# Third call for proposals – 2026

# BESTLIFE2030 – Grant scheme for biodiversity in the EU's Outermost Regions and associated Overseas Countries and Territories

# Guidelines for applicants

**Deadline for submission of concept notes:**

8 December 2026 at 14:00 CET (Brussels time)

**Applicants are strongly recommended to read this guidance document in full before submitting their concept notes and full proposals**

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# Table of Contents


1. GENERAL INFORMATION ____ 4
1.1. Background ____ 4
1.2. Objectives of BESTLIFE2030 ____ 4
1.3. Grant Amount ____ 4
1.4. Project duration ____ 5
2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA ____ 6
2.1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. Applicant and co-applicant/s) ____ 6
2.2. Eligibility of activities ____ 9
2.3. Eligibility of costs ____ 14
2.4. Conflict of interest and ineligibility ____ 16
3. HOW TO APPLY AND PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW ____ 17
3.1. Application stages and documents ____ 17
3.2. Accessing the call and completing eligibility ____ 18
3.3. Preparing the concept note ____ 20
3.4. Developing the full proposal ____ 21
3.5. Preparing the separate detailed budget ____ 23
3.6. Due diligence and financial capacity ____ 25
3.7. Checking and submitting your application ____ 26
3.8. Responding to clarification requests ____ 27
3.9. Deadlines, timetable and support ____ 28
4. EVALUATION AND SELECTION ____ 30
5. NOTIFICATION OF APPLICANTS ____ 31
6. AWARD DECISION ____ 32
7. ANNEXES ____ 33
Annex 1: Co-Applicant mandate and sworn statement ____ 33
Annex 2: BESTLIFE2030 evaluation grids ____ 36


***NB: Provisions in these guidelines may change.***

# List of keywords and abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Description |
|---|---|
| **BEST** | Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas |
| **CINEA** | European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency |
| **CN** | Concept Note |
| **EC** | European Commission |
| **ESMS** | Environmental and Social Management System |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **FP** | Full Proposal |
| **IUCN** | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| **LIFE** | EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action *(L'Instrument européen de Financement pour l'Environnement et l'action pour le climat)* |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organization(s) |
| **OECM** | Other effective area-based conservation measures |
| **OFB** | French Office for Biodiversity (*Office français de la biodiversité*) |
| **OCT** | Overseas Countries and Territories |
| **OR** | Outermost Region(s) |
| **PCA** | Protected and Conserved Area(s) |
| **RAC** | Regional Advisory Committee |
| **SME** | Small and medium-sized enterprise(s) |

# 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

This is a two-step call for proposals: first, only concept notes must be submitted for evaluation. Thereafter, applicants who are pre-selected will be invited to submit a full proposal.

## 1.1. Background

The BESTLIFE2030 Programme (hereafter BESTLIFE2030) continues the EU BEST Initiative. The proposal submitted by the consortium was selected for funding in late 2022 following a call for proposals launched by the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA).

BESTLIFE2030 provides grant funding for small-scale field actions for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the EU's Outermost Regions (ORs) and associated Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs).

## 1.2. Objectives of BESTLIFE2030

BESTLIFE2030 is designed to provide substantive and effective support **at both local and regional levels** in ORs and OCTs for the **conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of ecosystem services, including for climate adaptation**. BESTLIFE2030 will also catalyse the efforts and will constitute a key contribution to the **achievement of global objectives** and goals in terms of **biodiversity, sustainable development and climate change**. As regional cooperation is key in the regions where ORs and OCTs are located, BESTLIFE2030 will seek coordination with other organisations to avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure synergy, when possible, with other existing grant mechanisms (e.g. BIOPAMA Action Component, TeMeUm, Kiwa Initiative, Varuna etc.) in order to foster interregional cooperation.

## 1.3. Grant Amount

BESTLIFE2030 grants amount to a maximum of EUR 100,000 per recipient. The "recipient" of this maximum amount is the project itself and not the individual beneficiaries that participate in or are involved in said project.

The proposed budget should appropriately reflect the expected results, envisaged activities and related estimated costs. Applicants will be encouraged to request the maximum (or close to the maximum) grant amount available. A minimum of 5% co-funding of the total budget is required and can take the following forms:

- own resources (resources that are not linked specifically to the action submitted for funding), or
- financial contributions (funding given by third parties to a beneficiary for being used specifically for the same action of the project).

As running costs are covered by the 7% maximum of indirect costs and are already eligible

costs, they cannot be included as own resources.

Should the BEST grant be used in complementarity with other EU budget-based types of grants or sources of funding in order to implement larger projects, special attention must be paid to the fundamental principle underpinning the rules for public expenditure in the EU that states “no costs for the same activity can be funded twice from the EU budget” (more details here: https://ieep.eu/publications/principles-of-double-funding/).

## 1.4. Project duration

Project duration **must range between 18 to 36 months** (including any potential extensions) and must be aligned with the proposed activities and workplan.

**Start date:** Projects must have a start date between **July to September 2027**. Extensions will only be granted if well justified. In exceptional cases, an earlier start date may be accepted if duly notified and justified. The contractual conditions below continue to apply.

Successful applicants can start project implementation ***after*** the signature of the grant contract and ***after*** the project start date featured in said contract. Any costs incurred prior to this date will not be eligible.

# 2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

There are three sets of eligibility criteria, relating to applicants, activities and costs.

## 2.1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. Applicant and co-applicant/s)

In order to be eligible for BESTLIFE2030 grants, the lead applicant (I, II, III) and co-applicants (I) **must be:**

I. **A private or public legal entity** registered in ORs and/or OCTs (*). International organisations (inclusive of regional organisations with international membership), individual consultants and sole traders are not eligible to receive a grant (**).

II. **Directly responsible** for the preparation and implementation of the grant project. Applications submitted by a body acting as an intermediary for a third party are not eligible.

III. **Have a bank account in the name of the organisation** and in the place where the Grantee is established or where the project is carried out; grants cannot be paid into an account in the name of an individual.

***(*) Financing of entities from third countries***[1] ***is only possible under exceptional and limited circumstances.*** *Each case will be examined individually but the application must show beyond a doubt that the involvement of the third country entity is essential to the project to reach its expected impact in the EU ORs and/or associated OCTs. However, an entity from a third country can never be a coordinating beneficiary.*

*Organisations that are registered in the EU Member States* ***can only apply as co-applicants,*** *provided the project has the support of OR/OCT authorities (e.g. letter of support), and puts a strong focus on local collaboration with relevant local stakeholders and capacity-building activities.*

***(**)*** *Individual consultants and sole traders can only be involved in a project as sub-contractors in support of local organisations.*

In line with BESTLIFE2030 objectives, target beneficiaries are:

- Local non-profit organisations, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- Local civil society organisations (CSOs);
- Local community-based organisations (CBOs);
- SMEs as defined by the European Commission[2];
- Local research institutes and organisations (provided eligible activities are implemented);
- Local sub-governmental bodies, e.g. municipalities and groups thereof;
- Collectivités Territoriales in the French ORs i.e, Conseils régionaux et Conseils départementaux, if they co-apply with local NGOs, local CSOs, local CBOs, SMEs,

[1] See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/third-country_en

[2] See https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en?prefLang=en

municipalities, or local research institutes;

- Regional governments in Spanish and Portuguese ORs, i.e., the Canary Islands, Azores, and Madeira, under the same conditions as those for the French ORs, if they co-apply with at least one of the following organisations: local NGOs, local CSOs, local CBOs, SMEs, municipalities or local research institutes;
- OCT territorial governments in the Dutch and French OCTs, if they co-apply with at least one of the following organisations: local NGOs, local CSOs, local CBOs, SMEs, municipalities, or local research institutes;
- And in special cases: Territorial government departments, agencies and their services (see conditions below).

The lead applicant may act **individually or with co-applicant**(s). Co-applicants must sign the Co-applicant Mandate available on the BESTLIFE2030 website. If awarded a grant, the lead applicant will become the beneficiary identified as the project coordinator in the grant contract. The project coordinator (aka lead partner) represents and acts on behalf of any other co-beneficiary (if any) and coordinates the design and implementation of the action. The project coordinator will bear full responsibility for the technical and financial implementation of the project.

An organisation can submit and be awarded **a maximum of two proposals per call**, either (i) one proposal as lead applicant and one as co-applicant, or (ii) two as co-applicant (max amount for each recipient per project per call: EUR 100,000).

If an organisation (company, institution, association) has offices/branches in multiple regions, said offices/branches must be legally and fiscally registered in those regions in order to be able to apply independently one from the other in the different regions.

