# Complete Guide for Applicants

Annual Application Round 2, FY 2024/25

Published in December 2024

**Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature**

# Contents

# 1. Overview of this guidance

## Before reviewing this guidance note

**If interested in applying to OCEAN, as first step, we recommend you read the Essential Information for Applicants for the relevant funding pathway.** This will detail the key eligibility criteria, application requirements and dates. You can access the documents via the links below:

- [Essential Information for Community Grants](#)
- [Essential Information for Partnership Grants](#)

## Purpose of this guidance note

After reading the essential information documents, **we strongly recommend reading all sections of this guidance note before starting your application.** This document includes information on what projects can be funded by OCEAN, how to apply, and the process used to select projects for funding. This guidance note should also be used as a useful tool to help answer application questions and better understand OCEAN requirements.

Note that the information presented in this document applies only to the funding round specified on the cover page. For details on future funding rounds, please refer to the most recent published guidance.

## Further resources and guidance

**For complete information and before requesting any assistance, read all available guidance which includes:**

- Finance Guidance
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance
- Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Guidance
- Flexi-Grant Guidance

All guidance documents are available via the OCEAN [website](#) and [Flexi-Grant](#) ahead of each new funding round. Required templates can be downloaded from Flexi-Grant once the funding round opens.

## Contact us

If, after reading this guidance note, you require any assistance with your application, contact the OCEAN Helpdesk via [helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk) in your preferred language. We will respond to your query within five working days. **Please be aware, the Helpdesk can only provide clarifications on the information included in the published guidance and is not able to comment on your project ideas, pre-assess your eligibility or review draft applications and supporting documents.**

