**Invitation to tender (ITT)**

**Carbon Innovation Fund Round 3: Evaluation and learning support**

1. **Introduction**

This is an invitation to tender(ITT) to commission an expert organisation/partnership or individual to assess the impact and support learning from our Carbon Innovation Fund Round Three (CIF3). Our three-year, £3.5m [**Carbon Innovation Fund**](https://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/how-we-fund/carbon-innovation-fund-2/)is a partnership between The Co-op Foundation and the Co-op. [Round Three](https://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/how-we-fund/carbon-innovation-fund-3/) focuses on sustainable ways to create a thriving food and farming sector, while avoiding damage to peat soils across the UK.

The expert is expected to play a critical role in assessing the impact of the fund by:

* Co-creating with our funded partners our learning and evaluation approach so that it will be proportionate and useful for the funded organisations
* Facilitating funded partner learning events
* Designing methods, collecting and analysing data and collating the impact and learning of the programme.

This work requires:

* Research and evaluation expertise in peat conservation and restoration, sustainable techniques for growing food crops on peat soils e.g., paludiculture, wetter farming, alternatives to the use of peat as fertiliser e.g., vermiculture, use of algae
* Knowledge of scaling up innovations in farming
* Facilitation skills
* Science communications skills.

**Proposals up to 10 pages to conduct this work need to be submitted by 5pm 27th January 2025.**

The primary audiences for this piece of work are the CIF3 [funded partners](https://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/blog/round-three-cif-partners/)[[1]](#footnote-2) so that they can use the findings to improve their work and scale up their solutions, and other organisations and farmers that could adopt their solutions. The secondary audience is other funders who are looking to support alternative solutions to peat-free or peat-protecting food-growing methods.

1. **Background information**
   1. **Who we are and the Carbon Innovation Fund**

The Co-op Foundation is the [Co-op’s charity](http://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/) and we’re co-operating for a fairer world.

We believe co-operation is at the heart of strong communities and this makes us a different kind of funder. We work closely with communities; we listen and we learn. We unlock communities’ power by focusing on those who have most at stake.

The Carbon Innovation Fund (CIF) is our way of creating sustainable communities as part of our strategy, [‘Building communities of the future together’](https://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/strategy-2022-27/) and in partnership with Co-op. It’s funded through Co-op donations raised from the sale of compostable carrier bags in the UK and our own [Co-op Foundation funds](https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/3983278/financial-history).

CIF supports initiatives that aim to reduce the environmental impact of the food and farming sector. In Round One, we funded a broad range of initiatives working to reduce the environmental impact of the food and farming sector. Round Two focused specifically on innovative projects reducing the UK’s reliance on soy-containing feed and synthetic fertilisers.

* 1. **Carbon Innovation Fund Round 3**

For Round Three of funding (CIF3), we want to focus on sustainable ways of supporting a thriving food and farming sector that avoids damaging peat soils across the UK. The focus of CIF3 is also a part of Co-op’s effort to protect peatlands in the UK. In 2021, Co-op was the first UK supermarket to completely [end the sale of peat-based bagged compost](https://www.co-operative.coop/media/news-releases/co-op-re-peats-commitment-to-only-sell-peat-free-compost-as-government) across its stores. In 2023, Co-op announced [a three-year partnership with the RSPB](https://www.rspb.org.uk/corporate-partnerships/co-op), donating a £1million from the sale of its compostable carrier bags to contribute to their peatland restoration projects.

* + 1. **Why focus on peat?**

We need to protect peatlands to protect climate and the wider environment.

Peat bogs can store up to 30 times more carbon per hectare than a rainforest (Forest Carbon, 2023). In addition to enabling carbon sequestration and storage, protecting peatland delivers additional environmental benefits including the protection of natural habitats for wildlife, improving water quality, and reducing flood risk by regulating water flow.

