Licence holder exploration checklist

Twelve checks to finish before you spend money on exploration. Tick each box when you have the answer in writing, and note the date and who gave it to you. Rules and fees differ by country, so check with the ministry before you apply or pay.

1. Title and boundaries in the cadastre

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Confirm that the licence exists on the official register under your name, and that the boundary on the register matches the boundary on your certificate. Compare the corner coordinates, the datum (the reference system the coordinates use) and the area in hectares or acres.

Where: The national mining cadastre or licence register, run by the mining ministry or mines department. The EITI Standard asks implementing countries to keep a publicly available register or cadastre that shows the licence holder, the coordinates of the licence area, and the dates and duration of each licence, plus the commodity for production licences. Our cadastre portals by country guide lists where to search, and there are separate guides for Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

Good answer: The holder name, licence number, corners and dates on the register match your paper certificate exactly. You hold the boundary as a digital file (KML, KMZ or shapefile) that overlays the register map with no shift.

2. Licence status, fees and work commitments

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Find out whether the licence is active, what it allows (prospecting, exploration, small-scale mining), when it expires, which fees are due and what work or spending you must report.

Where: The licence document itself, the mining act and regulations, and the ministry or mines department. If a fee or deadline is not written in an official document, ask the office in writing. Check with the ministry before you apply or pay.

Good answer: You can write down, from official papers, the expiry date, the next fee date, the work commitment and the report deadline. You hold receipts for every payment so far.

3. Overlaps and protected areas

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Look for other mineral titles, forest or game reserves, water sources, military land, pipelines and farmland that overlap your boundary. An overlap can stop work on part of the area even when the licence is valid.

Where: The cadastre map (it often shows neighbouring titles), the environment ministry or protected-area agency, and the global Protected Planet database of protected areas, which is updated monthly. Local land offices cover the rest.

Good answer: A clean overlay: either no overlaps, or each overlap is mapped, measured in hectares and explained in a letter from the office that controls it.

4. Access and land rights, including the community

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Find out who holds rights to the surface (private owner, community, customary authority, state), how you reach the area, and whether the people living there know about your plans. Licence rights under the ground do not replace agreement on the surface.

Where: Land registry or lands office, local government and customary leaders. For good practice, lenders use the IFC Performance Standards: Standard 5 covers land acquisition and the loss of livelihoods, and Standard 7 covers Indigenous Peoples, including the cases where their agreement must be obtained before a project goes ahead. You may never need a lender, but the standards show what careful engagement looks like.

Good answer: Written permission or an agreement for each place where you will work, a known access route in the dry and wet season, and a named local contact.

5. Existing geological maps and open data

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Collect what the national geological survey already published for your area: geological map sheets, explanation notes, airborne magnetic and radiometric surveys, and mineral occurrence lists. Note the map scale and the date.

Where: The national geological survey and its map shop or online portal. For the United States, start with the USGS National Geologic Map Database. The USGS also runs the Mineral Resources Data System, a collection of reports on mineral sites around the world; USGS stopped systematic updates in 2011, but says it remains the best collection of such reports it has for places outside the United States.

Good answer: You hold the map sheet that covers your area, you know its scale and date, and you have read the explanation notes. You know what airborne data exists and who sells it.

6. History of workings and old drilling

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Look for pits, shafts, trenches, tailings, old camps and drill holes, from past companies, colonial-era mines or local diggers. Old work shows where someone already saw something worth following. It also shows ground that was tested and left.

Where: Geological survey archives, the ministry's records of past licences, old company reports filed with the regulator, the occurrence database above and the people who live nearby. Our guide to prospecting for gold explains what workings and surface signs can tell you.

Good answer: A simple list with a position for each working, what was mined or drilled, the year if known, and where the logs, assays or reports are held. If drilling was done, you know who owns the data and whether you may use it.

7. Environmental approvals

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Find out which approval you need for each activity. Walking and mapping usually need less than trenching, and trenching needs less than drilling or a camp. Ask what an environmental impact assessment means for your licence class.

Where: The environment agency or ministry, and the conditions printed on your licence. Rules differ by country, so ask in writing.

Good answer: A written list that pairs each planned activity with the approval, the fee, the office and the time it takes. You do not start ground disturbance before the approval is in your hands.

8. Which minerals and deposit types are plausible

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: A deposit type is a family of ore bodies that form in a similar way, for example an orogenic gold vein system or a porphyry copper system. Match the rocks and structures in your area to the types known in the region, then rank the minerals that fit.

Where: Survey bulletins and map notes, the mineral occurrence records for nearby ground, and papers on the district. Our guide to epithermal gold deposits shows how a single deposit style is described.

Good answer: One main target and one back-up, each with a reason tied to your own geology (host rock, structure, alteration, nearby deposits). A mineral that has no support in the geology stays off the list.

9. The data you already hold

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: List what you own: field notes, sample results, assay certificates, photos, GPS tracks, maps and reports from earlier contractors. Check that each item has a location, a date and a method.

Where: Your own files, plus any contractor or laboratory that worked for you. Ask them for original certificates, not summaries.

Good answer: One folder, one list. Every sample has coordinates and a laboratory certificate, and every map file has a known coordinate system.

10. What to map first

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Do desk work before field work. Screen the whole area from existing maps and satellite imagery, pick a few small places that stand out, and only then send a team. This keeps field days for ground that has a reason.

Where: Compare methods before you commit. Our page on satellite, geochemistry and geophysics sets out where each one fits, and how satellite mineral exploration works explains the satellite step.

Good answer: A ranked list of three to five small areas, each with the reason it was chosen, how to reach it, and the first field check you will do there.

11. Budget stage-gates

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Split the spending into stages and decide in advance what result lets you move to the next stage. A stage-gate is a point where you stop, review the evidence and decide to continue, change course or end.

Where: Your own work plan and the commitments from point 2. Our guide to a first-year budget for a small licence shows how to stage the spending.

Good answer: Each stage has a cost cap, a deadline and a written test, for example: the field check confirms alteration at two of the five ranked areas. If the test fails, spending stops.

12. What to send a satellite report provider

■ Done on ____ / ____ / ____ By: _____

Check: Prepare three things: the boundary as a KML, KMZ or polygon file, the country, and the mineral or minerals you care about. Add anything from points 5 to 9 that you can share, such as old maps and sample results.

Where: Your files from point 1 and 9. Our mineral exploration report sample page shows what a delivered report contains. A Farmonaut satellite mineral report is delivered in 5 to 20 business days, and we recommend an area of at least 10 acres.

Good answer: The provider can open your file, see the right place on the map, and tell you in writing which mineral it will map. Satellites map surface and near-surface signatures, so treat the results as exploration targets that drilling and sampling confirm. They are not a resource under JORC, NI 43-101 or SAMREC.

Farmonaut satellite mineral report

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