# 2.  Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| Capability | Capability refers to the types of ability (skills and knowledge) required for a task. |
| Capacity | Capacity refers to the amount of ability at a point in time to deliver a task. |
| Civil Society Organisation (CSO) | An organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens. Examples of such organisations include social partners (trades unions and employers' groups), non-governmental organisations (e.g., for environmental protection), grassroots organisations (e.g., youth and family groupings). |
| Complementary | Whilst distinct, activities are compatible and support the delivery of results, as opposed to having a negative impact on each other such as duplication or competition for resources. |
| Country | Normally refers (unless otherwise stated) to any country on the eligible country list (see 5.1 and Annex A: Eligible countries), and not countries such as the UK. |
| Defra | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), UK Government. The OCEAN Grants Programme is a programme funded by Defra. |
| Delivery Partners | See glossary for 'Project Partners'. |
| Expert Committee (EC) | Expert Committee is a group of independent experts in marine protection and sustainable development that provides strategic advice, assesses proposals and makes recommendations to Defra on funding decisions. |
| Ethics | The values, such as fairness, honesty, openness, integrity, that shape how an individual or an organisation operates and interacts with others. |
| Evidence | Information that demonstrates project actions, outputs, outcomes and impact. It varies in format, quality and relevance and can include, documented and undocumented experiences, data, studies, policies, best practices, from a range of perspectives. However, evidence is particularly valued when it is quality assured, accessible and applicable. |
| Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) | Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, UK Government. |
| Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) | A Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion approach considers how social characteristics (such as disability, socio-economic status, migration and displacement status, ethnicity, race, age, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity) combine to influence who has power and access to resources, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | who makes decisions, and who loses out. Not considering these dynamics risks exacerbating inequalities and undermining climate and biodiversity goals. |
| In-country organisations | Organisations of an eligible country (Annex A: Eligible countries (see Annex A: Eligible countries) and based in such country. |
| Innovation | The implementation of a novel or significantly improved approach (product, ways of working, and/or process) that differs from previous approaches. Innovation can include the implementation of tried and tested approaches in geographies, scales, contexts and ways than have not been used before. |
| International Climate Finance (ICF) | International Climate Finance is a UK government commitment to support developing countries to respond to, and enhance their resilience against, climate change. |
| International organisations | Organisations that may have a presence in an eligible country, but a head office located in a country not listed as an eligible country (see Annex A: Eligible countries). |
| Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) | We define IPLCs in line with IPBES (2020)2: The term "Indigenous Peoples and local communities" and its acronym "IPLC" are widely used by international organisations and conventions to refer to individuals and groups who self-identify as indigenous or as members of distinct local communities. We adopt this terminology with particular emphasis on those who "maintain an inter-generational historical connection to place and nature through livelihoods, cultural identity, languages, worldviews, institutions, and ecological knowledge". |
| Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) | MEL refers to a set of tools and processes used to design, implement and assess projects, programmes or initiatives. MEL is an important part of effectively delivering projects, demonstrating results, and learning from your activities and experiences to understand what works and what does not. See the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance for further details. |
| Large sized organisation | In the context of OCEAN: a large sized organisation is an organisation with an annual income of more than £1 million. |
| Lead applicant | The lead applicant is the person who leads on the development of the application and supporting materials and will be the main project contact point during the application process. The lead applicant should also be the person that signs and submits the application form. |
| Lead organisation | The lead organisation is the organisation who will administer the grant and coordinate the delivery of the project, accepting the terms and conditions of the grant (see 9.19) on behalf of the project. The lead organisation will be the organisation who submits the application via the online application portal Flexi- |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Grant. If awarded the grant, the lead organisation will be responsible for project delivery and budget management. |
| Local/national organisations | Organisations of an eligible country (see Annex A: Eligible countries), with either a national or local remit, based within that country, and typically led by a national of the country. Sometimes referred to as in-country organisations. |
| Locally-led organisation | An organisation with either a national or local remit, based within that country, and typically led by a national of the country. See glossary for 'Local/national organisations'. |
| Logframe or Logical Framework | A monitoring tool to measure progress against a Results Chain, comparing planned and actual results along a causal pathway, and including indicators, baselines, targets, as well as risks and assumptions. |
| Marine environment | Includes estuaries, coastal marine and nearshore zones, and open-ocean-deep-sea regions. |
| Matched funding | Additional finance that is secured to help meet the total cost of the project, including public and private sources, as well as quantified in-kind contributions. |
| Multi-dimensional Poverty | See glossary for 'Poverty'. |
| NIRAS | OCEAN Grants Programme Administrator; first point of contact for projects and applicants. |
| Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) | Any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. |
| OCEAN | The Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature Grants Programme. |
| Official Development Assistance (ODA) | Official Development Assistance – commonly known as overseas aid – is when support, expertise or finance is supplied by one government to help the people of another country via activities that promote economic development and welfare as a main objective. |
| Pathway to change | A Pathway to change is an explanation of how planned project activities will change the current situation and address a marine environment challenge linked with multi-dimensional poverty. Specifically, a Pathway to change narrative should outline why and how you expect your project outputs to contribute towards your overall outcome and, in the longer term, your expected project Impact. |
| Partner organisation(s) | The organisation(s) who have a formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Poverty | Poverty is multidimensional and not solely about a lack of money; it encompasses a range of issues that hinder people's abilities to meet their basic needs and better their life with dignity including a lack of income, land, or other means of access to the basic material goods, infrastructure and services needed to survive with dignity, or a deficiency in healthcare, security, education or necessary social relations. |
| Primary country | A primary country is the country where the majority of project activities take place. An application can have more than one primary country. |
| Project leader | The project leader is the person who will lead the implementation of the project. This person has the necessary authority, capability and capacity, and a full understanding of the role and associated obligations, and will take responsibility for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant. The project leader can be the same person as the lead applicant. There is a preference for the project leader to be staff of the lead organisation. |
| Project Partners | The Lead Organisation together with each Partner Organisation. Project Partners can also be referred to as Delivery Partners. |
| Scale | The ability to deliver greater impact of a proven approach, either through expanding the scope of activities within a given geography or focal issue, taking the approach into a new geography or focal issue, or through uptake by stakeholders that promotes systemic change. |
| Safeguarding | Broadly means preventing harm to people and the environment. In practice, efforts often focus on taking all reasonable steps to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) from occurring, and to respond appropriately when it does. |
| Secondary country | A secondary country is an eligible country which may have some project activities but is not the main focus of the project. An application can have more than one secondary country. |
| Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) | Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. See glossary for 'Safeguarding' for greater details. |
| Small to medium sized organisation | In the context of OCEAN: a small sized organisation is an organisation with an annual income of up to £100,000; a medium sized organisation is an organisation with an annual income of between £100,000 and £1 million. |
| Stakeholder | The individuals/communities/organisations who are consulted, engaged and/or participate in project activities as they have an interest or concern in the project and its impact. They can also be partners, but if not, they would not have a budget management, or a formal governance role, within the project. Stakeholders are not homogenous groups and will include layers of diversity within |