### *SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR UNINHABITED ORs AND OCTs*

Exceptional access to BESTLIFE2030 grants is allowed for:

- Territorial government departments, agencies and their services;
- Organisations that are based in the region where the uninhabited territory is located, but that are not regional organisations, under the special condition described below;
- Organisations based in an EU Member State, under the special condition described below;

In the two latter cases, when the project proposal does not include the relevant OR/OCT authority as a co-applicant, the applicant must demonstrate that the proposed project **has the support of the relevant OR/OCT authorities** responsible for the targeted territory (e.g. by submitting an endorsement letter).

Proposals that foresee implementation in territories with restricted and limited access will be requested to provide an operational plan that factors in such contexts. Considering the complexity of administrative and legal processes needed to secure interventions in said territories, this is an additional element that must include detailed action items and milestones that each team member and external body involved in the

envisaged activities needs to complete to meet project objectives.

### *SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR OR and OCTs WITH A LOW POPULATION*

Exceptional access to BESTLIFE2030 grants is allowed for:

- OCT and OR territorial governments and their services in territories with a low population. The two conditions of the low population, i.e. < 60,000 inhabitants, and the population density < 100 pop/km$^2$, shall be applied alternatively, not cumulative.
- In such cases, the project must put a strong emphasis in the territory on collaboration with local stakeholders and include capacity-building activities (in addition to the mandatory biodiversity action).

### *Special conditions*

| Type of organisation | Eligible? | Conditions for eligibility |
|---|---|---|
| **Local** non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), non-profit organisations | ✔ | No special conditions |
| Small socio-professional organisations, SMEs, small for-profit organisations of economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism | ✔ | Individual consultants and sole traders **are not eligible as lead applicant or co-applicant of a project**; they can only be involved in a project as sub-contractors. |
| **Local** sub-governmental bodies of an OR/OCT (i.e. municipalities, cities etc.) | ✔ | No special conditions |
| OR/OCT regional and territorial governments | ✔ | Eligible if they co-apply with local NGOs, local CSOs, local CBOs, SMEs, municipalities or local research institutes. |
| | ✔ | **Special conditions (no need to co-apply as described above) for:**<br>• **Uninhabited ORs and OCTs.** The applicant must demonstrate that the proposed project **has the support of the relevant OR/OCT authorities** responsible for the targeted territory (e.g. by submitting an endorsement letter).<br>• **ORs and OCTs with a low population** (< 60,000 inhabitants **or** where the population density < 100 pop/km$^2$). The project must put a strong emphasis on local collaboration and |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | partnership with the local civil society, and/or local sub-government bodies, socio-professional organisations. |
| **Local** research organisations | ✓ | * Provided that, if any research activity is undertaken, it is operational and supports action on the ground during the lifetime of the project (**fundamental research cannot be the main activity of a BESTLIFE2030-funded project**). |
| Organisations based in a European Union Member State but not located in an OR | ✓ | * **Can only apply as co-applicants**, provided the project has the support of OR/OCT authorities (e.g. letter of support), and puts a strong focus on local collaboration with relevant local stakeholders and capacity building activities. |
| International Organisations (inclusive or regional organisations with international membership) | ✗ | Not eligible |
| Organisations based in third countries | ✗ | Not eligible |

## 2.2. Eligibility of activities

Eligible activities **must**:

- Be located in one or more ORs/OCTs;
- Contribute to BESTLIFE2030 objectives with tangible activities on the ground;
- Comply with IUCN's environmental and social safeguard aspects;
- Contribute to **tangible and measurable impacts** in terms of biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and/or sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services, including ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation or mitigation;
- Encourage a partnership-based approach with local stakeholders;
- Guarantee open access to data, results and all information generated by the project;
- **Not be fundamentally research projects**. Proposals that include research activities must support tangible follow-up actions using the research during the time-life of the project, i.e. proposal of a practical management plan or new policy, or new protected area design, new natural resources management plan, in vivo pilot site activities implementing the results of the research with new management or conservation actions.

Eligible activities can be wide in scope, **whilst necessarily proposing a key objective linked to biodiversity and nature conservation**, and should contribute logically to the achievement of the goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework and of national and EU policy objectives. **They must address at least one** of the LIFE Programme's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) linked to biodiversity: species, invasive alien species, and habitats. More information on KPIs will be provided during the full proposal phase. At full proposal stage, include at least one applicable BESTLIFE biodiversity indicator from BEST

1–10 in the logical framework. Other relevant BEST 11–21 indicators and project-specific indicators may be added; use the definitions and units in the BESTLIFE indicator guidance.

## Strategic regional objectives

All project proposals must demonstrate clear alignment with our overarching priorities, which are structured around three core pillars:

- **Conservation of Biodiversity** – Safeguarding ecosystems, species, and habitats to preserve global biodiversity.
- **Sustainable Use of Ecosystem Services** – Promoting the responsible and equitable utilization of ecosystems to ensure their long-term viability.
- **Climate Change Actions** – Addressing and adapting to the impacts of climate change to protect biodiversity and enhance ecosystem resilience.

## Conservation of biodiversity in ORs/OCTs

- Conservation of protected or endangered species;
- Improving habitat conservation, restoring degraded habitats and improving the functionality of ecological continuity (aquatic/terrestrial / marine);
- Improving the status of threatened species and their habitats;
- Mapping of vegetation/habitats and the subsequent implementation of concrete activities – protection, management or restoration of critical / endangered habitat;
- Fauna/flora inventories and monitoring for conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems purposes with the implementation of concrete activities;
- Establishment/extension of protected and conserved areas (PCAs), other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) or other types of sustainable biodiversity management areas/regimes and ecological connectivity;
- Development of terrestrial/marine/coastal/wetland conservation plans and concrete implementation of modalities (e.g. mangrove restoration in strategic high-potential sites, pond restoration actions, fish stocks monitoring, implementation of bycatch reduction systems by existing fisheries cooperatives);
- Strengthening the effectiveness of PCA management (with the implementation of concrete activities, e.g. actions to reduce detrimental edge effects and to protect core refugia for species populations);
- Support to local stakeholders (e.g. local communities and authorities) to help protect/manage biodiversity, and ecosystems (e.g. ecosystem management, participatory Community-Based Monitoring), with the implementation of concrete activities;
- Analyses to better understand/quantify the threats on biodiversity (including socioeconomic studies) and subsequent implementation of concrete activities based on the analyses' results (e.g. study of threats represented by a potential invasive species on native/endemic species, leading to ways to prevent its

introduction in a specific site);

- Eradication/control/prevention of invasive alien species;
- Implementation of nature-based solutions and other sustainable natural resource management activities;
- Species reintroduction and translocation for conservation purposes.

### Sustainable use of ecosystem services in ORs/OCTs

- Actions to maintain integrity and contiguity/ecological continuity of ecosystems;
- Actions to develop agricultural and fisheries and forestry good practices promoting sustainable use and biodiversity conservation outcomes; sustainable management of natural resources;
- Strengthening indigenous and local traditional knowledge systems and practices, accompanied by the implementation of concrete activities, that contribute to protect biological (and cultural) diversity.

### Climate change action in ORs/OCTs

- Ecosystem restoration, including in ecological corridors and between protected areas;
- Native and endemic tree species planting;
- Actions to improve land management and nature conservation;
- Develop and support implementation of nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and mitigation;

Adapting sustainable resource management regimes to the re-distribution of species due to climate change. To ensure the funded actions align with regional biodiversity objectives, the second and successive calls for proposals will include tailored added-value elements, addressing each region's specific needs and constraints. This **regionalised approach enhances relevance, responsiveness, and long-term sustainability**. The regional priorities below have been further refined through consultations with BESTLIFE2030 partners and thorough contextual analyses. Guided by insights from previous calls and initiatives, the scope and selection process prioritise projects that **leverage past and ongoing efforts**, ensuring proposals build on or scale up existing activities for maximum impact and innovation.

### Regional priorities for Amazonia, the French Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and North Atlantic's Saint Pierre and Miquelon:

- Ecosystem restoration and functional recovery: Restoring degraded ecosystems to their natural state and ensuring the recovery of ecological functions critical for the survival of species.
- Conservation of natural heritage sites, species, and ecological continuity: Protecting key habitats and species, particularly those threatened or with restricted geographic ranges, while maintaining ecological connectivity across terrestrial, aquatic, and marine systems, including the Land-Ocean Aquatic

Continuum (LOAC).

- Control of invasive alien species and stray domestic animals: Addressing the threats posed by invasive non-native species and unregulated domestic animals to native biodiversity and ecosystem balance.
- Reducing climate change impacts on biodiversity: Implementing measures to minimise the adverse effects of climate change on species, habitats, and the ecosystem services upon which humans and wildlife depend (use of nature-based solutions, NBS).
- Creating new protected areas and strengthening existing ones: Expanding the network of protected areas and improving the management and effectiveness of existing protected and conserved areas.
- Support the development of sustainable regime and economic valorisation of biodiversity (excluding invasive species), ecosystems and ecosystem services (e.g. ecotourism).

