where they present their ideas for projects to a group of specialists, and specialists are able to ask questions.

Step 4: Use match-making technique to match potential applicants to specialists based on their respective preferences. Connect them and encourage them to design a project together.

Step 5: Contract an independent, 3rd party expert to evaluate applications submitted to ensure that those which have been appropriately designed, meeting the criteria of the Expert Groups as well as the criteria for impact evaluation, are approved.

Step 6: Publication, sharing and promotion of findings in peer-reviewed journals, the BCFs website and other forums for sharing evidence in conservation and development

Figure 3: Illustrative set of options for integrating support for impact evaluation into the BCFs funding application processes

4 Trade-offs and strategic considerations

4.1 Funder chooses vs applicants opt in

With the funder chooses model, the funder has greater control and can select only those applicants with the greatest perceived potential, as judged by an independent specialist. This limits resource needs and potential for the risk that some applicants will want to opt in but may not have a design that is appropriate for impact evaluation, and related risks of either unmet expectations when applicants are turned down, or poor quality evidence generation.

With the applicants opt in models, there is greater opportunity for more applicants to be involved in the screening process and to learn about impact evaluation and the things one needs to consider when deciding whether your project design is amenable to impact evaluation.

4.2 Early opt in vs later opt in

The case for early opt in is predominantly around ensuring robust design for evaluability. If project teams are thinking about evidence from the start or as close to it as possible, they will be more likely to design for evidence in an optimal way. When impact evaluations need to be built into already designed projects, there are almost always compromises made to accommodate the existing design at the expense of the robustness of evidence.

A later opt in has the advantage of limiting the resources that are put into trying to design for evaluation, including for those projects which will not end up being approved. In presenting the opportunity only to strong contenders who are left after a process of elimination, fewer resources are spent and there is less chance for disappointment from unmet expectations (especially in cases where applicants may have compensated specialists for their time during project design). This creates a case for later opt in.

4.3 Relevant funds and schemes

The process is potentially relevant to a wide range of BCFs schemes. However, given the challenges involved in undertaking Impact Evaluation, the process is potentially less risky, and more likely to generate stronger evidence, if offered only to larger projects run by partners with higher levels of technical and organisational capacity. However, given the potential to build the capacity of smaller organisations to more effectively evaluate their impacts and to understand how to design projects for evaluability, there is also an argument for targeting the smaller projects. In the long-run, the approaches could be used in conjunction with one another to catalyse enhanced evidence generation across a spectrum of organisation types.

For Darwin Plus, there has been a recent shift away from research-focused projects (which are not necessarily synonymous with impact evaluations but which do share the common aim of generating evidence) and towards more direct delivery of tangible outputs and outcomes. If the process is utilised within this fund, care should be taken to avoid conflicting messaging and to ensure that strategic objectives are coherent and well communicated.

4.4 Level of incentives and resources offered

For applicants, the lowest level of incentivisation is to simply offer the opportunity for applicants to link with specialists, and to let them know that they can budget for impact evaluation in their projects (e.g. as a distinct output), and to remind applicants that the strength of their MEL is built into the application scoring system, so, all else being equal, undertaking impact evaluation will improve their chances of being selected. This may be

enough to overcome the significant disincentives to project teams conducting impact evaluation[5], but we cannot be sure that it will. There is also a question over whether they will be willing to divert resources from implementation to evaluation, given limits to the amount of funding that they can apply for.

More significant types of incentivisation include the potential to make impact evaluation mandatory for certain schemes such as IWT Challenge Fund Evidence or Darwin Initiative Innovation. However, these schemes currently prioritise different forms of evidence generation and a shift to impact evaluation may not be strategically desirable.

Another option is to set aside a pool of funding which all projects can access as an 'add-on' to the standard funding amounts under each scheme, thereby removing the need for applicants to make difficult choices in how to allocate resources between implementation and evaluation.

For specialists, the lowest level of incentive would be the chance to work with project teams who are 'at the coalface' and the chance to publish their results in prestigious journals. For academic specialists and consulting specialists alike (groups which are not mutually exclusive, but which could be seen as two ends of the spectrum), it seems plausible that this could be enough motivation to participate in the development of an application to the BCFs. It is probably worth testing this assumption before offering any higher level of incentive, for example by having the fund compensate specialists for their time during the application phase.