| | |
|---|---|
| | them. For difference between a Stakeholder and Partner Organisation, see 5.4. |
| Theory of Change (ToC) | The Theory of Change explains the process of change by outlining causal linkages taking activities through to a desired outcome, being explicit about the assumptions underlying the expected causal pathways and including an analysis of barriers and enablers as well as indicators of success. Often set out in a diagram and narrative form. |
| Value For Money (VfM) | Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes. |

# 3.  OCEAN Grants Programme

## 3.1.  About OCEAN

**The Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature Grants Programme (referred to as 'OCEAN') is a global competitive grants initiative that aims to support the people most impacted by declining ocean health and climate change through funding local solutions to local problems.**

OCEAN is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), through the UK's Blue Planet Fund (BPF) – a £500 million portfolio of programmes supporting developing countries to protect the marine environment and reduce poverty. Applications and grants are administered by NIRAS[1] (referred to as 'Grants Administrator').

Additional information concerning the background to the set-up of OCEAN and the global marine protection and poverty reduction challenges that OCEAN aims to address can be found in Appendix 1: Global context.

## 3.2.  Intended impact of OCEAN

**The intended impact of OCEAN is to place the ocean on a path to recovery, enabling local communities and nature to thrive.** OCEAN aims to achieve this impact by supporting local solutions to local problems that help communities manage marine resources sustainably, effectively, and inclusively, and through using evidence and best practices to reduce multi-dimensional poverty. OCEAN also expects to realise cross-cutting co-benefits including promoting Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and tackling climate change mitigation and supporting climate change adaptation.

In addition to awarding grants, OCEAN is committed to supporting organisations through facilitating learning and networking opportunities. This support is offered to help empower projects, organisations, partners and stakeholders, ensuring that organisations are better supported, have increased ability to influence policy at local, sub-national and national levels, and are able to participate in more inclusive decision and policy-making.

OCEAN expects the grants it awards and the support it offers to organisations to lead to tangible, positive impacts on the marine environment and contribute to reducing multi-dimensional poverty worldwide. **The expected long-term impacts of OCEAN include:**

- Better protected and more sustainably used and managed marine ecosystems and ecosystem services;
- A reduction in levels of multidimensional poverty, with fewer people experiencing the impacts of poverty; and
- Increased gender equality, disability inclusion and accessibility, and social inclusion, particularly regarding access to resources and alternative (or sustainable) livelihoods in coastal ecosystem.

Some of the identified pathways to achieving this impact include:

- Increased coastal resilience to climate change;

---

[1] NIRAS is an international consultancy committed to helping clients worldwide achieve their development and sustainability goals. Our UK team excels in delivering expert engineering, environmental, and project management services, both locally and internationally.

- Improved waste management systems, particularly in relation to managing marine pollution;
- Improvements to public health such as reducing the risks of disease or malnutrition.
- Strengthened management of regional and national fisheries and aquaculture;
- Improved and more inclusive governance of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs); and
- A reduction in Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities and improvement in social outcomes for vulnerable fishing communities.