In the UK alone, an estimated 3.2 billion tonnes of carbon are stored in peatlands. With almost 80% of UK peatland degraded, it is estimated that without intervention to repair and preserve UK peatlands, greenhouse gas emissions from degraded peatland could exceed the equivalent of 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) each year. Much of the degradation arises from the drainage of peatland for crop production. As a result, we want to focus our funding on ways to protect peatland while still providing food.

* + 1. **Aim, activities and objectives of the fund**

**Carbon Innovation Fund Round 3 aims** to create more sustainable management of peat soils and protect peatlands by reducing reliance on peat in food supply chains.

**The Fund’s activities for this include:**

* Investing in testing and scaling up sustainable peat-free or peat-protecting food growing methods. This includes protecting peatland used for growing crops or for grazing livestock.
* Support work that may be ‘risky’ for other funders because for example of the size of the organisation or because they have only conducted a pilot so far.

**The Fund’s overall objectives are to:**

* Strengthen existing or create new networks and collaborations between farmers and other stakeholders that bring together solutions to common challenges.
* Increase access to knowledge, techniques and skills for the UK farming community.
* Increase farmers’ confidence, skills and knowledge to transition successfully into a new era of peat-free and/or peat-protecting sustainable growing.
* Reduce costs for farmers and consumers and have a positive impact on the environment through the adoption of alternative solutions to protect peatland.

**Funded projects**

CIF3 invited applications for grants of £50,000-£150,000 to initiatives that:

* Reduce and remove the amount of peat needed to grow crops within food supply chains.
* Establish sustainable management that protects peat soils by using alternative, non-damaging land-management methods for crops and/or livestock grazing.

In August 2024 we announced our successful proposal. The list of funded organisations, the level and duration of funding and the project focus are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Carbon Innovation Fund grants**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Organisation | Funding duration | Total | Project focus |
| [Derbyshire Wildlife Trust](https://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/) | 18 months | £86,831 | Working with farmers to develop action plans on how to maintain or improve farm income and food production, while delivering lowland peatland restoration and sustainable farming. |
| [The Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants](https://www.wildlifebcn.org/) | 2 years | £150,000 | Testing new ways to sow, manage and monitor crops sustainably on peatlands and test their suitability as feed for livestock. This will demonstrate wetted land farming techniques that can be scaled up if needed, while protecting peat soils. |
| [Rhyze Mushrooms Co-op CIC](https://rhyzemushrooms.org/) | 2 years | £148,200 | Developing compost using worms that is easily replicable and scaled-up to be used on farms. This method would make it possible for market gardens to produce their own high-quality peat-free compost to grow vegetables. |
| [Tagsa Uibhist](https://www.tagsa.co.uk/) | 18 months | £149,999 | Developing a more local food system on Uist in the Outer Hebrides to alleviate food insecurity without damaging peatlands and the fragile Western Isles eco-system. |
| [Algae Products International Ltd.](https://algae-products.com/) | 12 months | £150,000 | Developing soil additives from algae, without using peat or emitting carbon. These soil additives could then be used for fertiliser, or as alternatives to grazing for animals. |
| [criw compostio](https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/cy/org/public-profile/75909) | 3 years | £122,957 | De-mystifying food waste management, regulation and processing and creating a unique peat-free compost for the community. |
| [The Lancashire Wildlife Trust](https://www.lancswt.org.uk/) | 2 years | £148,181 | Developing sustainable techniques for growing food crops on peat soils. By growing on peatland that is more saturated with water, they hope to reduce greenhouse gas emissions whilst maintaining economically viable food production. |

1. **CIF3 learning and impact**

The Co-op Foundation is seeking to commission an evaluation and learning expert who will co-create our learning and evaluation approach with our funded partners so that the produced evidence is useful for their practice. It will also enable the assessment of impact and learning from our investments across the seven funded organisations.

Our learning and evaluation approach at Co-op Foundation is underpinned by our co-operative values. How we learn is as important as what we learn. We want to understand where we are making a difference, what works in what context, identify gaps and target our support. We support our **funded partners** in learning and measuring impact for their own benefit, to improve their practice and foster opportunities for peer learning. Our expectations of partners are proportionate and set in the context of transparent, open and trusting relationships.We want to turn learning into actions for greater impact.