## Regional priorities for the Dutch Caribbean:

- Reduction of soil erosion including strict regulation of free-roaming introduced mammals;
- Reduction of pollution on the islands and surrounding waters (e.g. nutrient pollution, untreated sewage, waste dump and materials that are blown from open landfills and sea-based pollution from fishing vessels, cargo ships and the cruise industry);
- Prevention, control and eradication of invasive species (e.g. coralita, lionfish) including domestic species like feral cats and free-roaming livestock;
- Tackling overexploitation of endangered species such as the queen conq on Bonaire;
- Reducing habitat loss and fragmentation by limiting expansion of housing and road infrastructure while promoting inclusive green and climate-smart spatial planning and developments;
- Restoration of degraded marine and terrestrial habitats including coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, tropical dry and wet forests and scrublands, following a strategic, locally embedded approach;
- Production of rapid responses to climate-related disasters (e.g. hurricanes, coral bleaching, coral diseases, sargassum blooms), and
- Expansion of the existing protected area network and improving management.

## Regional priorities for Macaronesia:

- Regional/national priorities including Macaronesia GAP Analysis Report (assessment of habitat and species conservation status in the European Outermost region, funded by EU DG-ENV, under LIFE4BEST ORs).
- EU policies, specifically the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
- Projects should also align with and contribute to the objectives set by the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, ensuring the conservation of biodiversity and protected ecosystems.
- Moreover, they shall prioritise the most threatened species and habitats as per

the IUCN Red List, as well as those species for which data is lacking.

## Regional priorities for the Pacific:

- Establishment, better management and improved regulations for protected areas;
- Safeguard of endangered and protected species;
- Protection and sustainable management of ecosystems, and their services;
- Ecosystem restoration and functional recovery;
- Addressing threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- Eradication/control/prevention of invasive alien species;
- Prevention/control of erosion;
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation by implementing Nature-based Solutions.

## Regional priorities Greenland:

- Actions to develop fisheries and hunting good practices, promoting sustainable use, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable management of natural resources;
- Strengthening Indigenous and local knowledge systems and practices that contribute to the sustainable use of biological (and cultural) diversity;
- Conservation of protected or endangered species;
- Improving habitat conservation and sustainable use of the associated natural resources;
- Fauna/flora inventories and monitoring for conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems with the implementation of concrete activities;
- Establishment/extension of protected and conserved areas, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) or other types of sustainable biodiversity management areas/regimes, including ecological connectivity;
- Development of terrestrial/marine/coastal/wetland conservation plans and concrete implementation, including reducing by-catch in fisheries;
- Support to local stakeholders (e.g. local communities and authorities) to help protect/manage biodiversity and ecosystems (e.g. ecosystem management, participatory Community-Based Monitoring), with the implementation of concrete activities;
- Analyses to better understand/quantify the threats to biodiversity (including socioeconomic studies) and subsequent implementation of concrete activities based on the analyses' results (e.g. study of threats represented by a potentially invasive species on native species, leading to ways to prevent its introduction in a specific site);
- Eradication/control/prevention of invasive alien species;
- Development and implementation of nature-based solutions and other sustainable natural resource management activities for climate adaptation and

mitigation;

- Adaptation of sustainable resource management regimes to the re-distribution of species due to climate change.

## The following cross-cutting actions should accompany the concrete actions proposed:

- Empowerment of local communities to actively participate in conservation efforts and promote sustainable practices through visibility, awareness and involvement.
- Equipment of decision-makers with the skills and knowledge to prioritise biodiversity conservation, embedding it into public policies and governance frameworks.
- Safeguard traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, and natural landscapes associated with biodiversity, while promoting their societal value and significance.
- Drive research on biodiversity and ecosystems and develop robust monitoring systems to track changes and guide conservation efforts effectively.
- Strengthen collaboration across regions to address shared biodiversity challenges and ensure conservation measures transcend administrative boundaries.

## Complementary activities (i.e. they cannot be the main activities of a project):

- Use of assessment and evaluation tools and methods for governance assessment, management effectiveness assessment, land use and marine spatial planning, restoration, connectivity conservation etc;
- Support for public awareness, education campaigns, training and capacity development;
- Support the development of sustainable regime and economic valorisation of biodiversity (excluding invasive species), ecosystems and ecosystem services (e.g. ecotourism);
- Strengthening the effectiveness of PCA management (training, management plans, boundary demarcation, fire management, engagement of local stakeholders, IUCN Green List standard);
- Supporting youth outreach activities to advance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems.

## Where applicable, grants should primarily address EU policy objectives (non-exhaustive list below):

- In Outermost Regions, where applicable (i.e. where the Habitats and Birds Directives apply, in Macaronesia: Spain – Canary Islands, Portugal – Azores and Madeira), site-based conservation should firstly contribute to the development of the Natura 2000 network and the Invasive Alien Species Regulation.
- Applicants will be encouraged to implement activities linked to the implementation of key EU environmental policies and legislation, including the

newly adopted Nature Restoration Regulation. Moreover, it will be key to seek an alignment with the EU commitments included in, but not limited to, the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the Forest Strategy, and the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change.

- In OCTs, the Overseas Association Decision, including Greenland (OADG), defines the objectives of cooperation between EU and OCTs, increasing the competitiveness of the OCTs, strengthening their adaptability, reducing their economic and environmental vulnerability and promoting their cooperation with other partners.
- The new EU Arctic Strategy is relevant for Greenland. This strategy states the need for "addressing the ecological, social, economic and political challenges arising as a consequence of climate change and taking strong action to tackle climate change and environmental degradation, making the Arctic more resilient", and for "supporting the inclusive and sustainable development of the Arctic regions to the benefit of its inhabitants and future generations, focusing on the needs of Indigenous Peoples, women and the young".

### *Ineligible activities*

- The purchase of land, involuntary resettlement of people, or activities that negatively affect physical cultural resources, including those important to local communities;
- Activities adversely affecting individuals and local communities or where these communities have not provided their broad support to the project activities;
- The removal or altering of any physical cultural property (includes sites having unique archaeological, paleontological, historical or religious values);
- Activities that duplicate work previously funded by BEST or other EU funds, i.e. implementing the same project, with the same objectives, in the same location. This does not regard activities that build on the results of previous projects.
- Financial support to third parties through sub-grants / micro credits / loans.

## 2.3. Eligibility of costs

**Only eligible costs will be reimbursed.** Eligible costs must be:

- Necessary for the implementation of project activities;
- Reasonable and justified and consistent with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness;
- Generated during the lifetime of the project (costs incurred before the official starting date of the project or after the official end date of the project are not eligible); expenditure eligible for financing may not have been incurred before the signature of the grant agreement;
- Either actually incurred by the beneficiary and be recorded in his accounts in accordance with the applicable accounting principles, or based on the simplified costs option or on the combination thereof;
- Identifiable and verifiable;

- Compliant with the requirements of the applicable tax and social legislation.

**Categories of eligible costs:**

- **Human resources:** the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the beneficiary or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the project, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual policy on remuneration. Those costs include actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration.
- **Travel:** costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel.
- **Equipment and supplies** for the project, provided that the purchases are made by BESTLIFE2030 Procurement Policy and are in line with the national procurement regulations, if applicable.
- **Costs derived from subcontracts**, provided that the purchases are made following BESTLIFE2030 Procurement Policy (subcontracting is normally limited to 30% of the total budget; some exceptions can be made under extraordinary circumstances).

### *Reimbursement options*

Reimbursement of costs can be based on the **actual costs** incurred by the beneficiary(ies), **simplified cost options** or a combination thereof as appropriate. The choice made is fixed and **cannot be changed** during project implementation; some exceptions can be made under extraordinary circumstances (to be analysed on a case-by-case basis and an amendment will be needed).

Simplified cost options (SCO) may take the form of:

- Unit costs: covering all or certain specific categories of eligible costs which are clearly identified in advance by reference to an amount per unit.
- Lump sums: covering in global terms all or certain specific categories of eligible costs which are clearly identified in advance.
- Flat-rate financing: covering specific categories of eligible costs which are clearly identified in advance by applying a percentage fixed ex ante.

Costs should be linked to the project to allow their payment upon achievement of concrete outputs and/or results. The amounts or rates have to be based on estimates using objective data such as statistical data or with reference to certified or auditable historical data of the applicant(s). The costs should fairly correspond to the actual costs incurred and in line with the applicant(s) cost accounting practices. No threshold is applicable.

