

Request for Proposals - Enhanced Due Diligence Framework

RFP n#: 2026-4-PR-DDFRAMEWORK

Location: Remote or London or Geneva

Start date: 15 June 2026

End date: 31 May 2027

Technical Team: Programmes



All applications must be submitted via this [form](#).

In light of the diverse skill set needed for this consultancy, we are open to consortium applications.

You may submit questions to tender@bettercotton.org – RFP n# 2026-4-PR-DDFRAMEWORK until 24 April 2026, noting that the final submission deadline for bids is the 10 May 2026.

Questions, requests and applications sent after the deadline will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Important Submission Process Information:

After submitting your details through the [form](#), you will receive a separate email to upload your supporting documents to a secure platform.

Description

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is the world's largest cotton sustainable certification programme. Our mission: to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. In difficult times, we are meeting the challenge head on. Through our network of field-level partners we have provided training on sustainable farming practices to more than 2.9 million cotton farmers in 26 countries. More than a fifth of the world's cotton is now grown under the BCI Standard and our membership network includes more than 2,400 members.

More information about BCI can be found on our website: www.bettercotton.org

Background

BCI is focused on affecting change, reducing the environmental impact of cotton production and improving the livelihoods of cotton farmers through the production of BCI Cotton. To achieve this change, BCI coordinates several activities for which various levels of Due Diligence are required:

1. A capacity strengthening programme, delivered through about 60 experienced field-level partners in 15 countries. These partners help farmers adopt practices consistent with the Better Cotton Initiative Standard System (BCISS). The credibility of the BCISS therefore relies, in part, on BCI's ability to select and work with competent partners.
The Recognition programme recognises other standards, managed by Strategic Partners, as equivalent to the BCISS. This is a way to reduce redundancies, use resources more efficiently, and expand BCI's outreach. BCI conducts due diligence with its Strategic Partners.
Above the farm level, BCI also engages with large agribusinesses, requiring an additional level of scrutiny focussed on business governance and operations.
These activities are managed by the **Programmes Function**.
2. A membership approach to engage the cotton supply chain stakeholders in the BCI sustainable journey and the management of the BCP (Better Cotton Platform), an online platform to trade BCI Cotton Claim Unit (BCCU) – ([BCI Platform - Better Cotton Initiative](#)). We have 2500 members and 300 BCP suppliers using BCI claims or trading BCCU which need to be monitored on a risk-based approach.
These activities are managed by the **Demand & Engagement (D&E) Function**.
3. A wide portfolio of procurement activities to select and onboard service providers that help deliver BCI's activities. Every year, we collaborate with over 250 providers. Some of our service providers go through a risk screening before any contractual engagement is secured with BCI.
These procurement activities are managed by the **Operations (Ops) Function**.
4. A certification scheme ensuring that cotton producers are compliant with BCI standard. BCI works with a network of Certification Bodies in several countries which need to be credible and checked.
These certification activities are managed **Standard System & Integrity (SSI) function**.

Focus on Partners' Due Diligence

Better Cotton Initiative developed and rolled out a Due Diligence process in 2022 to support this selection process and support existing partners to strengthen their organizational effectiveness. The current Due Diligence framework, implemented since 2022, is aligned with the OECD Due Diligence guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct ([OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct \(EN\)](#))

BCI's due diligence process is one of the foundations that ensures the integrity and credibility of the entire Partnership model, which sits at the heart of BCI's implementation strategy to be a

mainstream sustainability standard. By systematically identifying and managing partnership risks and working with partners to implement targeted remediation plans to strengthen their organizational effectiveness, BCI ensures that only credible and capable organisations are entrusted to deliver on the BCSS in the long term.

Rigorous due diligence is a key mechanism, among others within the BCI toolbox, to ensure the quality of country-level implementation and protect the reputation of the BCI system. It can also provide assurance to BCI members that commitments to sustainable cotton through valuable partnerships are met in practice.

In order to achieve this, the current DD process covers six areas: ethics, governance, human resources, environment and operations, financial stability and governance, and where applicable - downstream local partners.

The BCI Due Diligence process is structured around:

- Assessing the partner across the 6 areas and its undertakings to identify the factual circumstances under which the activity is operating.
- Identifying and assessing any actual or potential risks by evaluating the factual circumstances against recognised standards.
- Preventing or mitigating the identified risks by adopting and implementing a corrective risk action plan.

The current Due Diligence methodology is delivered with the support of local external consultants, ensuring both an objective assessment and a strong understanding of local legislation and contextual realities.