## 3.3. Projects funded by OCEAN

OCEAN will award grants to projects that aim to **reduce multi-dimensional poverty in ways which contribute to the protection, restoration, and/or benefit of the marine environment and its biodiversity** through the following two distinct funding pathways (see 4 for further details).

- **Community Grants** of a maximum grant size of £250,000 will be available for small- to medium-sized, locally-led, in-country organisations. These grants must focus on increasing the capacity of local communities to tackle marine and poverty issues, by delivering local solutions to local problems.
- **Partnership Grants** of between £500,000 to £3 million will be available for medium to large organisations with the capacity to deliver solutions at scale. These grants must focus on partnering with and working alongside the local communities, to deliver local solutions to local problems, while addressing the potential to scale.

All projects must contribute to a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty and support the protection, restoration, conservation or sustainable management of the marine environment to be eligible for funding. When designing projects for funding by OCEAN, applicants should also ensure that their projects:

- Promote Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and demonstrate how they have taken GEDSI into consideration during project design;
- Work at the local level and with organisations based in the country of implementation;
- Are based in an eligible country and meet all mandatory eligibility requirements.

Before applying, carefully review the eligibility and selection criteria (see 5 and 11) to ensure that your project meets the mandatory requirements, and clearly demonstrate how your project will address the additional requirements (see 9).

| Example project areas | Example project activities |
|---|---|
| • Increasing community capacity to establish and sustainably, effectively, and inclusively implement and manage marine protected areas and other effective conservation measures. <br> • Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities are more effectively monitored, prevented and prohibited with the communities previously dependent on these practices | • Inclusive and accessible community training workshops in sustainable marine management practices to increase productivity and yields of ecosystems. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, potential barriers (for both attendance and participation) that women, youth, people with disabilities, and other marginalised |

| Example project areas | Example project activities |
|---|---|
| supported through alternative, stable, sustainable livelihoods.<br><br>• Management of regional and national fisheries and aquaculture is strengthened to deliver sustainable fish stocks and healthy marine ecosystems, provide inclusive livelihoods, and reduce overfishing.<br><br>• Communities have increased capacity to manage marine pollution, targeting pathways from land to sea to prevent it entering the marine environment. | community members might face must be adequately addressed.<br><br>• Supporting women, youth, and people with disabilities to develop income generation and livelihood development in integrated waste management.<br><br>• Establishing and training staff in environmental management and information systems.<br><br>• Training women and men artisanal fishers in IUU fishing data collection to develop community-led networks to report IUU fishing.<br><br>• Capacity building projects to train in-country experts to carry out fishery assessments and develop improvements based on data.<br><br>• Establishing no-take zones and creating biodiversity monitoring programmes.<br><br>• Establishing waste collection, sorting, and disposal systems in local communities. |

## 3.4. Challenge fund principles endorsed by OCEAN

OCEAN is a challenge fund and will consider the following challenge fund principles when selecting applications:

- **Competitive process**: OCEAN is open to all who meet the eligibility criteria (see 5) and are willing to compete. Only the highest scoring projects will be funded.
- **Innovation**: OCEAN encourages applicants to submit potentially transformational plans that can contribute to achieving local solutions to local problems.
- **Co-financing**: OCEAN encourages co-financing (including in-kind funding), promoting ownership and commitment to projects and ensuring public funds can go further. This is not a requirement.
- **Partnerships**: OCEAN encourages the bringing together of partners and cooperation of shared mutual benefits.
- **Local solutions to local problems**: OCEAN encourages localisation and the development of ideas that provide local solutions to local problems, stimulating ownership and greater innovation.
- **Inclusion and equality:** OCEAN requires applicants to consider how their efforts can advance gender equality, disability inclusion and accessibility, and social inclusion.