The use of simplified cost options "unit rate" is allowed for the following cost categories:

- Human resources
- Local transportation (use of own vehicles)

- Per diems for missions (travel)

SCO Expenditure verification: auditors will not check supporting documents to verify the actual costs incurred but they will verify the correct application of the method and formula for the calculation of the cost based on related inputs and relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

At the contracting phase, the BESTLIFE2030 consortium decides whether to accept the proposed amounts or rates based on the provisional budget submitted by the applicants, by analysing factual data of grants carried out in the past by the applicants or of similar actions and by performing checks. If SCO is rejected by the BESTLIFE2030 consortium, reimbursement will be based on actual costs incurred.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the BESTLIFE2030 consortium to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant amount as a result of these corrections.

It is therefore in the applicants' interest to provide a **realistic and cost-effective budget**. While it will be recommended to, it is not necessary to request the maximum (or close to the maximum) grant amount available.

### *Eligible indirect costs*

Indirect costs incurred in carrying out the action may be eligible for flat-rate funding, but **the total must not exceed 7 %** of the estimated total eligible direct costs. Indirect costs are eligible provided they do not include costs assigned to another budget heading. The lead applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the Special Conditions of the grant contract, no further supporting documents need to be provided.

## 2.4. Conflict of interest and ineligibility

IUCN is committed to ensuring that its transactions, engagements, and relationships are transparent and do not inappropriately benefit interested persons and organisations. As the administrator of BESTLIFE2030, IUCN aims to ensure the same high standards are applied to all BESTLIFE2030 operations and funding decisions. The Programme has transparent and globally consistent eligibility criteria and decision-making processes that are approved by the European Commission and widely publicised. The investments adhere to the environmental and social policies of IUCN[3] as implementing agency of the European Commission.

All grant recipients agree to adhere to specific ethical standards about the use of BESTLIFE2030 funds, as detailed in the BESTLIFE2030 grant agreement (template available on the project website). Additional measures put in place for BESTLIFE2030 operations and decision-making that may present an actual or apparent conflict of interest are detailed below.

[3]See http://iucn.org/about/values/

Grants will not be awarded to applicants whose staff includes individuals currently employed by or closely related (i.e. immediate family) to an IUCN employee involved in the management of the BESTLIFE2030 Programme or other BEST contracts. Given the geographical and demographic specificities of ORs and OCTs, to avoid conflict of interest situations, to eliminate personal biases and to ensure an objective process, a Conflict of Interest declaration will be signed by Regional Hubs staff and experts during proposal assessment phases. If needed, designated staff will be able to recuse themselves from participating in the process.

Organisations that are member of IUCN are eligible to apply for grants provided they can demonstrate their legal and structural independence from IUCN.

Potential applicants may not participate in the call for proposals or be awarded grants if they are in any of the situations listed in the European Commission's EDES system. In the Applicant Declaration (prompted when initiating the application process on IUCN Grants Management Facility - GMF) the lead applicant must declare that they are not in any of these situations. Additionally, any co-applicants listed in the proposal will need to sign a sworn statement (Annex 1) that will be uploaded on IUCN Grants Management Facility (GMF) by the lead applicant.

# 3. HOW TO APPLY AND PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW

## 3.1. Application stages and documents

The call has two selection phases: an open concept note phase, followed by a full proposal phase for shortlisted applicants only. GMF organises the application into the forms below. Completing an eligibility form is not the same as submitting a concept note.

| GMF form | What to prepare |
|---|---|
| **1. IUCN Eligibility** | The organisation's self-declaration and the details of its authorised representative. |
| **2. BESTLIFE2030 Eligibility** | Answers on the applicant, proposed project and applicable eligibility conditions; signed co-applicant mandates and sworn statements where relevant. |
| **3. Concept Note** | The project concept, financing plan, completed budget summary and preliminary environmental and social screening. |
| **4. Full Proposal - by invitation** | The developed narrative, completed logical framework Excel file, maps, personnel information and safeguard documents where required. |
| **5. Full Detailed Budget** | The completed detailed budget Excel template, matching financing totals and documents supporting the estimates. |
| **6. Due Diligence** | The organisation's legal, governance and financial capacity information, supporting documents and authorised certification. |

Applications may be submitted in **English** or **French**. Use the same language for the concept note and full proposal. Use the templates provided for the third call; hand-written applications are not accepted. Read sections 1 and 2 of these guidelines before starting.

Download the relevant templates, read their instructions and prepare the required attachments. Complete only the designated Excel input cells. Do not remove or modify worksheet protections, formulas or the template structure. Follow the instructions in the file for adding entries.

The screenshots in this guide are illustrative test examples. Their names, answers, dates and application numbers are not instructions to copy or call deadlines. Some GMF labels may remain in English when French is selected.

## 3.2. Accessing the call and completing eligibility

Sign in to the IUCN Grants Management Facility (GMF) (https://gms-portal.iucn.org/) and open the BESTLIFE2030 third call. Read the call information and select “Apply to this call” (1) for **your region**. Use the same account throughout the application process.

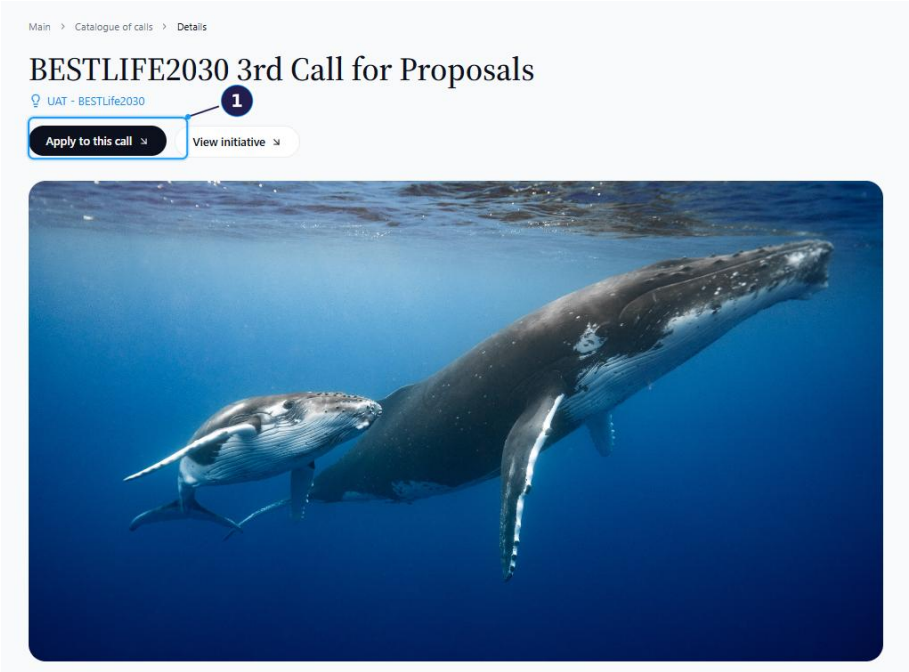


*Figure 1. Open the BESTLIFE2030 third call and start your application.*

Keep your application number for correspondence. In the application screen, check the last-saved information (1), use the left-hand menu to navigate (2), and use the download controls to keep a copy of the form or PDF (3). A padlock means that a form is not currently available for editing; follow the stage instructions or invitation.

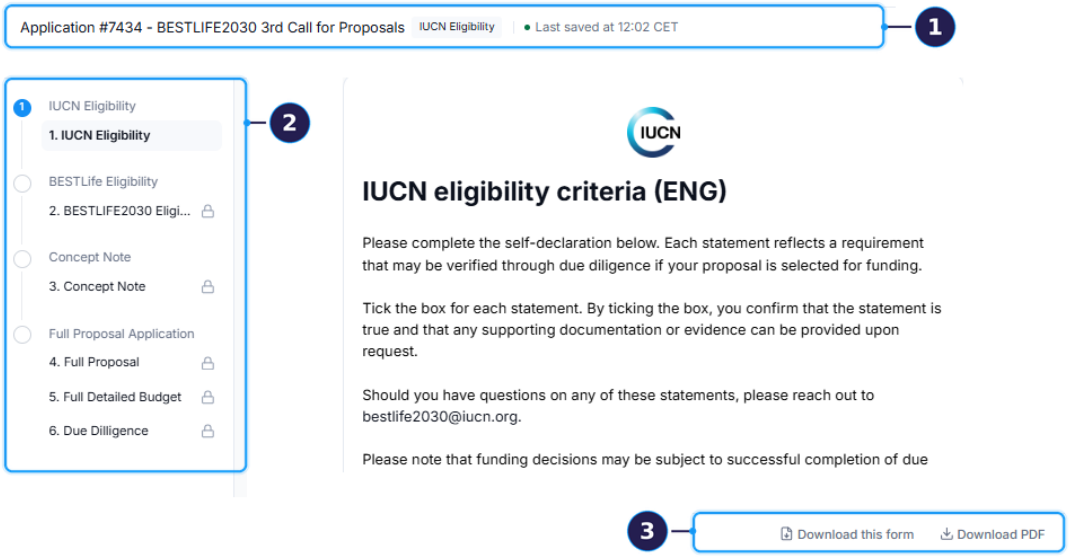


*Figure 2. Screen details: application reference, navigation and downloads.*

### *IUCN declaration and BESTLIFE2030 eligibility*

Read each IUCN declaration carefully. Tick a statement only if it is true and the organisation can provide supporting evidence on request. Complete the authorised declaration with the representative's name, position, organisation and date. Select "Submit" and confirm in the dialogue.