The Due Diligence framework includes the following main tool:

- Due Diligence questionnaire (+/- 50 questions), with specific questions and related evidence list
- Evidence requirements and verification process
- Risk scoring methodology and guidance
- Due Diligence reports summarising the assessment and developing a Corrective Action Plan
- Due Diligence handbook and operational procedures

**All the tools will be shared with the selected applicant*

BCI intends to update and streamline the Due Diligence framework in order to:

- Improve efficiency and consistency of assessments, whilst maintaining its robustness and effectivity to identify and mitigate risks. The current Due Diligence framework is heavy for involved stakeholders and time consuming (6-12 Months to complete a Due Diligence)
- Create a final product that can be adapted to different countries, partnership types and Partners profiles.
- Strengthen alignment with international standards (OECD, UN, CSDDD...)
- Facilitate coordination between BCI internal teams, external consultants, partners, BCI members, Supply chain companies or service providers.

Focus on Members & BCP suppliers Due Diligence

BCI is a membership association made up of 2,500 members in six categories, Retailers and Brands, Suppliers and Manufacturers, Producer Organisations, Civil Society and Associates. BCI ensures compliance and integrity by governing members under strict Terms of Service and a Code of Practice with screening, monitoring, and enforcement protocols, while also overseeing 13,000 non-member supply chain actors through registration checks and platform access rules, investigating any reputational risks and applying sanctions when necessary.

We are seeking a revised risk-based due diligence and monitoring model for our members and non-member suppliers. This initiative aims to enhance our existing monitoring mechanisms for new and existing members in order to protect the credibility of BCI and its members in the current legislative context, and to identify opportunities for productivity improvements through new screening tools or other technology. The new model must enable more proactive checks on our growing member base without increasing resources. In addition, the D&E team asks Service Providers to share basic evidence and internal documents to support a light assessment, such as registration records and core policies.

An assignment with separate consultant is ongoing to make some proposals in order to enhance the monitoring mechanism.

Takeaways from the consultancy shall be taken into account for this assignment.

Focus on service providers Due Diligence

Currently, the Operations team uses different tools to conduct due diligence with service providers:

- A credit control tool, used for credit checks and credit capacity assessment
- A dedicated risk consultancy providing in-depth due diligence reports

These tools are costly and impose constraints on their use. At the same time, inconsistent quality and credibility of due diligence reports in certain BCI operating contexts make risk assessment more difficult.

In addition, the Operations team requests for service providers to share basic evidence to support a light assessment, such as registration and financial records.

Scope of Work

Due Diligence framework: Shared infrastructure, Function-specific application

The Due Diligence framework used with partners by the Programme function is currently the most advanced and complex. The assignment will therefore be guided primarily by the Programme function needs. However, our aim is to develop tools that other functions can also use: **shared tools serving different purposes**. The consultant will then need to identify what can be standardised and what must remain function specific to build a framework that works for everyone.

For example:

- A single screening tool could be used across functions, each function applying it for its own purpose.
- The concept of a Due Diligence questionnaire and its related digital management tool could be shared, while the questions themselves remain function specific.
- The digital platform could be common, with selected features tailored to each function.
- Report drafting might probably be Programme function specific
- Etc...

Takeaways from the Due Diligence implemented by Program function

The current Due Diligence implemented by the programme function is highly resource intensive. It requires significant involvement from multiple teams including partners, external consultants, the global team and country teams. Timelines are tight, coordination is complex and the full cycle usually takes six to twelve months. Because of conflict of interest considerations and limited internal capacity, assessments are carried out by local external consultants, resulting in important implementation costs.

The objective of the enhanced Due Diligence framework is to streamline the process, reduce resource requirements and costs and introduce more flexibility while preserving the robustness and the credibility of the system.

The overall objective of this consultancy is to review, strengthen and digitize the Due Diligence framework to ensure it is:

- Adapted to every use case and every function (Programme, Demand & Engagement, Operations and Certification)

- Risk-based and proportionate
- Flexible to adjust as per context and partner type
- Operationally efficient
- Aligned with international standards and guidelines: OECD, UNGP ...
- Supported by an appropriate digital workflow system

The consultancy will include six main components:

1. **Identify synergies and specificities between each function in their use of Due Diligence framework to propose a relevant Due Diligence framework**
2. **Revision and enhancement of the Due Diligence framework.**
3. **Design of a digital tool supporting the Due Diligence process and workflow within the BCI IT constraints.**
4. **Training for all relevant users of the Due Diligence framework and digital tool.**
5. **Support during a Due Diligence pilot to test the framework and the digital tool.**
6. **Support during the first months of Due Diligence roll out.**

In addition, BCI is exploring how **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** could support certain aspects of the process, such as stakeholders screening, document review, preliminary risk analysis or report drafting.