# 4. Funding pathways

There are two distinct OCEAN funding pathways available: Community Grants (up to £250,000) and Partnership Grants (between £500,000 - £3 million).

## 4.1. Community Grants

The Community Grants pathway has been designed to meet the needs of **small to medium-sized, locally-led, in-country organisations legally registered and working in an eligible country** (see Annex A: Eligible countries). All Community Grants applications must:

- Support a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty;
- Lead to improved protection, restoration, conservation or sustainable management of the marine environment;
- Address the needs of and barriers for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, aiming to reduce gender and social inequalities (i.e., a GEDSI Responsive approach – see 9.9 and 11), though projects meeting or striving toward a higher GEDSI ambition (GEDSI Empowering – see 9.9 and 11)) will be prioritised;
- Demonstrate how they contribute to climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation;
- Demonstrate a good understanding of the context in which the project will take place;
- Increase the capability and capacity of local communities and/or organisations; and
- Contribute to developing new ideas, providing local solutions to local problems, and empowering communities.

## 4.2. Partnership Grants

The Partnership Grants pathway has been designed to meet the needs of **medium to large, established organisations** that work with locally-led organisations based in-country where the project is planned to be implemented (see Annex A: Eligible countries). All Partnership Grants applications must:

- Support a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty;
- Lead to improved protection, restoration, conservation or sustainable management of the marine environment;
- Reduce gender and social inequalities and empower community members by reducing barriers and increasing equitable access to assets, resources, and capabilities for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups (i.e., a GEDSI Empowering approach – see 9.9 and 11);
- Demonstrate how they contribute to climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation;
- Partner with at least one organisation based in the project primary country(ies);
- Effectively engage with and work alongside partner organisation(s) to support local communities;
- Demonstrate a good understanding of the context in which the project will take place;
- Implement an approach at a unique scale via well-established networks to provide maximum impact and deliver long-term outcomes to the marine environment and local communities.

| | **Community Grants** | **Partnership Grants** |
|---|---|---|
| **Application stages** | • Stage 1. Concept note<br>• Stage 2. Detailed application | • Stage 1. Detailed application<br>• Stage 2. Interview |
| **Selection criteria (see 11)** | • Technical merit<br>• Marine conservation impact<br>• Poverty reduction<br>• Community empowerment | • Technical merit<br>• Marine conservation impact<br>• Poverty reduction<br>• Partnerships |
| **Assessment criteria (see section 11)** | • Upper Middle-Income Countries (UMIC)<br>• Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion<br>• Value for Money | |

# 5. Eligibility criteria

Applications will be assessed on their technical merit, only if they meet all eligibility criteria and application requirements. Applications that fail to meet the specified eligibility criteria or application requirements (see 6) will be rejected. Eligibility criteria is detailed below:

| | Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|---|
| **Grant size** | Up to £250,000.<br><br>The maximum annual budget value in any given year must not exceed 50% of the lead organisation's average annual income. | Between £500,000 - £3,000,000.<br><br>The maximum annual budget value in any given year must not exceed 25% of the lead organisation's average annual income. |
| **Project start date** | November - December 2025 | |
| **Project duration** | Between 12 and 41 months - all projects must conclude by 31 March 2029. There is a preference for multi-year projects to support greater impact and value for money, unless distinct objectives can be achieved within one year. | |
| **Project country** | Based in a country listed in Annex A: Eligible countries. Can be based in more than one country, but all countries must be eligible. | |
| **Lead organisation** | Can be a non-profit organisation, an academic or research institute, a private sector organisation, a business, or a business association. Funds cannot be used to generate a profit for the lead organisation. | |
| | • Must be legally registered in the same country where the project is implemented (project country).<br>• Must have an annual income of less than £1 million.<br>• Must be formally established for more than two years. | • Can be based anywhere in the world, though projects from local/national organisations are encouraged.<br>• Must be formally established for more than three years.<br>• No income requirements apply. |
| **Partner organisation** | Partner organisations can be a non-profit organisation, an academic or research institute, a private sector organisation, a business, or a business association.<br>Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations can be a partner organisation but may not receive funding. | |
| | • Partnerships are encouraged but are not mandatory, and the lead organisation may partner with one or more partner organisations. | • The lead organisation must partner with at least one organisation legally registered in the primary project country. If a project is working in multiple primary countries, |

| Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|
| • Partner organisations can be based in the identified project country(ies) or elsewhere and no income requirements apply. | then it should identify a partner in each country. No income requirements apply to the Partners. <br> • If the lead organisation has local or affiliated offices in the project country, in spite of these being set up as separate legal entities, it may partner with them but must also partner with at least one other organisation legally registered in the project country. |

## 5.1. Project country

**Projects must be based in an Official Development Assistance (ODA) eligible coastal country**, given that OCEAN is entirely ODA funded. OCEAN funded projects must promote the economic development and welfare of the country they work in, as primary objective. OCEAN funded projects must also contribute to poverty reduction in a way that reduces gender inequality and promotes social inclusion, as required by the UK International Development Act. In addition, as all projects must support creating a positive impact for the marine environment, only coastal countries are eligible to apply for an OCEAN grant. See the full list of eligible coastal countries in Annex A: Eligible countries.

Given the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, OCEAN has taken the decision to suspend all bilateral engagement with Russia. Russian organisations are ineligible to be a Lead Organisation or Partner or involved in any way with any OCEAN grant.

| Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|
| Based in a country listed in Annex A: Eligible countries. Can be based in more than one country, but all countries must be eligible. | |

> *What is the difference between a primary country and a secondary country?*
>
> *A **primary country** is the country where the majority of activities take place. An application can have more than one primary country.*
>
> *A **secondary country** is a country which have some activities but are not main project focus. An application can have more than one secondary country.*

## 5.2. Lead organisation

Applications must be made by **a lead organisation, not an individual**. **The lead organisation can be an be a non-profit organisation, an academic or research institute, a private sector organisation, a business, or a business association.**

**Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations, such as UN agencies, are not eligible to be the lead organisation.**

There is no limit on the number of applications a lead organisation may submit, but we would strongly encourage internal co-ordination to ensure all submissions are truly competitive; Defra will consider the number of applications from an organisation as part of their decision-making process when awarding grants.

| Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|
| • Must be **legally registered in the same country where the project is implemented**. A registration certificate is required. For applications under below £100,000, this can be replaced by a letter of support from Host Governments/ British Embassy or High Commission.<br>• Must have an **annual income of less than £1 million** (calculated as an average of the past two years of the organisation's accounts).<br>• Financial accounts covering the last two financial years are required. For projects over £100,000 these must be either audited or independently examined accounts. | • Can be **based anywhere in the world, though projects from local/national organisations are encouraged**. A registration certificate is required.<br>• **No annual income requirements** apply.<br>• Financial accounts covering the last three financial years are required. These must be audited. |

## 5.3. Project leader

The lead organisation will be required to name a project leader during the application process. The project leader will be the first point of contact for all aspects of project management and will be responsible for the overall management of the project and accountability of the award, on behalf of the institution they represent.

Where the project leader is not employed by the lead organisation, the reasoning behind this should be made clear in the application, including their capability to control and be held accountable for the proposed project.

