

## EVIDENSIA RESEARCH COUNCIL | TERMS OF REFERENCE

September 2020

### OVERALL PURPOSE

Evidensia's mission is to put evidence at the heart of sustainability actions and decisions. Its goal is to ensure that credible research and evidence positively influences corporate and government decisions regarding sustainable commodity production and sourcing. It does this through the Evidensia platform ([www.evidensia.eco](http://www.evidensia.eco)) that provides easy access to credible research, evidence and insights and through outreach and engagement with key stakeholder groups to facilitate evidence uptake and learning.

Evidensia endeavors to be a leading global effort to make credible evidence about the impacts and effectiveness of market-based sustainability tools and approaches accessible to inform policy and practice in the field. Its governance structure comprises three bodies that each have a specific role and contribution to make towards ensuring that Evidensia's approach and activities are credible, rigorous, transparent, and effective in meeting its goals (see Annex 1 to this ToR document).

Trust in the platform is hinged on ensuring that Evidensia's approach and methodology to sourcing, sharing, synthesizing, and communicating research findings and insights is transparent, unbiased and abiding by the highest scientific standards. Evidensia also offers a space and platform to bring together organisations keen on furthering research and analysis in the field to work off a common knowledge base and build partnerships to advance research and insight. The Evidensia Research Council is a technical, independent governance body that has accountability for Evidensia's overall research methodology, approach, activities and supports with research collaborations and partnerships. This document sets out the scope, responsibilities and other specifics of the Research Council.

### SCOPE OF THE COUNCIL

The Evidensia Research Council is a technical, independent governance body that has accountability for Evidensia's overall research methodology, approach and activities and supports with research collaborations, partnerships, and fundraising efforts. It leads on the continued development, review, and approval of Evidensia's overall research approach and methodology that guides all research activities of the platform. This includes the Evidensia typology, methodology behind key platform research features (such as visual summaries, knowledge matrix, geographic map) and any new features developed, the research tracking approach and Evidensia systematic review general methodology. The Research Council will also serve as a forum to explore partnerships and other collaborative efforts to further research in this field as specific opportunities present themselves.

The Council is independent of Evidensia's Stakeholder Council which is a representation of Evidensia's target users and the wider stakeholder base and user groups. It is also independent of the Evidensia Steering

Committee which advises on strategic and operational matters (see Annex 1 to this ToR).

## **TERM of COUNCIL MEMBERS**

The Evidensia Research Council is a new governance body being constituted as part of the Evidensia partnership. It is intended that members of the Council will serve an initial term of two years with possibility to extend.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

- To regularly review, further develop and approve the overall research approach and methodology behind the Evidensia platform and its connected activities. This includes (but is not limited to) the strategy and processes for research tracking, research synthesis and visualisation, methodology behind specific features and the Evidensia typology.
- To be proactive in helping the Evidensia implementation agency team stay updated with best practices in the field of research tracking, knowledge management, systematic reviews, research synthesis and visualisation.
- In addition to approving a 'generic Evidensia research synthesis methodology', also review the methodology and synthesis protocols of specific research efforts.
- To be ambassadors of Evidensia and work to raise awareness about Evidensia within research, policy and donor circles they are associated with
- To be proactive in seeking / supporting opportunities for Evidensia to partner and collaborate with specific organisations, institutions and / or researchers to further Evidensia's goals.
- To proactively flag and support the Evidensia implementation agency and Steering Committee in securing funding for new research activities that fall within the scope of the platform's work
- To participate in Research Council meetings that will be the main channel through which the Council will conduct its work, with some additional pre and post meeting work as requested.
- To provide feedback on updates provided by the implementation agency on a regular basis. Members may also be requested to participate in interviews and workshops that are part of Evidensia's ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND SELECTION CRITERIA**

The composition of the Research Council includes key members of the implementation agency (ISEAL), a *de facto* nominated representative from the Evidensia Steering Committee (Deanna Newsom, Rainforest Alliance) and additional nominated members as explained below.

The Research Council will have 6-8 members who represent diverse research interests and disciplines and bring a range of expertise to this group. Nominations to the Council can be put forward by members of the Evidensia Steering Committee, Stakeholder Council or any current member of the Research Council. The final decision on membership to the Research Council rests with the Evidensia Steering Committee.