There is some question over the extent to which each of the specialist types would need to be compensated for their time, and whether this would need to be built into grant budgets. In some cases, academic consultants may be willing to forego compensation if their cost of time can be covered from other sources. There is likely also a relatively high availability of PhD students and other less experienced practitioners, which points to a potential trade-off between low-cost/low experience specialists vs higher-cost-higher-experience specialists who will already be comfortable navigating the complexities of impact evaluation but whose time, as mentioned above, could be a significant cost relative to the average BCF funding amount.

4.5 Role of NIRAS in vetting and QA

There is a question of how active a role the BCFs should play in identifying and vetting specialists before recommending them to applicants; in regulating, or at least providing guidance on, the rates that they charge for their services; as well as the extent to which the BCFs should quality assure relevant outputs. There are potentially significant risks to qualifying grantees and specialists involved given the difficult nature of impact evaluation, and the need for cohesion between specialists and grantees to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the process and able to navigate the conflicting priorities associated with implementation and evaluation respectively. If there is a breakdown in communication, or a conflict of interests which is not properly resolved, this will lead not only to a lower validity in evidence, but to the dissatisfaction of both parties overall.

Arguably, the BCFs management team could play an active role in 'de-risking' the process. If this is done it should be done with the full awareness that the BCFs would in a sense be taking that risk on as a 'reputational risk' to the funds. To the extent that the BCFs are seen to have vetted or even just suggested a specialist who fails to perform as expected, or to have Quality Assured an output seen as controversial by any of the implementing partners, there could be risks for the BCFs' reputation.

Finally on this point, vetting, regulating, and quality assurance all require resources, and depending on the volume of Impact Evaluations which are conducted, and the extent to which the BCFs management team take

[5] Baylis, K., Honey-Rosés, J., Börner, J., Corbera, E., Ezzine-de-Blas, D., Ferraro, P.J., Lapeyre, R., Persson, U.M., Pfaff, A. and Wunder, S., 2016. Mainstreaming impact evaluation in nature conservation. *Conservation Letters*, *9*(1), pp.58-64 (Online). Available: https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/conl.12180 [Accessed 16/06/2024].

responsibility for these roles, this could place a potentially unsustainable burden on the BCFs management team if resource constraints are not addressed.

4.6 Involvement of the Expert Groups

Experts (by which we mean people who are currently contracted to advise the BCFs through the Expert Groups) could be used in various ways, depending on which process model is used. In the 'funder chooses' model, experts could help to identify 'high-risk' projects, or projects which seem promising but which are using untested approaches (i.e. where there are evidence gaps). Identifying evidence gaps is value-laden process and it can help to have people from a range of backgrounds and expertise types to inform which of them are most significant.

In the applicants opt in models, experts could be used to review the applications which include impact evaluations. However, the experts have not been selected based on their specialist knowledge of project evaluability, and while some are experienced in experimental design, it is probably unwise to expect all of them to make judgements in this area. This is why we have suggested the contracting of an independent specialist who has the specific range of skills and expertise needed (including a very strong understanding of the intricacies of conducting impact evaluation of conservation initiatives), and entrusting them with a significant portion of responsibility in the project selection process.

4.7 Balancing evidence generation and capacity building

The process envisioned in this document can be seen as having two broad aims: generating robust evidence and building the capability and capacity (C&C) of applicants and grantees to design evaluable projects. Both are important and necessary, but it is worth considering the trade-offs involved when we decide which to prioritise in our process design. As pointed out in Section 4.1, a more open process which allows applicants to opt in to a general call has high C&C potential, simply because a greater range of people will have the opportunity to consider whether they would like to be involved, and to think about whether or not the project design that they have in mind could be amenable to experimental design.

If C&C is a high priority in process design, then the process will need to align with the C&C Workstream Strategy and be prioritised accordingly within it. Resources needed could become significant, especially in the 'applicants opt in' models where applicants will require support in understanding some of the ways that they can maximise evaluability in project design. The application process already has significant levels of C&C building, so this needs to be added in with careful consideration for timing and burden of engagement. However, the survey conducted for the deep dive into the Standard Indicators, in 2023, revealed that on the whole there is a strong appetite amongst both applicants and grantees for active support with project-level MEL[6].