> ***What is the difference between a lead organisation, a lead applicant and a project leader?***
>
> *The **lead organisation** is the organisation who will administer the grant and coordinate the delivery of the project, accepting the terms and conditions of the grant (see 9.19) on behalf of the project. The lead organisation will be the organisation who submits the application via the online application portal Flexi-Grant. If awarded the grant, the lead organisation will be responsible for project delivery and budget management.*
>
> *The **lead applicant** is the person who leads on the development of the application and supporting materials and will be the main project contact point during the application process. **The lead applicant should also be the person that signs and submits the application form.***

*The **project leader** is the person who will lead the implementation of the project. This person has the necessary authority, capability and capacity, and a full understanding of the role and associated obligations, and will take responsibility for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant. **The project leader can be the same person as the lead applicant. There is a preference for the project leader to be staff of the lead organisation.***

## 5.4. Partner organisations

OCEAN encourages partnerships between organisations. Aligning interests around a common vision, combining complementary resources, experiences and competencies, and sharing risk, can maximise a project's impact in terms of scale, quality, sustainability and benefits. OCEAN expects applications to be co-developed by the lead organisation together with all partner organisations.

**Partner organisations can be a non-profit organisation, an academic or research institute, a private sector organisation, a business, or a business association. Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations, such as UN agencies, can be a partner organisation but may not receive funding so can only provide in-kind partnership.**

| Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|
| • Partnerships are encouraged but are **not mandatory**, and the lead organisation may partner **with one or more partner organisations**.<br>• Partner organisations **can be based in the project country or elsewhere** and no income requirements apply. | • The lead organisation **must partner with at least one organisation legally registered in the primary project country**. If a project is working in multiple countries, then it should identify a partner in each primary country. No income requirements apply to the Partners.<br>• If the lead organisation has **local or affiliated offices in the project country**, in spite of these being set up as separate legal entities, it may partner with them but must also partner with at least one other organisation legally registered in the project country. |

### 5.4.1. Letter of support

The lead organisation will need to provide a letter of support from each partner organisation, demonstrating their commitment to the project. The letter of support should be on headed / branded paper of the partner organisation and signed by an appropriate member of the partner organisation staff. The letter should indicate whether the partner organisation has been consulted in the design of the project and that they agree to support its implementation.

*What is the difference between a partner organisation and a stakeholder?*

*A **partner organisation** is an organisation that have a formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities.*

*A **stakeholder** is an organisation or an individual that does not have a budget management, or a formal governance role, within the project but is consulted, engaged and may participate in project activities. It should be noted that **stakeholders are not homogenous groups** and have additional layers of diversity and social identity including gender identify and expression, ethnicity, caste, age, religion, sexuality, disability status, indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), and income that need to be considered within the design and delivery of projects. Best practices show that **target beneficiaries** of a project should also be included as stakeholders—being engaged and consulted throughout design, implementation, and MEL. Aiming to empower local communities, these stakeholders should be included in decision-making processes, their input should be valued, and their concerns and aspirations understood and considered.*

# 6. Application requirements

Applications that meet the eligibility criteria (see 5) will be assessed individually on their technical merit. To be successful, an OCEAN application must address the following elements:

- Multi-dimensional poverty reduction; and
- Protection, restoration, and/or benefit of the marine environment and its biodiversity.

Applications are also expected to demonstrate how their projects will contribute to climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation. Specific details of the scoring criteria and how applications will be scored can be found in section 11.

## 6.1. Multi-dimensional poverty reduction

The most vulnerable populations depend heavily on the environment to manage risks such as food insecurity, environmental hazards, climate change impacts, and health risks, while also meeting their daily needs. Even within vulnerable communities, the most other marginalised members - including women, youth, people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and those discriminated against based on factors such as religion, race, caste, or sexual identity or gender expression - often face additional risks, reliance on natural resources, and poverty. Low-income countries, in particular, are more directly reliant on natural capital than higher-income nations, often using it as a foundation for building infrastructure and human capital.

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applications should **look systematically at the relationship between poverty and the marine environment**, with project designs explicitly considering how planned activities relate to poverty or to the efforts to reduce poverty; with clearly identified beneficiaries (who are also included as participatory stakeholders) and reflecting Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations.