Membership to the Council is open to individuals who have a credible track-record of research in this field (impacts and effectiveness of market-based sustainability approaches) and can be from academic institutions, think tanks or other research bodies or independent freelance researchers or consultants. The following criteria will guide the nomination and selection of representatives:

- Interest in Evidensia’s mission, overall purpose and activities as a platform and partnership at the intersection of research, evidence and practice
- Knowledge of market-based sustainability tools and approaches (including but not limited to voluntary sustainability standards) and a track record of research and publication in this field
- Knowledge and expertise in at least one of the 12 key issues of focus of Evidensia ([visit the site](#) to see the list)
- Ability to provide specific research and methodological insight to Evidensia’s activities and approach
- Expertise in research design for impact evaluation and / or research synthesis and /or systematic reviews and/or research communication
- Knowledge of the research funding landscape and experience in fundraising for research in this field
- Ability to commit time to this Council and its activities on a regular basis as detailed above

#### **OPERATIONS and TIME COMMITMENT REQUIRED**

Council meetings will take place 2-3 times a year, of roughly 2 hours in duration, with sufficient notice to members and time provided to consider the background reading and resources provided in preparation for these meetings. Based on the preferences of Council members, we will also use a mailing list to keep conversations going on select topics, or as follow up from Council meetings or if inputs and advice are needed on an urgent matter. Council members should account for some time commitment to engage with preparatory work in advance of Council meetings, in addition to time taken for meetings themselves.

As lead implementation agency, ISEAL will be responsible for developing agendas and leading the Research Council meetings, in consultation with all members of the Council and the de facto representative from the Steering Committee. Meeting minutes will be recorded and stored as a reference point for decisions taken.

In general, the Council will take decisions by consensus. Where there is strong opposition to a proposed decision by one or more members of the Council, further work shall be undertaken to reach a decision that is supported by all. We will endeavour to have all Council members present for all meetings but in the event this is not possible and a decision needs to be taken quorum will be regarded as 3/4<sup>th</sup> of members being present. If approval by all Council members is not possible for the overall Evidensia research approach and methodology then we will seek to publish a statement of limitation alongside the methodology so we are transparent about any objections or other concerns from Council members.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY and CONFLICT of INTEREST**

The Research Council will operate according to Chatham House Rules. Accordingly, members will have full authority to share the non-confidential substance of discussions and papers, but they shall not report or attribute the comments of individuals or their affiliations outside of meetings, whether conducted face-to-face or virtual. Council members are expected to express any suspected conflicts of interest as they arise, and individuals can be excused from the discussion or abstain from participating in decision- making in such an event.

## Annex 1 – Overview of Evidensia governance structure



### Overview of roles and responsibilities for Evidensia governance bodies

Activity type	Steering Committee (SC)	Implementing agency (IA)	Research Council (RC)	Stakeholder Council (StC)
1. Evidensia vision, mission and Theory of Change and overall strategy	Accountable	Implements	Advises	Advises
2.1 Platform regular maintenance	Advises	Accountable + implements	N/A	N/A
2.2 Platform enhancement and new features	Accountable	Implements	Advises	Advises
3.1 Evidensia research approach and activities	Co - Accountable	Implements	Accountable	Advises
3.2 New Evidensia systematic review methodology	Advises	Implements	Accountable	Advises
4.1 Branding	Accountable	Implements	N/A	N/A
4.2 Communications and promotions	Supports	Accountable + implements	Supports	Supports
5.1 Regular financial management	Advises	Accountable	N/A	N/A
5.2 Fundraising and funding strategy	Accountable	Implements	Advises + Supports	Advises
5.3 Non-grant income models	Advises + Supports	Accountable + Implements	Advises	Advises
6. Outreach and Uptake	Supports	Accountable + Implements	Supports	Supports
7. Governance	Accountable	Implements	N/A	N/A
8. Monitoring and evaluation	Supports	Accountable + Implements	Supports	Supports

**Accountable:** is accountable for the workstream, holds mandate for key decisions and approvals, ultimate authority on this line of work

**Advises:** provides inputs, ideas and feedback when sought on specific activities in tis workstream

**Supports:** has a role in supporting with the implementation of some activities in this workstream, as requested by Implementing Agency

**Implements:** take charge of implementing some or all activities, once decisions have been taken