We expect the expert’s work to help answer a set of learning questions to improve the practice of our funded partners, the Co-op Foundation and other funders. The aims and learning questions have been designed through a co-operative approach that included workshops with our funded partners, our Funding and Partnerships team and 1:1 discussion with Co-op.

* 1. **Aim, objectives, learning questions**

The aim of the learning and impact work for CIF3 is to advance the evidence for different types of options for growing food that does not damage peat and for conservation action that can inform future peat restoration on farmland. Our ambition is for the evidence to add to a body of knowledge that a network of organisations can use to advocate for peat free practices within food production to influence government policy and legislation.

**Objectives:**

* To test, measure and analyse data to evaluate the effectiveness of the peat alternatives.
* To assess the scalability of the solutions by the end of the project and how this could realistically influence commercial-level supply chains.
* To understand the barriers to stopping the use of peat and recommend solutions on how to overcome these.
* To produce evidence and raise the profile of grassroots/community-based solutions for peat free-food production.
* To assess Co-op Foundation’s funding practices in CIF3

**Research questions:**

Solutions

* What and how well do CIF3 solutions protect peatland and promote more sustainable land use?
* What CIF3 solutions have not worked and why?
* What tested solutions can be scaled up and how can these solutions be scaled-up?

Impacts

* What are the environmental, social, and financial effects of peatland protection resulting from the CIF3 projects?
* What key factors influence the success of the solutions e.g., geography, types of peatland etc.
* How can we measure the reduction of CO2 emissions that the different CIF3 solutions deliver?
* Are some/any of the solutions able to make a dent in improving the commercial food supply chain in the UK? If so, how?

Barriers

* What are the barriers to peatland protection, and how do we overcome these?
* What are the barriers to changing value chains and consumer behaviour?

Dissemination and engagement

* How can we create effective narratives and framing that support consumption change that protects peatland?
* How can we change farmer/growers behaviours to adopt more sustainable practices that avoid damage to peat soils?
* How have our funded partners engaged different communities as part of scaling up their solutions? What have been their successes and challenges? Note: we expect each funded partner to define their community differently based on the focus of their project.

Legacy

* What is the expected legacy of the projects?
* What further support is needed to scale up the solutions?
* What needs to happen following the end of the projects for the solutions to be adopted at a wider scale and taken up by the supply chain and become established practices?
* What funding practices have worked well and what could be improved from the Co-op Foundation’s funding practices (from application stage to delivery and closing the funding programme).

1. **Scope of work**

We encourage bidding providers to suggest appropriate and innovative ways in their proposals to undertake this work and we also expect the expert to co-create the final methodology for learning and assessing the impact of CIF3 in collaboration with our funded partners. We acknowledge that the choice of methodology and level of depth of the learning and evaluation work is expected to be influenced by the available budget and timeline.

In this section, we articulate some of the activities this work may involve:

* Conducting site visits to observe the practices and interviewing our funded partners face-to-face.
* Engaging our funded partners in the CIF3 learning and evaluation activities in a way that does not divert them from their project delivery and is proportionate to the level of funding and scope of their project.
* Adopting a mixed method approach that combines collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data.
* Adopting methods based on best practice.
* Organising opportunities (face to face and online) for the funded partners to come together, learn from each other and network.
* Identifying opportunities for funded partners and the Co-op Foundation to share learning from CIF3 externally e.g. through networks, platforms and events.

Partners have been advised to dedicate 5% of their funding to learning and evaluation activities as a recognition of the staff time and resources these activities require. Some partners have more capacity and skills than others in measuring the impact of their project and learning and reflection. All of our funded partners have indicated that they have plans to evidence the impact of their individual projects. The expert will be a helpful resource for all projects to draw on to support their critical reflection and learning.