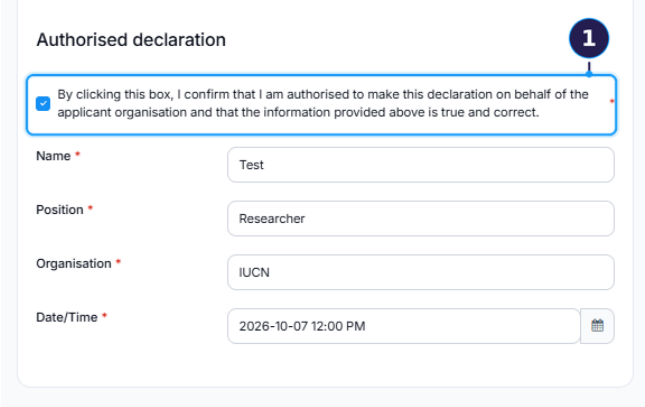


*Figure 3. Confirm the authorised declaration (1).*

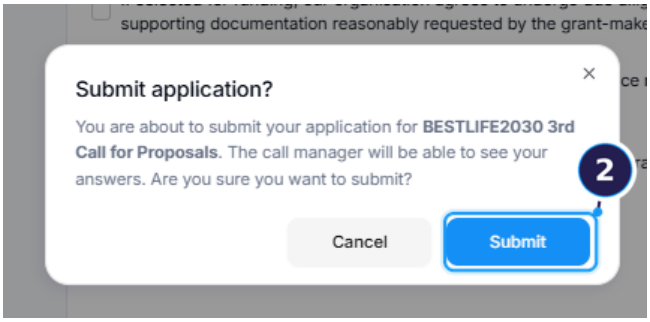


*Figure 4. Confirm submission of the current stage (2).*

Next, complete the BESTLIFE2030 eligibility check. Answer all applicable questions and provide documents requested by conditional fields, including the signed mandate and sworn statement for each co-applicant. The special conditions in section 2.1 still apply.

If an answer triggers an ineligibility message, read it carefully and contact your Regional Hub if you need clarification. Do not change a correct answer simply to proceed. A "Yes" to an excluded activity is different from identifying a manageable risk in the concept note safeguard screening.

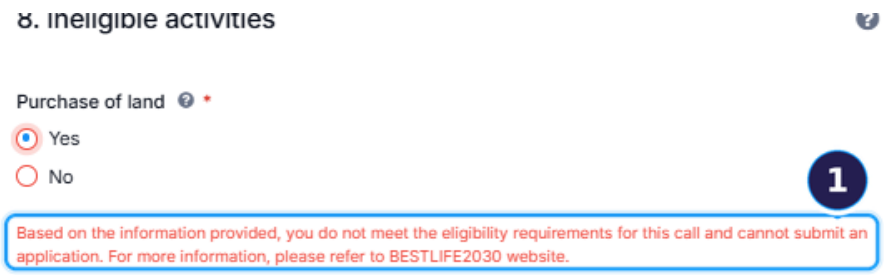


*Figure 5. An eligibility warning (1): check the applicable rule before proceeding.*

## 3.3. Preparing the concept note

Complete the online concept note after the eligibility steps. Explain the conservation need, the proposed change and why your organisation can deliver it. Keep answers focused and respect the limit shown beside each field.

### *Applicant, project design and implementation*

Provide the lead applicant's registered details, main contact, relevant experience and co-applicant information. Keep the legal names and co-applicant arrangements consistent with the eligibility check and signed documents.

State the project title, geographical scope, rationale, overall objective and contribution to BESTLIFE2030 regional priorities. Summarise the main activities and intended conservation outcomes, the people involved, implementation risks and how benefits will be sustained after the grant. Avoid repeating the same text across fields.

### *Funding and budget*

Download and complete the concept note budget summary in the chosen language. Enter the BESTLIFE2030 funding requested in the online financing plan. List each co-funding contribution, including the organisation's own resources, and indicate whether it is confirmed, requested or planned. Check the calculated co-funding total and total project budget against the Excel file, then upload the completed file in the dedicated budget field.

The grant must not exceed EUR 100,000 or 95% of the total project budget. Co-funding must cover at least 5% of the total budget. The budget summary must explain the basis of the proposed costs; the full detailed budget is required only from invited applicants.

### *Environmental and social screening*

Answer every applicable preliminary safeguard question. Describe identified risks where requested. These answers allow the Regional Hub to determine the follow-up needed at full proposal stage; identifying a risk does not by itself replace the assessment of project eligibility.

Upload optional supporting documents only where they add relevant evidence not already provided. Verify the concept note and attachments before submitting. Incomplete applications, major discrepancies or errors may lead to rejection. Clarifications are requested only where needed for an objective assessment.

## 3.4. Developing the full proposal

Only shortlisted applicants invited by IUCN may submit a full proposal. Return to the same application using the same account and language. Read the invitation and address the recommendations received following the concept note review, including the budget review.

Develop the approved concept rather than replacing it with a different project. The objectives and activities presented in the concept note remain the basis of the full proposal. Explain proposed refinements and discuss any material change with the Regional Hub. The requested BESTLIFE2030 contribution may not vary by more than 25% from the initial estimate and must remain within the grant ceiling and co-funding rules.

| Full proposal section | What to develop |
|---|---|
| **1. Lead applicant and project team** | Additional organisational details; authorised signatory and project manager; key personnel and CVs or recruitment plans; co-applicants, coordination and changes since the concept note. |
| **2.1-2.3. Project overview** | An executive summary, realistic implementation dates and the overall conservation objective. Keep the duration within 18–36 months, including extensions. |
| **2.4-2.5. Context, location and targets** | Evidence of the conservation need; regional relevance and policy contribution; project sites, coordinates and map; target habitats and species. |
| **2.6. Project approach** | Explain why the methods are appropriate and how they will deliver the intended conservation outcomes. Record individual activities in the logical framework. |
| **2.7. Logical framework** | Upload the completed linked logical framework, monitoring plan and timetable in Excel. See the guidance on the next page. |
| **2.8-2.11. Delivery and sustainability** | Stakeholder participation, inclusion, implementation risks and mitigation, communication, and arrangements for maintaining and replicating outcomes. |
| **3-4. Safeguards and supporting documents** | Complete the required safeguard follow-up and report new risks. Add relevant supporting evidence in the appropriate upload fields. |

Keep all parts consistent: the narrative explains the approach; the logical framework sets out the outcomes, outputs and activities; the monitoring plan measures progress; the timetable schedules implementation; and the budget costs the work.

### *Completing the logical framework Excel file - section 2.7*

Download the current template and read its Instructions sheet. The file contains three linked working sheets: Logical framework, Monitoring plan and Project timeline. Replace illustrative examples with your project information and retain the links and protected

formulas.

In the logical framework, use the overall project objective from section 2.3. Set out the specific objectives or outcomes, the outputs needed to achieve them and the activities that will deliver each output. Use the codes and terminology provided in the template consistently. Select the related objective or output when a drop-down asks you to link an entry.

Include at least one applicable BESTLIFE biodiversity indicator from BEST 1–10. Select other relevant indicators from BEST 11–21 and add project-specific indicators where needed. Use the definitions and units in the BESTLIFE Indicator Atlas. A custom indicator does not replace the requirement to select at least one indicator from BEST 1–10. Resolve any warning that this requirement has not been met.

Complete the monitoring information: baseline, target, unit, means of verification or measurement method, monitoring frequency and responsibility. Check automatically linked descriptions against the source entries. “Auto” means that the value is linked or calculated: update its source field instead of overwriting the formula.

Schedule the activities within the implementation dates. Check the linked activity descriptions, leads and budget references in the timetable. Include preparation, permissions, procurement, seasonal constraints, monitoring and communication. Use the same activity and budget-line references across files. Save and upload the completed Excel file in section 2.7; do not upload the budget in this field.

### *Environmental and social safeguards - section 3*

Confirm whether environmental or social risks were identified during concept note screening. If they were, complete and upload the full ESMS questionnaire, following the Regional Hub’s instructions. Provide any additional safeguard documents requested by the Hub. These requirements cannot be waived by selecting “No” or “Not applicable”.