For this purpose, Better Cotton Initiative seeks a qualified consultant to:

- **Enhance BCI Due Diligence framework
AND**
- **Design a digital solution with an AI application in line with BCI AI strategy.**

Due Diligence tools development – A staged approach

1. Identify synergies and specificities for all the functions

2. Revision of the Due Diligence framework

In order to identify strengths, gaps and inefficiencies in the current system, the consultant will:

1. Review the effectiveness of the current Due Diligence framework and related documents, including **but not limited to (All the related documents would need to be mapped with relevant BCI function)**:
 - Due Diligence questionnaire
 - Financial health Check
 - Risk scoring guidance

} **For Programme
function**

- Evidence requirements
- DD reports templates
- Corrective Action Plan framework and process
- Due Diligence handbook for BCI staff and external local consultants

- Screening tools
- Evidence requirements

**For Programme
function**

**For D&E and
Ops functions**

2. Analyse the current workflows for each function (Programme, D&E, Ops and SSI) between:
 - BCI country teams
 - BCI global teams
 - External consultants
 - Partners
 - Members
 - BCP suppliers
 - Service providers

Based on the previous review, the consultant will propose some options, to be approved first by BCI before developing it, to enhance the DD framework including:

1. The Due Diligence questionnaire and Financial health Check differentiated by partner profiles (NGOs, Corporate entities, public institutions), by partnership types (Programme Partners, Strategic Partners, Agribusiness in Brazil, Programme Participants in Uzbekistan) and by funding relationships between BCI and Partner (GIF¹ funded or not GIF funded).

Due Diligence being a risk based approach some specific questions shall be included according to specific country context and risks. Each question in the questionnaire should also be accompanied by an explanation outlining the purpose of the question and the specific type of risk it is designed to flag.

2. The revised evidence list requirements and verification guidance. So far, BCI decided to make a deep assessment for each piece of evidence submitted. However, we are considering mixing this with a check list/tick box approach.
3. The new risk rating methodology and related scoring guidance
4. The DD report template
5. The Corrective Action Plan framework and process
6. Templates for policies which need to be aligned with best practices and definition of expectations for partners to improve internal policies or manuals such as: Conflict of interest, Anti-bribery/anti-corruption,

**For Programme
function**

¹ GIF = Growth and Innovation Fund, is an internal BCI fund funding some partner to run BCI programmes

- Safeguarding, Grievance mechanism, data management, etc... (the final list will be provided during the assignment)
7. A clear workflow and roles & responsibilities between:
 - Country teams
 - Global teams
 - External local consultants
 - Partners
 8. Improved governance and review mechanisms (e.g. Due Diligence Committee review process, back and forth between local consultant, partners and BCI, etc...)
 9. Due Diligence guidelines and handbook for partners, BCI teams, external consultant conducting the Due Diligence review
- } **For Programme function**
1. A Due Diligence questionnaire
 2. A revised evidence list requirements and verification guidance
 3. A risk rating methodology and related scoring guidance
 4. A DD report template
- ⇒ **Requirements to be defined by each function separately**
- } **For D&E, Ops and SSI function**

The enhanced Due Diligence framework shall create synergies across functions while preserving the specific needs of each use case.

3. Digital Due Diligence Tool

The consultant will propose various options to digitize the Due Diligence framework with clear Pros and Cons for each. Each option would need to be discussed with BCI, specifically with the IT function, and approved before launching the design of the tool.

3.1. Risk screening tool

The consultant will propose a risk screening tool to enable BCI to run risk checks on potential partners, suppliers, members, etc. - including, but not limited to:

- Registration & regulatory compliance
- Ownership / Shareholding
- Financial stability
- Litigation status & potential misconduct
- Sanction & terror lists
- PEP
- Negative media
- Other risks linked to unethical practices

Screening tools for individuals might also be considered in addition to screening tools for entities.

3.2. Due Diligence process digitization

The consultant **will design or source, implement and test a digital tool** supporting the whole Due Diligence process.

The digital tool should support:

- Sharing the questionnaire to partners, members, services providers, BCP suppliers... by BCI or external consultants.
- Completion of Due Diligence questionnaire by partners, member, services providers, BCP suppliers
- Document / Evidence upload and storage.
- Partner, members, service providers, BCP suppliers...’s answers and evidence review and validation.
- Risk scoring based on answers and evidence analysis.
- Workflow and a digital tool access management between stakeholders involved in the Due Diligence exercise.
- Due Diligence implementation monitoring.