* 1. **Provider requirements**

Successful bidding providers should have:

* Research and evaluation expertise in peat conservation and restoration, sustainable techniques for growing food crops on peat soils e.g., paludiculture, alternatives to the use of peat e.g., vermiculture, using algae as fertiliser.
* Knowledge and understanding of approaches, barriers and enablers of innovation in farming.
* Facilitation skills.
* Science communication skills.
* An understanding of funding practices, grant-making and philanthropy.

We also expect the expert individual/organisation/partnership team to be diverse in membership and inclusive in practice.

1. **Deliverables**

We expect the following deliverables:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Deliverables** | **Deadline** |
| Publishable thematic reports (maximum 30 pages each) and blogs to disseminate these. We welcome proposals that suggest how these deliverables might look like.  The thematic reports will be focusing on emerging areas of interest as our projects evolve. Producing these reports will require looking at our funded partners’ project progress, peer reviewed and grey literature, and external expert input on the particular topic. | Years 1 and 2 of the contract (dates to be agreed) |
| Two annual face-to-face learning events that will bring together the funded partners to reflect on progress and share learning on topics of their interest | Spring 2025, Spring 2026 |
| Online peer-learning and networking events | To be confirmed |
| Short engaging summaries of the discussions and outcomes from the online peer-learning and annual face to face learning events | Spring 2025, Spring 2026 |
| Final publishable impact and process report (maximum 40 pages) on the impact of the projects, effectiveness of funding process, key learnings and recommendations for the funded partners, other organisations working in the same area of focus, and funders. | June 2027 |

1. **Budget and timeline**

The budget available for the work, including all expenses and VAT, is £95,000 to be spent approximately during the period January 2025-June 2027 (depending on the project’s estimated completion time). The budget should also cover all costs associated with quality assurance, proof-reading and design of the final outputs. An appropriate allowance for expenses and management time should be included. Budget should indicate VAT where this applies. The budget should include costs for organising the learning events (venue and refreshments) for the two face-to-face annual events. Co-op Foundation will cover the funded partners’ participation.

1. **Ethics**

We expect the research to adhere to the Social Research Association (SRA) [research ethics guidance](https://the-sra.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Resources/SRA%20Research%20Ethics%20guidance%202021.pdf).

1. **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is one of Co-op Foundation’s strategic priorities and we are committed to cultivating a fair and healthy environment for the people who work here and those we work with. As we learn more about barriers that disadvantage certain groups from progressing in our workplace, we will remove them.  We would like to partner with suppliers who share our commitment to DEI. We will ask applicants questions related to DEI as part of our commissioning processes.

1. **Time allocation and parameters**

**ITT Timetable (the dates indicated below can be flexible)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| c | **Activity** | **Date** |
| 1 | ITT issued to Suppliers | 15 November 2024 |
| 3 | Submission of Supplier Q&A to Co-op Foundation Contact | 10 January 2025 |
| 4 | Return of Supplier Q&A to Suppliers | 14 January 2025 |
| 5 | Submission of ITT Response | **5pm 27 January 2025** |
| 6 | ITT Evaluation Period | 29 January – 5 February 2025 |
| 7 | Clarification meetings **may** be held with shortlisted suppliers | 12 February 2025 |
| 8 | Notification of Contract Award | 24 February 2025 |
| 9 | Contract finalising | 28 February 2025 |
| 10 | Contract start date | 3 March 2025 |

1. **Response submission and format**

Proposals should be submitted via email to Co-op Foundation’s Head of Learning and Impact Dr Asimina Vergou: [asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk](mailto:asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk)

We would expect to see in the submitted proposal the following:

