

*****Updated on 01/12/2023. Modified text written in red.*****

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First call for proposals – 2023

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

Guidelines for applicants Concept Note phase

Deadline for submission of concept notes:

8 January 2024 at 14:00 CET (Brussels date and time)

(in order to convert to local time click [here](#))

Applicants are strongly recommended to read this guidance document in full before submitting their proposals

BEST *Life*
2030

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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 (<i>L'Instrument européen de Financement pour l'Environnement et l'action pour le climat</i>)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization(s)
OECM	Other effective area-based conservation measures
OFB	French Office for Biodiversity (<i>Office français de la biodiversité</i>)
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. FINANCIAL ALLOCATION

The indicative total amount made available for this BESTLIFE2030 call for proposals is **five million eight hundred and twenty-two thousand nine hundred and ninety-three euros (EUR 5,822,993)**. The BESTLIFE2030 Board (signatories of the grant agreement, except donor CINEA) reserves the right to increase or decrease the amount depending on the number of high-quality proposals.

BESTLIFE2030 grants amount to a maximum of EUR 100,000 or 95% of the project budget if the requested amount is below said limit. Therefore, if the applicant's contribution is 5% (**although it can be higher**), the total budget will be EUR 105,263.16. 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. As 5% co-funding of the total budget is required, it can take the following forms: (i) own resources (resources that are not linked specifically to the action submitted for funding), or (ii) 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

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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 in **August 2024 or later**. **Extensions will only be granted if well justified.**

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 (*). Regional and international organisations, 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;** grants cannot be paid into an account in the name of an individual.

() Financing of entities from third countries¹ 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 third countries can never be coordinating beneficiary.*

*Organisations that are registered in an 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 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 primarily:

- local non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- local civil society organisations (CSOs)
- local community-based organisations (CBOs)
- local non-profit organisations
- small and medium enterprises as defined by the EC²
- local research organisations (provided eligible activities are implemented)
- local sub-governmental bodies i.e. municipalities, cities of a territory, communal services

The lead applicant may act **individually or with co-applicant(s)**. Co-applicants must sign the mandate included as Annex 1: Co-applicant Mandate. If awarded a grant, the lead applicant will become the beneficiary identified as the Coordinator in the grant contract. The coordinator represents and acts on behalf of any other co-beneficiary (if any) and coordinates the design and implementation of the action. The Coordinator will bear full responsibility for the technical and financial implementation of the project.

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://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en

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An organisation can submit and be awarded a maximum of two proposals, on conditions that they submit:

(i) one proposal as lead applicant and a maximum of one other proposal as a co-applicant; or

(ii) two proposals as co-applicant, with no other application.

The max grant amount requested per proposal cannot exceed EUR 100 000.

If an organization (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 TERRITORIES (i.e. OCTs with no permanent population)

Exceptional access to BESTLIFE2030 grants is allowed for:

- Territorial governments 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 OCT authority as a co-applicant, the applicant must demonstrate that the proposed project **has the support of the relevant 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 in order to meet project objectives.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR OCTs WITH A LOW POPULATION

Exceptional access to BESTLIFE2030 grants is allowed for OCT territorial governments and their services when both criteria below are met (this applies to territories as a whole and not to uninhabited islands within territories):

- There is a low population, i.e. < 60 000 inhabitants, and a population density < 100 pop/km²;
- The project puts a strong emphasis in the territory on collaboration with local stakeholders and includes 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 ; <u>they can only be involved in a project as sub-contractors.</u>
Local sub-governmental bodies of an OR/OCT (i.e. municipalities, cities etc.)		No special conditions
OR/OCT territorial government departments and services		* Only for OCTs with a low population (< 60 000 inhabitants), provided that the project puts a strong emphasis on local collaboration and partnership with the local civil society, and/or local sub-governmental 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		* 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.
Regional Organisations		Not eligible
International Organisations		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 **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, habitats. More information on KPIs will be provided during the full proposal phase.

Following consultations with various OR/OCT stakeholders, the following list of eligible activities was devised for this first call for proposals:

Conservation of biodiversity in ORs / OCTs

- Conservation of protected or endangered species;
- Improving habitat conservation, restoring degraded habitats and improving functionality of ecological continuity (aquatic / terrestrial / marine);
- Improving the status of threatened species and their habitats;
- Mapping of vegetation/habitats and **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 implementation of concrete activities**;
- Establishment/extension of protected and conserved areas (PCA), 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);

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- Strengthening the effectiveness of PCA management (with **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, ecosystems (e.g. ecosystem management, participatory Community-Based Monitoring), with **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 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.

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;

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- Support the development of sustainable regime and economic valorisation of biodiversity (excluding invasive species), ecosystems and ecosystems 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 to the [Invasive Alien Species Regulation](#).
- Given the Nature Restoration Law and the Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, proposed by the European Commission in June 2022 and July 2023, respectively, applicants will be encouraged to implement activities linked to the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the European Green Deal.
- 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

- 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 in accordance with BESTLIFE2030 Procurement Policy and are in line with the national procurement regulations, if applicable.
- ✓ **Costs derived from subcontracts**, provided that that the purchases are made in accordance with BESTLIFE2030 Procurement Policy (subcontracting normally limited to 30% of 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 costs options** or on 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.

