**Prior Information Notice (PIN)**

**Introduction**

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (‘the Customer’) is currently preparing to initiate a procurement process to build the evidence base for demonstrating the impact of the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) Tree Planting Programme and beyond. The Customer intends to award contracts under several lots, each of which addresses an evidence gap in the NCF Tree Planting Programme.

**Background**

The [England Trees Action Plan](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987432/england-trees-action-plan.pdf) (ETAP) sets out the government’s long-term vision for the treescape it wants to see in England by 2050 and beyond in order to reduce climate change and to improve biodiversity in the UK.  The Nature for Climate Fund is a primary delivery vehicle to meet the above Defra targets and generate a trajectory to ensure the Government meets ETAP policy outcomes. The fund will run up to 2025 and the scope of this work includes the NCF Tree Planting Programme (‘the Programme’) only.

The Programme incorporates new partnerships and a range of workstreams such as building sector capacity and improving management of woodlands. It provides grants and advice to increase woodland creation and expansion to at least 7,500ha per year by March 2025, as well as a range of associated benefits, including carbon sequestration, strengthened biodiversity, habitat creation, improved flood mitigation and water quality, and social/economic development in line with government ‘levelling up’ objectives.

A monitoring and evaluation framework was developed by a third party to set out the evaluation approach and a KPI framework in May 2022. The KPI framework consists of log frames that detail indicators against outputs, intermediate outcomes and outcomes in the Programme Theory of Change. The KPI framework has several indicator areas that have evidence gaps or require further development. We expect the successful supplier to prioritise demonstrating the changes within the life of the Programme and where this is not possible, providing a modelled trajectory of the achievement of outcomes.

**Requirement**

We invite single organisations or a consortium of organisations to provide proposals across several lots to develop indicators for the Programme evaluation. In broad terms, our requirement is focussed on organisations with scientific expertise and experience of indicator development. Several key outcomes were highlighted as areas for indicator development in May 2022, these include:

* Biodiversity– the requirement is to measure biodiversity in existing and new woodland and provide a projection of how it may change over time based on the interventions of planting and protecting trees in and outside of woodland.
* Water quality – improving water quality is a key objective and area of interest. Indicators measuring water quality are absent and it will be beneficial to understand the number of hectares planted by NCF in areas of England with lowest water quality and the change in water quality as a result.
* Carbon sequestration – it will be important to measure carbon sequestration e.g. a model) versus more complex site-specific sequestration measurement (across different areas, soil types, rock types, tree age, and tree types).
* Air quality – the requirement is to model the level of pollutant removal which NCF planting will deliver for six priority air pollutants: PM10, PM2.5, SO2, NH3, NO2, O3. The actual pollutant removal NCF trees programme will achieve is location and species dependent and cannot be currently accurately quantified. The existing indicator is crudely modelled.

The KPI Framework is currently under review and the scope of this procurement may extend to other *potential* outcome areas for indicator development such as flood mitigation and resilience, and tree mortality rates. These will be confirmed prior to initiating the next stage of the commercial process.

Our aim in commissioning this research is to provide usable, robust, relevant, and timely evidence so that the Customer can deliver a thorough monitoring and evaluation of the programme that gives confidence to others on whether it has achieved its projected outcomes.

We need indicators that are operationalizable by January 2024 so that they can be incorporated into the interim impact evaluation and final programme evaluation.Potential suppliers are expected to provide proposals for developing one or more indicators and should submit a separate bid for each indicator.

We understand indicator development for the outcomes described above is challenging and we expect that some of the outcomes described will only have longer-term applicability as benefits from tree planting will be realised over a far longer time than the lifespan of the Programme. We welcome suppliers that can provide an approach and methodology that consider how attribution, forecasting, existing evidence, and site-specific approaches could help to demonstrate the Programme’s impact so far.

**Commercial approach**

The purpose of this Prior Information Notice is to determine the market’s interest in developing indicators to inform the Programme evaluation. At this stage, any information gathered through this exercise may inform internal business planning and any possible subsequent procurement process and will **not** be appraised in any future tender evaluation exercise.

Defra are keen to undertake early engagement with the market to understand the available skills, market capacity and capability, and any barriers to entry. We are also keen to drive collaboration and joint working with the market and to engage with the market to refine the final specification ahead of procurement.

A pre-market engagement will give potential suppliers the opportunity to feedback on our current thinking and to tell us about any alternative approaches or innovative ideas to successfully demonstrate the Programme’s impact.