

ACORN Design Document (ADD) Review

Terms of Reference for a Technical Review Panel (TRP) Member against the Acorn Framework V 1.0 and Acorn Methodology V1.1

Version 1.2
16th April 2025

1. Introduction

The Plan Vivo Foundation is a Charity, registered in Scotland, that applies the Plan Vivo concept and upholds projects to the Plan Vivo Carbon Standard (PV Climate) – a tried and tested framework for community land use and forestry projects that strive to make a difference.

ACORN (Agroforestry CRUs for the Organic Restoration of Nature) is an initiative developed by Rabobank. The objective is to increase the accessibility of the international carbon market for smallholder farmers in the developing world. The Plan Vivo Foundation has certified and supported the development of two key components of the ACORN program:

- **ACORN Framework** – A set of requirements that all ACORN projects must meet. These requirements not only meet all requirements in the Plan Vivo Carbon Standard (PV Climate) V4 but also go beyond these requirements to narrow down the type of project that can enter the ACORN programme.
- **ACORN Methodology** – Rules and procedures around the estimation of *Carbon Benefits* from ACORN projects, which follow all methodology requirements from PV Climate V4.

The purpose of these two documents, in addition to the ACORN Platform¹, is to improve the efficiency of the registration, reporting and Validation process, whilst also ensuring that all ACORN *Projects* are of a high quality to also align with PV Climate V4. By doing so, we help projects provide benefits to communities and the environment and provide assurances to buyers of Carbon Removal Units (CRUs) that the removals represent real, additional and verifiable environmental benefits.

2. Objectives

The *Project* design, as outlined in the Acorn Design Document (ADD), Verification Data package and any subsequent Annual Reports (AR), undergo a desk-based review by the Plan Vivo Foundation and Plan Vivo Technical Review Panel (TRP).

The purpose of the technical review is to ensure that the technical aspects of the ADD meet the requirements set out by the Acorn Framework and Methodology. As the *Methodology* has been independently reviewed and relies largely on remote sensing to estimate *Projects' Carbon Benefits*, the scope of the technical review is quite limited compared to reviewing *Projects* under PV Climate V4.

¹ <https://acorn.rabobank.com/en/>

3. Scope of work

The role of the TRP member is to review the appropriateness of the *Technical Specifications*. The TRP member must use the ADD Review Report provided in Annex 1 to ensure that:

1. The Technical Specifications are compliant with the Acorn Framework Requirements; and
2. The ADD follows and has correctly applied the procedures in the Acorn Methodology v2.

To achieve this, the TRP member will carry out an initial review of the ADD, Verification Data Package and AR(s), prior to review by an approved VVB, followed by a review of the final Verification Data Package and updated ADD, prior to approval by the Plan Vivo Foundation.

The relevant sections of the ADD which fall within the scope of the TRP member's review are outlined in the ADD Review Report (see Annex 1).

4. Review Process

4.1. Communication and Reporting

Relevant documentation and templates will be provided to the TRP member to enable their review and to structure their feedback. All feedback and documentation will be shared between the TRP member and ACORN through the Plan Vivo Foundation, thereby allowing anonymity for the TRP member. Anonymity may be waived, at the discretion of the TRP member, to discuss feedback directly with the ACORN.

4.2. Plan Vivo Review Stage

Using the ADD Review Report, the TRP Member should identify and categorise any review findings into the following categories:

- Corrective Action Requests (CARs), which represent instances where:
 - o A criterion of the Project Requirements has not been fulfilled;
 - o A non-conformance with the chosen *Methodology* resulting in a deviation between the measured/modelled and actual *Carbon Benefits* achieved.
- New Information Requests (NIRs), which indicate that:
 - o The information given is insufficient or not clear enough to determine whether the Project Requirements have been met;
- Forward Action Requests (FARs), which indicate that:
 - o A CAR or NIR cannot be resolved through a desk-based review and must be included in the *Validation* audit, which will be assessed during the site visit by the VVB.

After receiving feedback from the TRP Member, Acorn and the local partner will be able to update their ADD and respond to any feedback raised in the ADD Review Report.

4.3 Report Approval Stage

After the *VBV* has reviewed the ADD, Verification Data Package and AR(s) and provided a draft Validation and/or Verification Report suggesting that the ADD *should be approved*, the TRP member should evaluate the latest draft of the *Technical Specifications* and indicate whether they agree or disagree with the findings and changes made.

A *Project* cannot register if any CARs or NIRs from the ADD Review Report remain open after *Validation*.

5. Qualifications

To review project documentation, the TRP member must have:

- **Expert knowledge of the *Project Intervention(s)* applied by the given *Project*** - demonstrated by: i) previous involvement in the development, implementation, evaluation or *Validation/Verification* of *Projects* with similar interventions; or ii) experience conducting scientific research related to the intervention.
- **Basic knowledge of the given *Project context*** - demonstrated by: i) previous experience in development, implementation, evaluation or *Validation/Verification* of *Projects* in a similar location and/or similar environmental and social context; or ii) experience conducting scientific research in a similar location and/or similar environmental and social context.
- **In-depth understanding of the *Carbon Benefit Methodologies, Modules and Tools* applied by the given *Project*** - demonstrated by: i) previous involvement in the development, implementation, evaluation or *Validation/Verification* of *Projects* applying the same (or very similar) *Methodologies*; ii) contributions to the development of similar *Methodologies*; or iii) completion of specific training relating to the application of the *Methodologies*.

6. Grievances

The Plan Vivo Foundation has a right to raise any concerns that they might have regarding the quality, quantity, accuracy, impartiality or timeliness of the feedback provided by the TRP member. In such instances, the Plan Vivo Foundation may contact alternative experts to gather evidence as to the appropriateness of the grievance. In the instance that the grievance is substantiated, the Plan Vivo Foundation will attempt to work with the TRP member to resolve the matter. Where this is deemed not possible, the review process will terminate and the TRP member will not be remunerated.

7. Conflicts of interest

TRP members must disclose any potential conflicts of interest that could affect their impartiality within the review process. TRP members will be excluded from participation in the review of any *Project* if they, or an organisation that employs them, have played any role in its development.

Annex 1 – ADD Review Report

Please see the accompanying Excel file.