



Standards for a  
Sustainable Future

## SD VISta *Nature Framework*

### Technical Expert Panel

#### Terms of Reference

December 18, 2024

This document defines the objective, member qualifications, and key operational elements for the SD VISta *Nature Framework* Technical Expert Panel.

#### Background

Verra's mission is to support climate action and sustainable development with standards programs<sup>1</sup> that credibly, transparently, and robustly assess environmental and social impacts and enable funding for sustaining and scaling up these benefits.

In October 2024, Verra [launched](#) the [Nature Framework, v1.0](#), an asset methodology under Verra's [Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard \(SD VISta\) Program](#). By enabling projects to quantify biodiversity outcomes and generate Nature Credits, the *Nature Framework* incentivizes widespread investment in measurable conservation and restoration activities benefiting both nature and people.

Project proponents starting to develop a project under the *Nature Framework* certification must submit a project description (PD) document describing all elements of the project's design and reflecting compliance with the *Nature Framework* and SD VISta requirements. The PD must detail the activities the project will implement, define the ecosystem-specific Condition indicators and their reference values, establish a sampling protocol for monitoring biodiversity outcomes, and calculate a crediting baseline and estimation of biodiversity outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Verra's portfolio includes the following programs:

- [Verified Carbon Standard \(VCS\) Program](#), the world's most widely used greenhouse gas (GHG) crediting program, drives finance toward activities that reduce and remove emissions, improve livelihoods, and protect nature
- [Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard \(SD VISta\) Program](#), the premier standards program for certifying real-world benefits of social and environmental projects, supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- [Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards \(CCBS\) Program](#) supports land use projects in addressing climate change, benefitting local communities and smallholders, and conserving biodiversity
- [Plastic Waste Reduction Program \(Plastic Program\)](#) enables robust impact assessment of new or scaled-up waste collection and recycling projects



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## Objective

As an integral step before the project validation process, Verra is establishing a Technical Expert Panel (TEP) of ecological and biological experts. The TEP's objective is to provide ecosystem-specific evaluation of the technical elements of project design under the *Nature Framework*. This approach is intended to:

- Uphold ecosystem-appropriate design in *Nature Framework* projects,
- Promote confidence and integrity in biodiversity outcomes generated by *Nature Framework* projects, and
- Support the *Nature Framework*'s operationalization and ongoing development.

The TEP will be comprised of ecologists, biologists, and other conservation-focused environmental experts who will conduct technical evaluations of projects' PDs, with reference to the *Nature Framework* requirements, prior to validation by an approved validation/verification body (VVB).

The scope of the panel's evaluation of *Nature Framework* project PDs will include:

- The appropriateness of project activity/activities conserving and/or restoring biodiversity in a given landscape context;
- The project proponent's biodiversity-related safeguard risk assessment and proposed mitigation measures;
- Selected Condition indicators (and associated reference values) in terms of their appropriateness for both the ecosystem and the project activity/activities;
- The sampling protocol for selected Condition indicators and overall monitoring plan for biodiversity outcomes; and
- The crediting baseline method selected by the project proponent, its implementation, and its stepwise calculation.

## Member Qualifications

Members of the TEP will be selected by Verra per the following requirements:

- Possession of a master's degree or higher in conservation biology, ecology, or other ecosystem restoration- or conservation-focused environmental science
- At least five years of full-time professional experience in roles addressing ecosystem restoration or conservation, including field experience designing and implementing biodiversity sampling and monitoring protocols for data collection (i.e., field and remote-sensed)



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- Demonstrable ecosystem-specific knowledge (e.g., through scientific publication or participation in specialized committees)
- Region- or country-specific experience within the ecosystem specialization
- At least five years of experience in project management (e.g., research projects, nature-based solutions projects), including impact assessment
- Demonstrable knowledge of statistics and statistical modeling
- Professional and technical proficiency in English

Experience in auditing project-level impacts and/or familiarity with market-based mechanisms for conservation finance will be considered advantageous. In the first wave of TEP member selection, specialization in at least one of the following ecosystems will be prioritized: tropical and subtropical forests, temperate forests, savannahs and grasslands, or shrublands and shrubby woodlands.

### **Commitment and Compensation**

TEP members will serve a two-year term starting on the date of their first assigned evaluation. Members' terms may be extended by invitation from, and mutual agreement with, Verra. Members may terminate their participation in the TEP with 30 days' written notice to Verra and must fulfill the delivery of any outstanding project evaluations already in process at that time.

TEP members must be willing to sign and adhere to the Verra Code of Conduct (i.e., ethical standards, free from conflict of interest, and willingness to maintain confidentiality regarding the TEP and its activities).

Verra reserves the right to terminate any member's participation in the TEP without notice if there is any reputational risk to Verra or a project proponent or if a member's undeclared conflict of interest is identified.

Upon appointment to the TEP, members will need to review the *Nature Framework* technical requirements in detail and participate in a one-hour training within two weeks to ensure a working understanding for project evaluation. Upon Verra's assignment of a *Nature Framework* project evaluation, TEP members must be able to allocate four to six hours for technical evaluation of the PD and deliver detailed feedback within four weeks of receiving project documents. Members must then be able to allocate an additional two to three hours to evaluate the project proponent's responses and provide feedback as to their adequacy.

No in-person meetings or site visits are expected with Verra or the project proponent during the evaluation process. Verra or the project proponent may require clarification of feedback in virtual



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engagements or in writing, so TEP members must be willing to participate in timely communication as needed.

For the contributions described above, TEP members will be compensated \$500 (USD) per project evaluation.

### **Operation**

Verra will select and appoint two independent TEP members to each *Nature Framework* project evaluation based on members' regional and ecosystem-specific expertise, as well as ad hoc alignment with other project-specific criteria (e.g., expertise in faunal rewilding, experience engaging with Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge).

Verra will communicate with TEP members during the evaluation process for status updates, clarification, and finalization.

### **Application for Membership**

Interested candidates are invited to apply for TEP membership by **February 28, 2025**. Note that Verra will only accept applications submitted using the [Nature Framework Technical Expert Panel Application Form](#).

Verra aims to select the first wave of panel members from the list of applicants by March 31, 2025. Their appointment will be at Verra's sole discretion via direct invitation. Verra anticipates engaging members in project evaluation as early as April 15, 2025. A list of active TEP members will be maintained on the Verra website.

If you have any questions about Verra's SD VISTA *Nature Framework* TEP, please contact Amy Thom, manager, sustainable development innovation ([athom@verra.org](mailto:athom@verra.org)).