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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 contracting phase, the BESTLIFE2030 consortium decides whether to accept the proposed amounts or rates on the basis of 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 are 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 environmental and social policies of IUCN³ as implementing agency of the European Commission.

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

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 a 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's grants portal) 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's grants portal by the lead applicant.

³ <http://iucn.org/about/values/>

3. HOW TO APPLY AND PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW

This is a **two-stage application process** conducted via [IUCN's grants portal](#):

- **Stage 1:** Open call for project **concept notes**;
- **Stage 2:** By invitation only, preselected concept notes will be invited to submit a **full project proposal**.

Applicants can submit applications **in English or French**. Templates and guidelines are available in both languages on the [BESTLIFE2030 website](#). **Hand-written applications will not be accepted.**

3.1. ONLINE APPLICATION

Applications **must be submitted only through the BESTLIFE2030 section of IUCN's grants portal**.

- 1) Applicants need to create an account;
- 2) Applicants can fill in their applications in multiple sittings and save draft versions;
- 3) Once all required information is provided, applicants can finalise their applications by clicking the "submit" button.

Please note that, once submitted, applications cannot be modified in any way, even though all information provided and files uploaded will be available for consultation and download. Before submitting the proposal, applicants must make sure that all requested information and documents have been uploaded successfully. Applications can also be deleted if applicants wish to do so.

In case of technical difficulties, applicants can inform the relevant regional hub and apply via email, ensuring that programme coordinator IUCN is copied (bestlife2030@iucn.org). The email containing the complete application documents must be received before the deadline for submissions.

IUCN's implementing partners and the eligible territories they are covering are listed in the table below.

Table 1. BESTLIFE2030 Regional Hubs

	Regional Hub	Territories (ORs* / OCTs)	Contact
1	French Biodiversity Agency (OFB – <i>Office français de la biodiversité</i>)	French Guiana*, Guadeloupe*, Martinique*, Saint Martin*, Saint Barthélemy, 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@iucn.fr
3	IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands	Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Saint-Eustache, Sint-Maarten	caspar.verwer@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

3.2. CONCEPT NOTE

Applicants have to fill in the different sections of the online template. Activities must be clearly articulated, and capacity to manage and implement successful projects demonstrated.

From a financial point of view, lead applicants must only provide **an estimate of the requested BESTLIFE2030 contribution**. The elements outlined in the concept note may not be modified in the full application. The BESTLIFE2030 contribution **may not vary** from the initial estimate **by more than 25%**. A detailed budget is to be submitted by lead applicants only if invited to submit a full application in the second phase.

Table 2. Concept note phase budget structure

Cost category	Amount (EUR)	Justification
1. Human Resources		
2. Travel		
3. Equipment and supplies		
4. Other costs and services		
5. Indirect costs (7% maximum)		
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET		
Co-financing (minimum 5%)		

Any error or major discrepancy related to the concept note instructions may lead to the rejection of the concept note. Clarifications will only be requested when the information provided is not sufficient to conduct an objective assessment.

Lead applicants must verify that their concept note is complete using the concept note checklist. Incomplete concept notes may be rejected.

In addition to consulting the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), clarification questions on the call for proposals can be sent by email to Regional Hubs (with project coordinator IUCN in copy) **no later than 15 December 2023**, clearly indicating the reference of the BESTLIFE2030 call for proposals.

3.3. FULL PROPOSAL

Only applicants invited to submit a full proposal following the pre-selection of their concept note can do so using the BESTLIFE2030 portal. **Hand-written proposals will not be accepted.**

Applicants must submit their full proposal in the **same language** as their concept note.

Any error related to the points listed in the checklist in the proposal application form or any major inconsistency in the full proposal (e.g. if budget amounts are inconsistent) may lead to the rejection of the proposal.

Lead applicants must verify that their proposal is complete using the proposal checklist. Incomplete full proposals may be rejected. Clarifications will only be requested when information provided is unclear and thus prevents evaluators from conducting an objective assessment.

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As part of the full proposal, the applicants whose project has identified risks at the Concept Note stage have to fill in the Environmental and Social Management System (**ESMS**) **full questionnaire** (see ESMS preliminary questions in online form). This document is **compulsory** for enabling the evaluation of the project proposal.