All applicants must report changes that could introduce additional environmental or social risks, even if none were originally identified. Describe the change, the activities, sites or groups concerned, and any mitigation measures already considered. Contact the Regional Hub for the follow-up required.

## 3.5. Preparing the separate detailed budget

Complete the Full Detailed Budget form for the full project implementation period. Use euros throughout. Incorporate the recommendations received at concept note stage and ensure that the costs match the proposed activities, logical framework and timetable.

### *Excel file and financing totals*

Download the detailed budget template, read the Instructions sheet and fill in the applicable input cells. Explain the purpose and calculation of every budget line in the justification column. Complete any implementation-period breakdown requested by the template. Review the Checks sheet and resolve the errors before uploading. Do not remove or alter worksheet protections.

Manually enter two amounts in the online financing plan: (1) BESTLIFE2030 funding requested, matching the donor contribution amount in Excel; and (2) total project budget, matching the total eligible costs of the action. Check both amounts after every revision to the Excel file. The difference is the project's co-funding contribution.

Do not repeat unchanged co-funding sources already supplied in the concept note. Explain any changes relevant to the financing plan when requested and ensure that the proposal remains fully financed. Upload the completed Excel file in the dedicated detailed budget field, using a format accepted by that field.

### *Actual costs and simplified cost options*

Actual costs: prepare realistic estimates at application stage. During implementation, eligible costs are reported on the basis of actual expenditure and the supporting records required for the cost category. Explain whether each estimate is based on salary records, quotations, previous purchases or another verifiable source.

Simplified cost options: use only methods permitted for the cost category and approved for the grant, such as an agreed unit rate, lump sum or flat rate. Provide evidence supporting the proposed calculation. During implementation, retain the records demonstrating the eligible units, work or conditions required by the approved method. Multiplying quantity by price does not, by itself, make a cost a simplified cost option. See section 2.3 for the applicable rules.

### *Organising the budget supporting documents*

Provide evidence supporting the estimates, not evidence of purchases that have yet to take place. Applicants are not expected to incur project expenditure or complete future procurement to prepare the application. Existing contracts and invoices may be used where relevant to an estimate or specifically requested by finance.

| Budget category | Examples of relevant supporting documents |
|---|---|
| **Personnel** | Employment contract or appointment letter; payslip; personnel cost calculation; proposed unit-rate calculation and supporting evidence, where permitted. |

| Budget category | Examples of relevant supporting documents |
|---|---|
| **Travel** | Per diem or mileage policy/official scale; travel, transport or accommodation quotation; subsistence or distance calculation; historical invoice or cost reference. |
| **Equipment and supplies** | Supplier quotation or pro forma invoice; technical specification; rental quotation or existing rental agreement; relevant existing invoice or purchase order. |
| **Other costs and services** | Terms of reference or service specification; provider proposal or quotation; draft or existing service contract; historical invoice or fee reference. |
| **Indirect costs** | Apply the permitted flat rate to the eligible direct cost base in Excel. Do not also charge the same costs under direct budget lines. The maximum rate is 7%. |

In each relevant category, add one document per row. Enter the exact budget-line reference or references used in Excel (for example, A5 if that is the line identifier in your template), choose the document type and upload the file. A spreadsheet showing a calculation is useful when its inputs, assumptions and source records are clear.

Use clear filenames, for example “7435_A5_Personnel-cost-calculation.xlsx”. If a document supports several lines, list all relevant references in its row. Upload files individually; ZIP archives are not accepted. Check the permitted file types and size limits shown in the upload field.

Before submitting, reconcile the Excel totals, the online financing amounts, the narrative and the activity references. For technical problems with the Excel budget template, contact BESTLIFE Finance at Financebestlife2030@iucn.org.

## 3.6. Due diligence and financial capacity

Complete the Due Diligence form when it is made available and requested in the application process. It enables IUCN to verify the organisation's eligibility and capacity to administer grant funds. This organisational assessment is separate from the detailed project budget. Follow the deadline and instructions in the invitation or request.

Answer all applicable questions on legal status and ability to operate, governance, regulatory compliance, accounting, procurement, banking controls, financial capacity, personnel, internal controls and previous relationships with IUCN. Select "Not applicable" only where the form offers it and the situation genuinely applies. Explain "No" answers and alternative controls where requested.

### *Prepare the supporting documents that apply to your organisation*

- Founding instrument: statutes, constitution, incorporation document or decree for a public body; registration and authorisation to operate where applicable.
- Latest audit report and management letter where an audit is performed; annual financial statements for the past two years where prepared. Explain any absence in the relevant field.
- Existing accounting and procurement policies, code of conduct/ethics and anti-corruption provisions, including conflict-of-interest coverage, as requested.
- Timesheet template where a system is used, and other evidence requested by the conditional fields or document checklist.

Provide operating budget figures for this year and the two previous years in the reporting currency requested. Explain payment approval, separation of duties and recordkeeping arrangements. The questionnaire asks whether grant accounting records can be retained for at least ten years after submission of the final financial report.

Where questions concern co-applicants or past sub-recipient management, describe the relevant arrangements accurately. These questions do not authorise onward grants, microcredits or loans prohibited under section 2.2. The project coordinator remains responsible for project implementation.

The authorised representative must complete the certification. Ensure the evidence agrees with the earlier declarations and notify IUCN in writing if the certified information changes. A funding decision may remain subject to satisfactory completion of due diligence.

## 3.7. Checking and submitting your application

You may work in several sessions. Check the last-saved indicator and use “Save” where available before leaving the form. Saving a draft does not submit it. Allow time to upload files and resolve errors before the deadline.

- Complete required fields and conditional questions. Check names, implementation dates, amounts and consistency between the narrative, logical framework and budget.
- Verify that the correct files have finished uploading. Download and open them if needed. Complete all forms made available for the stage, including the separate budget and due diligence forms when requested.
- Select “Submit”. If a validation window appears, use “Go to fill” (1) or close it (2) to return to the form and complete the listed fields. Check every listed issue, then submit again and confirm.

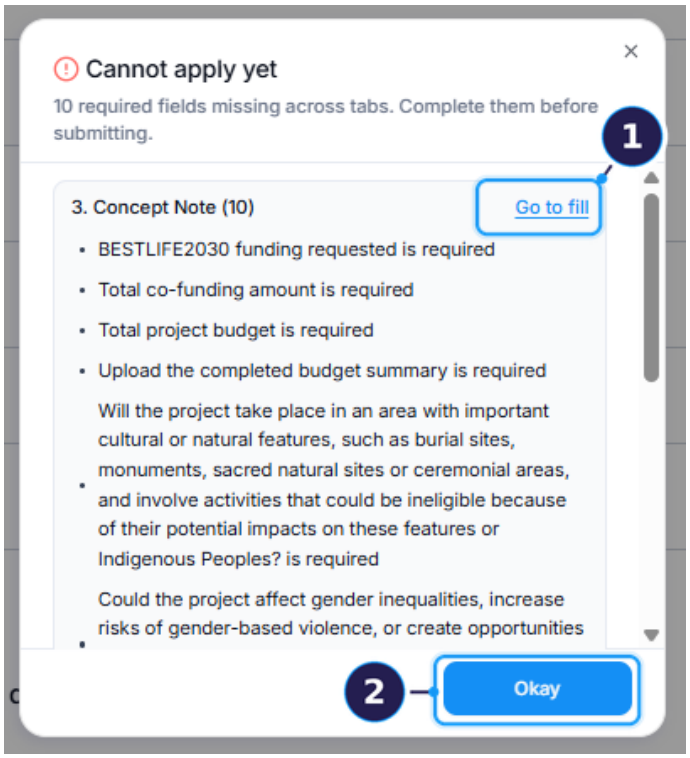


*Figure 6. Missing required fields prevent submission; follow the links to complete them.*

After submission, check the displayed status and keep a downloaded copy. A draft, an attempted submission or a validation error is not a submitted application. Draft applications not submitted by the deadline will be rejected. Submitted answers are normally locked; changes require a returned section or a specific request from IUCN.

## 3.8. Responding to clarification requests

IUCN may request an explanation or supporting documents where these are needed for an objective assessment. Monitor the email address linked to your account and your application in GMF. Respond by the deadline given in the request. A clarification request is neither a rejection nor a funding decision.

The notification email directs you to the request through “View comment” (1). Open the application’s “Clarification requests” tab, read the whole request and reply in the corresponding thread.