The tool shall be integrated within the existing BCI IT ecosystem. A strong coordination with the IT team is then requested.

3.3. Exploration of AI applications

The consultant will incorporate AI-enabled functionality into the digital tool, aligned with the BCI AI strategy and technical constraints. These capabilities will include:

- Automated screening of documents, evidence and answers provided by partners. Detection of missing or inconsistent evidence.
- Identification of gaps within the submitted evidence.
- Support for risk scoring based on pre-defined scoring guidance.
- Support in drafting Corrective Action Plans.
- Support in drafting Due Diligence reports.

The consultant will provide recommendations on feasibility, risks and implementation options, aligned with BCI’s ongoing AI strategy.

The consultant will ensure that the AI component is embedded into the Due Diligence workflows. This includes ensuring that AI-driven features are seamlessly integrated into each stage of the DD framework user journey and operate reliably within the processes.

High-level Timeline

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 24 April 2026 | <p>Questions deadline</p> <p>All questions must be sent only to tender@bettercotton.org with the RFP Reference in the Subject line.</p> |
| 10 May 2026 | <p>Applications deadline</p> <p>All applications must be submitted via this form.</p> |
| 11 May to 22 May 2026 | Applications review & shortlisting / Interviews |
| By 26 May 2026 | <p>The successful applicant will be notified</p> <p>Unsuccessful <u>shortlisted</u> applicants will also be notified</p> |
| 15 June 2026 | Start of the consultancy |
| By 30 September 2026 | <p>1st operational version of the Due Diligence tools that will be used by BCI teams</p> <p>Questionnaires</p> |
| By 31 October 2026 | <p>All previous deliverable tested and Enhanced</p> <p>Kick off for a DD pilot</p> |
| By 31 January 2027 | <p>Relevant teams trained to implement the DD framework</p> <p>Completed pilot for one DD per Function</p> |
| By 28 February 2027 | <p>Final version of the deliverables</p> <p>Training for all staff involved in the DD workstream</p> |
| March, April, May 2027 | General support to fuel the process in its initial rollout stage. |

Required Skills & Knowledge

| Skills, Knowledge and Experience |
|---|
| Essential |
| Strong experience in Due Diligence, risk management, compliance systems, or governance frameworks, preferably within international NGOs, sustainability standards, development organisations or consulting firms. |
| Master’s degree or equivalent in law, governance, risk management, international development, public administration, business administration, or related field. |
| Demonstrated experience in designing or revising Due Diligence frameworks, including risk-based methodologies, questionnaires, risk scoring systems, and corrective action mechanisms. Strong knowledge of OECD-aligned responsible business conduct and Due Diligence standards. |
| Proven experience designing or specifying digital compliance or workflow tools, including document management, risk scoring, and multi-stakeholder workflow systems. Ability to translate operational needs into functional specifications for digital platforms. |
| Strong ability to facilitate consultations and workshops, analyse governance systems, and translate findings into clear operational frameworks and guidance documents. |
| Experience exploring or implementing AI-supported tools for document review, compliance analysis, or reporting automation |
| Optional |
| Fluent English: BCI’s language of operation is English |
| Experience working with multi-stakeholder initiatives, sustainability standards, or supply chain Due Diligence frameworks is an advantage. |
| Prior experience working with NGOs, private sector entities, and public institutions across different regions. |

Application Requirements

Please note that we have changed our RFP submission protocol, and this is now in two phases;

- **Phase 1: Initial details will be submitted on the form found in this [link](#).**
- **Phase 2: You will receive an email with live links to upload relevant documents (please check your Spam and Junk folders)**

Proposals responding to this Request for Proposals should be a maximum of 15 pages (excluding CVs), and include the following:

- Overview of relevant experience
- Proposed methodology and timeline
- Detailed and transparent budget, in EUROS, including time allocation and day rates

We thank all applicants for their interest; however, only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.

BCI is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human and financial resources. All applications will be reviewed under the principles and subject to BCI's policies on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-bribery & corruption and conflict of interest.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Technical Evaluation Criteria

- Demonstrated understanding of this RFP
- Quality and clarity of the proposed approach and methodology
- Feasibility of the proposed activity plan and timeline, and appropriateness of time allocated to delivering each task
- Relevant professional experience of the proposed consultant(s)
- Quality and relevance of the sample work submitted

Financial Evaluation Criteria

- Quality and clarity of budget provided, and level of detail included
- Alignment of the budget to the activity timeline detailed in the technical proposal
- Value for money
- Adherence to the available budget