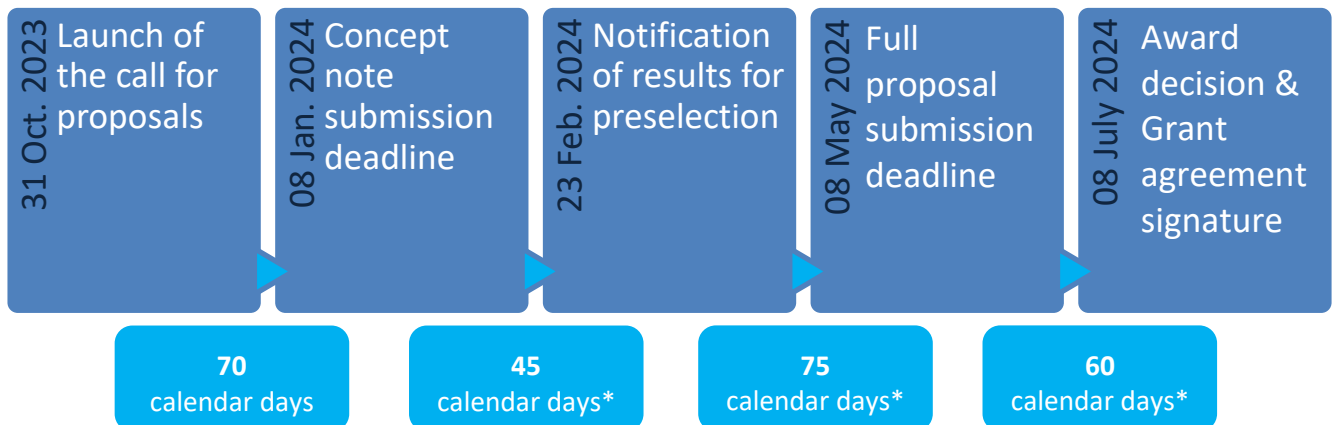
The full proposal must be submitted electronically on the [BESTLIFE2030 portal](#) using the same account and login as the concept note. Templates and other information relevant for the full proposal phase will be made available online in due course.

The deadline for the submission of full proposals will be indicated in the letter sent to the lead applicants whose concept notes have been pre-selected. In case of proven technical difficulties, applicants can submit their proposals via email to the relevant regional hub ensuring that programme coordinator IUCN is copied (bestlife2030@iucn.org). The email containing the complete application documents must be received before the deadline for submissions.

In case of difficulties that cannot be solved by consulting the Frequent Asked Questions (FAQ), queries may be sent by email to the relevant regional hub **no later than 10 working days before the deadline for the submission of full proposals**, clearly indicating the reference of the call for proposals.

Please note that questions that may be relevant to other applicants will be added to the FAQ list every two weeks by IUCN.

3.4. DEADLINES AND TIMELINE



**Indicative periods, depending on the number of proposals submitted*

Table 3. Important dates for the first BESTLIFE2030 call for proposals

BESTLIFE2030 call for proposals	DATE*	TIME*
Launch of the call for proposal	31 Oct. 2023	-
Deadline for requesting any clarifications regarding concept notes	15 Dec. 2023	23:59
Deadline for submission of concept notes	08 Jan. 2024	14:00
Notification of invitation to prepare a full proposal	23 Feb. 2024**	-
Deadline for requesting any clarifications regarding full proposals	24 April 2024**	23:59
Deadline for submission of full proposals	08 May 2024**	14:00
Evaluation results submitted to the Board for selection decision	27 June 2024**	-
Notification of evaluation results to applicants	08 July 2024**	-
Signature of Grant Agreements	15 Aug. 2024**	-

*All dates/time are in the CET time zone (Belgium)

**Indicative dates, depending on the number of proposals submitted

Once the deadline for the call expires, all incomplete applications within the system saved as drafts but not submitted will be rejected.

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.

The eligibility verification will be performed based on the supporting documents submitted with the Due Diligence and Financial Capacity Form.

- 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 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.

BESTLIFE2030 Guidelines

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 an 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 policies⁴
- 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. The intent of this process is 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
European Regional 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:

All application templates are available as separate editable files on the [BESTLIFE2030 website](#). 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](#) and [portal](#).

* * *

7. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: CO-APPLICANT MANDATE AND SWORN STATEMENT

ANNEX 2: BESTLIFE2030 EVALUATION GRIDS

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Annex 1. Co-Applicant Mandate and Sworn statement: BESTLIFE2030 – 1st Call (2023)

Mandate

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 grant contract.

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

Sworn statement

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

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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.

Name:	
Organisation:	
Position:	
Signature & Stamp:	
Date and place:	

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Annex 2. Evaluation grids BESTLIFE2030 – 1st Call (2023)

Table 1. Evaluation grid – concept note phase

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. Extent to which the project is likely to have tangible positive impacts on biodiversity conservation / sustainable use of natural resources / climate change/ ecosystem services.	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/timeline) and the absence of serious risks that will impede implementation.	15		
3. Partnerships and sustainability (max 10)			
3.1. 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 Threshold: 30	50		



Table 2. Evaluation grid – full proposal phase

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? <i>If applicable, this point will also take into account the responses of the ESMS questionnaire.</i>	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?	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 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 Threshold: 65	100		