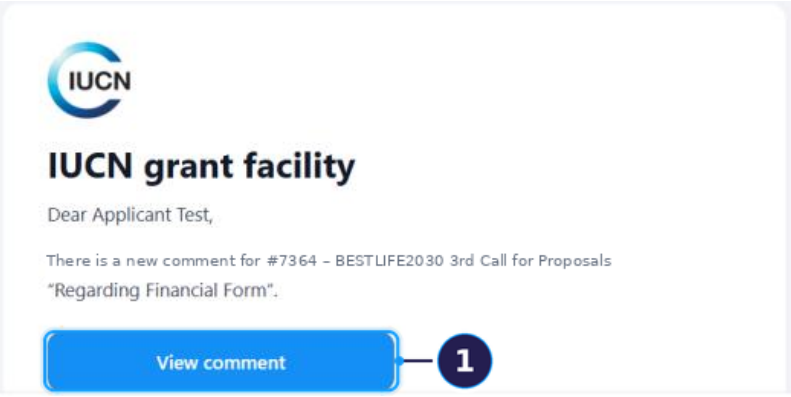


*Figure 7. Illustrative notification: the call title has been adapted to BESTLIFE2030.*

In the example below: (1) open the clarification tab; (2) enter your response; (3) attach the requested supporting documents; (4) select “Send a reply”. Check that the reply and attachments appear in the thread.

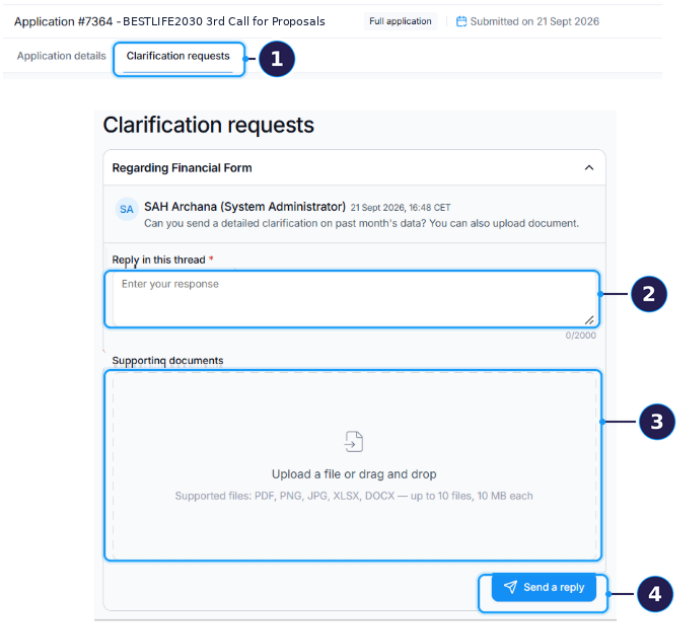


*Figure 8. Screen details from an adapted clarification example: reply and attach documents.*

If IUCN returns a section for correction, that section becomes editable again. Make the requested changes and resubmit it. Replying in a clarification thread does not by itself resubmit a returned section. Do not assume that a clarification request extends the application deadline.

## 3.9. Deadlines, timetable and support

The third call opens on **7 October 2026 at 14:00 Brussels time (CEST)**. Concept notes must be submitted by **8 December 2026 at 14:00 CET**. The full proposal deadline will be communicated in the invitation to shortlisted applicants. Remaining dates below require Secretariat confirmation before publication.

| Third-call milestone | Date | Time |
|---|---|---|
| Launch of the call for proposal | 7 October 2026 | 14:00 CEST |
| Deadline for requesting any clarifications regarding concept notes | 3 December 2026* | 14:00 CET |
| Deadline for submission of concept notes | 8 December 2026 | 14:00 CET |
| Notification of invitation to prepare a full proposal | February 2027** | TBC |
| Deadline for requesting any clarifications regarding full proposals | March 2027** | TBC |
| Deadline for submission of full proposals | April 2027** | TBC |
| Evaluation results submitted to the Board for selection decision | May 2027** | TBC |
| Notification of evaluation results to applicants | June 2027** | TBC |
| Signature of Grant Agreements | June 2027** | TBC |

*The concept note question date applies the rule of at least five days before submission. Deadlines are stated in Brussels local time (CET or CEST according to the date). Check the time difference for your location. Evaluation and notification dates are indicative and depend on the number of applications received.

**Indicative dates, subject to the number of proposals submitted. Exact dates and times will be communicated officially at a later stage.

### *Questions on the call*

First consult the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Send remaining questions to the relevant Regional Hub, copying bestlife2030@iucn.org and clearly identifying the third call. Questions concerning concept notes must be sent at least 5 days before the submission deadline; questions concerning full proposals must be sent no later than 5 working days before their deadline. Questions relevant to other applicants are added to the FAQ every two weeks.

For a GMF problem, contact the Regional Hub promptly, copying bestlife2030@iucn.org. Include the application number, form or section, exact error message and a screenshot. For an Excel budget-template problem, contact Financebestlife2030@iucn.org.

### *Regional Hubs and technical difficulties*

The Regional Hubs and the territories they cover are listed below.

| | Regional Hub | Territories (ORs*/OCTs) | Contact |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | French Biodiversity Agency (OFB – *Office français de la biodiversité*) | French Guiana*, Guadeloupe*, Martinique*, Saint Martin*, Saint Barthélémy, Réunion*, Mayotte*, French Southern and Antarctic Lands – Scattered Islands, Austral Islands and Adélie Land, Saint Pierre and Miquelon | bestlife2030@ofb.gouv.fr |
| 2 | IUCN French National Committee | New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia | pacifique@uicn.fr<br>chloe.desmots@uicn.fr |
| 3 | IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands | Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Saint-Eustache, Sint-Maarten | bestlife2030@iucn.nl |
| 4 | Consulta Europa Projects & Innovation | Azores*, Madeira*, Canary Islands* | bestlife2030@consulta-europa.com |
| 5 | Nordisk Fond for Miljø og Udvikling (NORDECO) | Greenland | nordeco@nordeco.dk |

In case of technical difficulties, applicants may inform the relevant Regional Hub and submit the complete concept note application by email, copying bestlife2030@iucn.org. For full proposals, this exception applies in cases of proven technical difficulties. The complete application documents must be received before the applicable submission deadline. Keep evidence of the problem; sending a request for help alone does not constitute an application.

Neither technical correspondence nor a request for clarification automatically extends a deadline. Allow sufficient time to resolve problems and submit a complete application.

# 4. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

Concept notes and full proposals will be examined and evaluated by the relevant Regional Advisory Committee according to the criteria set out in this document. All concept notes and full proposals will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria:

### *STEP 1: Administrative checks*

During the administrative check, the following will be assessed:

- If the deadline was met. Otherwise, the concept note will be automatically rejected.
- If the concept note satisfies all criteria specified in this document. This also includes an assessment of the eligibility of proposed actions. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the concept note may be rejected **on that sole basis**, and the concept note will not be evaluated further.

Initial eligibility checks use the declarations and documents requested in the eligibility and concept note forms. IUCN verifies these against the supporting evidence submitted through due diligence when requested, before any grant agreement is concluded.

- The declaration by the lead applicant will be cross-checked with the supporting documents provided. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the lead applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.
- The eligibility of applicants will be verified according to the criteria set out in this document (see section - 2.1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. Applicant and co-applicant/s)

The concept notes that pass this check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed actions.

### *STEP 2: Evaluation of concept notes*

Concept notes will be assessed using the evaluation criteria in the evaluation grid in Annex 2.

Concept notes are ranked according to the final score awarded. **The threshold is 30.** Applicants with concept notes that receive a total score below this threshold will not be invited to submit a full proposal.

All applicants will be informed in writing by the Coordinator, IUCN, about the results of the evaluation of their concept note (see the following section on Notification of applicants). Only pre-selected lead applicants will subsequently be invited to submit full proposals.

### *STEP 3: Evaluation of full proposals*

Full proposals must be submitted before the deadline. Otherwise, applications will automatically be rejected.

Full proposals submitted by the deadline will be evaluated on their quality (detailed proposed budget, applicant capacity, logical framework – indicators). The evaluation criteria are set out in the evaluation grid in Annex 2.

Proposals are ranked according to the final score awarded. **The threshold is 65.** Full proposals with a total score below this threshold will not be selected for funding.

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn up listing the proposals ranked according to their total score in each region. **The highest-scoring proposals will be recommended for funding until the available budget for this call for proposals is used**. In case of equal scores, the proposal that has a greater environmental impact and that supports enhanced geographic representativeness and more geographically balanced support of the BESTLIFE2030 programme will be given priority.

### *ESMS questions*

The BESTLIFE2030 project proposal sections are based on several elements of the basic project design including environmental and social risks.

At the Concept Note stage, each applicant will be required to answer preliminary Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) questions identifying potential environmental and social risks of the project. If the project is pre-selected and risk(s) are identified, a dedicated ESMS questionnaire will have to be submitted with the full proposal application. The analysis of this questionnaire will support the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) in the evaluation of the full proposal (specifically regarding the identified risks and solutions).