The 'funder chooses' model would allow the BCFs team to carefully select project teams which are likely to be 'safer bets' for robust evidence generation, because of their higher in-house MEL capacity. Assuming that the BCFs team, in consultation with a contracted specialist, is successful in identifying project teams like this, it

[6] Eager, R. 2023. Review of the BCFs MEL systems: Standard Indicators and reporting. Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Building and Applying Evidence. Produced for Defra by NIRAS (Online). Available: www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/information-notes). When asked which types of MEL support are most valued, 89% of the survey respondents reported "training resources with active participation (such as webinars, training sessions, workshops)". By contrast, only 55% of respondents expressed support for "detailed methodological guidance for the Standard Indicators".

seems likely that overall there would be a lower risk of low quality evidence generation, for example a study which fails to find any evidence of an impact because of an inadequately designed sampling strategy[7].

5 Suggested approach

The trade-offs highlighted above are complex and numerous. There are several significant risks which need to be balanced as we design a process to connect project teams with impact evaluation specialists. However, it is our view that these risks are collectively less significant than the alternative risk of not taking action to increase the amount of robust impact evaluations conducted within the BCFs.

Based on the early scoping work reflected in this report, we tentatively suggest an approach below. Our overall suggested approach as well as all of the specific suggestions outlined below are presented to generate discussion and facilitate the development of an optimal process that meets the needs of BCFs leadership in Defra, fund management, as well as the C&C team.

As an overall approach, we suggest that a pilot phase be initiated whereby we can test several combinations of the processes outlined in Section 3. We recommend that a 'start small and ramp-up' principle be applied, starting with low-intensity resource use and engagement with applicants.

For the first round of piloting, we suggest the following:

- That the **funder chooses model** be followed and that the process be tightly controlled and predominantly 'expert-led' using a combination of Expert Group and recently departed Expert Group members, as well as other highly experienced colleagues in Defra and third-party and NIRAS specialists. This high level of specialist knowledge is critical especially to guide initial thinking of what qualifies as robustly evaluable in the context of BCFs projects, how we might either identify existing applicants or grantees for impact evaluation, or the principles that our grantees can follow when they consider their own project designs and the degree to which the various types of impact evaluation might make sense for their context.
- The process should be trialled on BCF **Extra projects** before widening the scope to consider other funding schemes. This is because Extra projects have greater resources at their disposal and are better placed to take on the demands of an Impact Evaluation as they have access to higher levels of technical and organisational capacity. The downside of using this scheme is the small sample size. Given how unlikely it is that any given conservation project will be amenable to rigorous impact evaluation, there may not be any Extra applicants or running projects which are suitable. We suggest an initial screening of running Darwin Initiative Extra and IWT Challenge Fund Extra projects to see whether any are amenable to robust impact evaluation. We also suggest that the next round of applicants be screened for this. If no projects are identified, we suggest expanding the scope of the screening to include the Darwin Initiative Main, Darwin Initiative Innovation, IWT Challenge Fund Main, Darwin Plus Strategic, and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence schemes.
- That **no financial incentives** be offered. There is currently a complex web of incentives at play for both project teams and prospective specialists, and we advise working to further understand these before introducing additional incentives. A key question in the initial pilot period will be whether there is a willingness from project teams and practitioners to respond to a simple nudge from the funder, and to uncover which of the incentives are influential to them.

[7] this is quite a common failure in impact evaluations given how hard it is to estimate some of the parameters needed for power analysis, and the pressure to reduce survey costs which inexperienced practitioners are less capable of resisting

- That NIRAS play an **active role in vetting** prospective specialists. There is a question of how sustainable this will be if we are to continue with the process, and the way that we want to handle the associated risks moving forward and if greater numbers of project teams and specialists choose to engage if and when we choose to implement one of the 'applicants opt in' models, but for the first phase we see it as important that NIRAS be actively involved.
- We suggest that **selected Experts** or recently departed Experts be involved in the process at first, given that some have a high level of experience with impact evaluation in the conservation sector. If there are constraints to their availability moving forward, we could request that they work with another third-party specialist who we could identify together to equip them to facilitate the process in future.
- In line with our suggestion to use the 'funder chooses' model at first, we suggest **deprioritising applicant and grantee C&C building initially** in favour of building our own internal capacity to manage the process in a way that generates high-quality evidence. Depending on how the initial pilot goes, we would suggest shifting to the 'applicants opt in' model during the second or third round of piloting, by which time we will have learnt more about how to identify projects that lend themselves to impact evaluation, and distil a set of principles for doing so. These can then be shared with applicants once we are satisfied that they will be genuinely instructive.