1. Description of understanding of the project’s purpose and context.
2. Explanation of how the work and output format will fulfil the aim and answer the research questions of this study and complete the deliverables as they are described in the ITT.
3. Detailed methodology for undertaking the study, appropriate to answer the research questions.
4. Description of anticipated risks and challenges and ways to mitigate them and quality assurance for your work.
5. Details of staff allocated to the project, together with experience of the contractor and staff members in carrying out similar projects, expertise in the thematic areas of this study, skills and knowledge related to monitoring evaluation and learning and understanding of philanthropy. The project manager / lead contact should be identified.
6. A detailed budget including all costs, expenses and VAT, specifying all day rates of individuals involved, the allocation of days between members of the team; and the cost of particular activities.
7. A timeline for the work, including key milestones and deliverables against each of these.
8. Contact details of two previous or current clients with direct knowledge or experience of your work relevant to this ITT. Please specify how the referees know your work and if they can be contacted by us straight away.
9. Examples of similar types of work. These could be sent as a separate document/ appendix to the proposal. The individuals who will be involved in this contract need to be lead authors or played a significant role in the examples of work.

A proposal for undertaking the work should be **no more than 10 pages**. Submitting a proposal more than 10 pages will automatically result in the rejection of the proposal.

We recognise one individual or organisation may not feel equally able to deliver all strands of this work and are therefore happy to accept applications from a group of individuals or partner organisations. We will want one of these individuals or organisations to be identified as the lead contact.

1. **Accessibility**

Co-op Foundation is committed to ensuring that our ITT exercises are accessible to everyone. If you have a disability or a chronic health condition, we can offer adjustments to the response format e.g., submitting your response in an alternate format. For support during the ITT exercise, contact Dr Asimina Vergou: [asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk](mailto:asimina.vergou@coop.co.uk) .

If, within the proposed outputs of this ITT exercise, specific adjustments are required by you or your team which incur additional cost then outline them clearly within your commercial response. Co-op Foundation is committed to evaluating all proposals fairly and will ensure any proposed adjustment costs sit outside the commercial evaluation.

1. **Scoring**

Proposals will be scored out of 100%. 90% of the marks will be awarded to quality, and 10% of the marks will be awarded to price.

The proposal will be assessed against the following quality questions (90% of the total score):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Quality criteria & questions | Weighting |
| 1. To what extent does the ITT response demonstrate a clear understanding of the aim, key questions, and main issues related to this study? | Weighing 10% |
| 2. To what extent is the proposed methodology robust and appropriate to fulfil the aim of this work and answer the key questions? | Weighting 20% |
| 3. To what extent does the ITT response demonstrate the provider has research and evaluation expertise in peat conservation and restoration, sustainable techniques for growing food crops on peat soils e.g., paludiculture, alternatives to the use of peat e.g., vermiculture, using algae as fertiliser. | Weighting 30% |
| 4.To what extent does the ITT response demonstrate the supplier has facilitation skills and science communication skills? | Weighting 15% |
| 5. To what extent does the tender demonstrate a clear and realistic project plan, to successfully deliver the work to the budget and timetable required and a well-structured, inclusive in membership team with clear roles and responsibilities? | Weighting 15% |

The evaluation of price will be carried out on the schedule of charges you provide in response to Table A.

**Table A - Schedule of charges**

Proposals should show the number of staff and the amount of time that will be scheduled to work on the contract with the daily charging rate.

Please complete the table below providing a detailed breakdown of costs against each description. Suppliers may extend the tables to detail additional elements/costs if required.

If VAT is chargeable on the services to be provided, this should be taken into account in the overall cost of this contract so please make sure to include that clearly in the budget.

Suppliers should complete the schedule below, estimating the number of days, travel and subsistence costs associated with their proposal submission.

**TABLE A: (firm and fixed costs)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cost | Post 1 cost per day  (No of days)  e.g. Project Manager/ Director  @ £2 | Post 2 cost per day  (No of days)  e.g. Senior Consultant/manager/researcher  @£1.5 | Post 3 cost per day  (No of days)  Junior  Consultant /equivalent  e.g. £1 | Total days | Total fees |
| Inception meeting to agree plans and finalise requirements | Example 0.5 | 1 | 1.5 | page10image365247363 | £4 |
| [Add as necessary] | page10image36536064page10image36532224 |  |  |  |  |

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1. At Co-op Foundation, aligned with our co-operative values, we use the term ‘funded partners’ when we refer to the organisations we fund. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)