The RAC will focus on analysing the information provided by the potential grantee to determine the following aspects related to the project's environmental and social effects:

- Compliance with BESTLIFE2030 objectives and IUCN environmental and social safeguard policies[4]
- Potential for the project to cause adverse environmental impacts
- Potential for the project to cause adverse social impacts
- Capacity of the applicant to implement any required safeguard-related measures during the preparation and implementation of the project.

At the conclusion of the ESMS questionnaire review, the RAC will identify any environmental and social effects of the project and define any safeguard requirements necessary. Information on the findings of the ESMS analysis will be shared with the Board as part of the evaluation report. This process intends to ensure that the environmental and social safeguard issues are well analysed and, as a result, prevented or mitigated.

[4] For more details please visit https://www.iucn.org/resources/project-management-tools/environmental-and-social-management-system

# 5. NOTIFICATION OF APPLICANTS

Applicants will be informed in writing about the results of the evaluation of their proposal.

The BESTLIFE2030 team will provide an explanation to all applicants whose concept notes or proposals are unsuccessful. Applicants are encouraged to contact the relevant Regional Hubs if they have additional questions about the decision. If the applicant is not satisfied with the response, a grievance may be submitted to the BESTLIFE2030 Coordinator at bestlife2030@iucn.org.

Or by mail to the following address:

*BESTLIFE2030 Programme*

*Attn: BESTLIFE2030 Coordinator*

*IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature*

*EU Representative Office*

*64 Boulevard Louis Schmidt*

*BE-1040 Brussels, Belgium*

# 6. AWARD DECISION

Following the Board award decision, beneficiaries will be notified and offered a contract based on a standard grant agreement. By signing the proposal application form, the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the standard grant contract.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the BESTLIFE2030 team to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant amount as a result of these corrections, nor to increase salary costs at this stage.

### *Useful links:*

The annexes below are featured in this document for information only (they are not to be used for submitting your application).

List of replies to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) can be found on the BESTLIFE2030 website.

***

# 7. ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Co-Applicant mandate and sworn statement

**Co-Applicant Mandate**

**BESTLIFE2030 – 3rd Call (2026)**

The co-applicant authorises the applicant *<insert the name of the lead applicant organisation>* to submit on their behalf the present application form and to sign the standard grant contract with IUCN, as well as to be represented by the applicant in all matters concerning this BESTLIFE2030 call for proposals.

I have read and approved the contents of the proposal submitted to IUCN. I undertake to comply with the principles of good partnership practice.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** | |
| **Organisation:** | |
| **Position:** | |
| **Signature & Stamp:** | |
| **Date and place:** | |

# Co-Applicant Sworn Statement
# BESTLIFE2030 – 3rd Call (2026)

The co-applicant, represented by the undersigned, in the context of the present call for proposals, hereby declares that:

- the co-applicant has sufficient financial capacity to carry out the proposed action or work programme;
- the co-applicant certifies the legal statutes of the co-applicant as reported in the application;
- the co-applicant has the professional competences and qualifications specified in the BESTLIFE2030 Guidelines for Applicants;
- the co-applicant undertakes to comply with the principles of good partnership practice;
- the co-applicant is not acting as an intermediary;
- the co-applicant is not in any of the situations listed below excluding them from participating in contracts. Furthermore, it is recognised and accepted that if the co-applicant participates in spite of being in any of these situations, they may be excluded from other contracts:
- they are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
    - they, or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them, have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority of the country of the contracting authority, of the country in which they are established and of the country where the contract is to be performed, which has the force of res judicata (i.e. against which no appeal is possible);
    - they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify, including by decisions of international organisations;
    - they are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
    - they, or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them, have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity;
- the co-applicant is eligible in accordance with the criteria set out in the BESTLIFE2030 Guidelines;
- the co-applicant is aware that, for the purposes of safeguarding the financial

interests of the EU, their personal data may be transferred to internal audit services, to the European Court of Auditors, to the Financial Irregularities Panel or to the European Anti-Fraud Office.

Additionally, the co-applicant, represented by the undersigned, in the context of the present call for proposals, hereby declares that:

- the co-applicant does not have a conflict of interest, i.e. is not in any situation or has any interest that may compromise or be reasonably perceived to compromise their capacity to act in connection to this call for proposals.
- the co-applicant will promptly inform IUCN of any potential conflict of interest that may arise. In cases of uncertainty, the co-applicant will inform IUCN and the Regional Hub to allow them to verify the conditions to participate in this call for proposals.
- the co-applicant understands that IUCN reserves the right to verify this information, and the co-applicant is aware of the consequences which may derive from any false declaration, including the interruption of the application process.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** | |
| **Organisation:** | |
| **Position:** | |
| **Signature & Stamp:** | |
| **Date and place:** | |

# Annex 2: BESTLIFE2030 evaluation grids

**Concept notes** will be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria set out in the evaluation grid below.

| Criteria | Maximum score | Awarded score | Assessor comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Relevance (max 25)** | | | |
| 1.1. Alignment of the concept note with the overall BESTLIFE2030 objective. | 10 | | |
| 1.2. The extent to which the project is likely to have tangible positive impacts on biodiversity conservation / sustainable use of natural resources/ ecosystem services and climate change adaptation | 10 | | |
| 1.3. Extent to which the project concept will support the implementation of relevant local, territorial, national and regional strategies. | 5 | | |
| **2. Effectiveness (max 15)** | | | |
| 2.1. Feasibility of the proposed approach (realistic budget including a minimum of 5% of cofinancing/timeline) and the absence of serious risks that will impede implementation. | 15 | | |
| **3. Partnerships and sustainability (max 10)** | | | |
| 3.1. The extent to which the project identifies all relevant stakeholders and has adequately considered them in the design and implementation. | 5 | | |
| 3.2. Likely sustainability of the project concept over time and potential for replication. | 5 | | |
| **TOTAL**<br>**Threshold: 30** | **50** | | |

*Concept notes are ranked according to the final score awarded.* ***The threshold is 30.*** *Concept notes with a total score below this threshold will not be selected for developing a full proposal.*

**Full proposals** will be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria set out in the evaluation grid below.

| Criteria | Maximum score | Awarded score | Assessor comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1) Relevance and effectiveness (max 30 points)** | | | |
| 1.1. Does the project clearly indicate how it is not only consistent with the **objectives of BESTLIFE2030** but also **how it will concretely contribute to them**? | 10 | | |
| 1.2. Does the project clearly indicate how **tangible and measurable impacts will be achieved during the life of the project**? | 10 | | |
| 1.3. Does the project explain its added value to support local, regional and national policies and strategies? Is it implemented in Key Biodiversity Areas / Protected and Conserved Areas? Does it use the BEST regional ecosystem profiles? | 10 | | |
| **2) Concept and methodology (max 25 points)** | | | |
| 2.1. Is the proposed approach well-articulated, **realistic and achievable**? | 5 | | |
| 2.2. Are the **activities well defined and appropriate** to achieve the expected results? | 10 | | |
| 2.3. Does the project clearly identify **risks** and provide **solutions** to mitigate/overcome them?<br>*If applicable, this point will also take into account the responses of the ESMS questionnaire.* | 5 | | |
| 2.4. Does the project's **logical framework** contain **objectively verifiable indicators** to measure the results of the actions, in terms of objectives and results, and does it include **at least one mandatory** BESTLIFE2030 "Biodiversity" indicator (BESTLIFE 1 to 10)? | 5 | | |
| **3) Partnerships and synergies (max 15 points)** | | | |
| 3.1. Have all the **stakeholders** been identified, have they been given an appropriate role in the project in line with their skills? Does the project promote intra-territorial cooperation and synergies with other existing projects? | 10 | | |
| 3.2. Does the project **support capacity building**, the sharing of experiences and/or does it promote local partnerships? Does the project allow complementarity with other projects? | 5 | | |
| **4) Budget and financial consistency (max 15 points)** | | | |
| 4.1. Are the activities properly reflected in the budget? | 5 | | |
| 4.2. Is the budget adequate: is the ratio between the estimated costs and the expected results satisfactory? | 10 | | |
| **5) Added value and sustainability (max 15 points)** | | | |
| 5.1. Is there a clear approach to ensure the **sustainability** of activities beyond the project and encourage their duplication? Is there an 'exit strategy plan'? | 5 | | |
| 5.2. Does the project include **dissemination and communication** activities? | 5 | | |
| 5.3. Does the project integrate elements such as the promotion of **gender equality, equal opportunities, participation of people with disabilities and young people, minority rights**? | 5 | | |
| **TOTAL**<br>**Threshold: 65** | **100** | | |

*Proposals are ranked according to the final score awarded.* ***The threshold is 65. Full proposals with a total score below this threshold will not be selected for funding.***