Incorporating GEDSI approaches strengthens efforts to reduce multidimensional poverty, particularly in coastal communities where livelihoods are closely tied to natural resources and vulnerable to climate change. By addressing inequalities experienced by women, youth, and people with disabilities alongside resource management, climate resilience, and other related factors, projects can create more comprehensive and enduring solutions.

> ### What is multi-dimensional poverty?
>
> *Poverty is multi-dimensional and not solely about a lack of money. It encompasses a range of issues that hinder people's abilities to meet their basic needs and better their life with dignity. This can include a lack of income, ownership/control of land, or other means of access to the basic material goods, infrastructure and services needed to survive with dignity, or a deficiency in healthcare, security, education or necessary social relations.*
>
> *Importantly, reducing multi-dimensional poverty means more than helping people simply survive; it means empowering them to thrive with dignity. In coastal and marine areas, actions that improve environmental health - such as beach clean-ups, mangrove restoration, and the establishment of Marine Protected Areas - can be integral to this*

*effect. These interventions can lead to cleaner, safer, and more productive marine environments that in-turn help communities to thrive.*

*Addressing multi-dimensional poverty can also go hand-in-hand with fostering long-term social and economic equity and environmental well-being. For example, by protecting coastal communities against erosion, improving fisheries management, and reducing pollution, such activities support livelihoods, strengthen community resilience, and enhance overall quality of life.*

*Multi-dimensional poverty therefore has multiple facets and should be considered in terms of how it interlinks and is connected with the local context and environment. Marginalised community members—such as women, youth, and people with disabilities—may be more likely to experience the impacts of multi-dimensional poverty.*

**Multi-dimensional poverty reduction can be addressed:**

- **Directly**: through activities that help secure increased income for local communities, whilst tackling marine issues.
- **Indirectly:** through safeguarding traditional rights and cultural values, increasing the voices of other marginalised communities, increasing equality within communities (see 9.9), improved governance, protecting and restoring the marine environment through capacity building of local organisations.
- **Through practice-oriented research:** through activities that expand the local knowledge base on the marine environment and its interaction with poverty reduction; for example, the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of marine resources.

In addressing multi-dimensional poverty, OCEAN's ambition is to be take an empowering approach with respect to gender equality, disability inclusion and accessibility, and social inclusion (GEDSI). As such, Partnership Grants must take a GEDSI Empowering approach and Community Grants must, at minimum, take a GEDSI Responsive approach, ideally striving towards GEDSI Empowering. Further details can be found in 9.9 and 11 and in the GEDSI Guidance.

## 6.2. Protection, restoration, and/or benefit of the marine environment and its biodiversity

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applications must clearly demonstrate how their projects will have a **positive impact on the marine environment and its biodiversity, including how this will be monitored and evidenced**.

Applications are encouraged to note if their project will also relate to one of more of the Blue Planet Fund's seven key outcomes (see Annex C: Blue Planet Fund). Where this is the case, applications will be assessed on how effectively they address the outcome(s) that they are seeking to work towards.

Applications that do not directly relate to a Blue Planet Fund's outcome will not be penalised for this. However, applications that do not directly relate to a Blue Planet Fund outcome must demonstrate in a robust way that they align to one of the following two areas:

- Protect, restore, and enhance the marine environment or its biodiversity through conservation and / or sustainable management approaches.
- Improve awareness and understanding of global ocean challenges faced and the options to address them at the local and national level.

## 6.3. Climate adaptation / mitigation

UK International Climate Finance (ICF) is the UK's commitment to support developing countries in their transition toward sustainable, climate-resilient pathways. It provides financial resources and expertise to help these countries reduce emissions, protect and restore nature, build resilience to the impacts of climate change, and pursue green-growth strategies, ultimately contributing to the global objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement. UK International Climate Finance (ICF) therefore plays a crucial role in addressing the global challenge faced by climate change.

OCEAN is predominantly funded by the UK's ICF commitment and therefore expects the projects it funds to contribute to climate change mitigation or adaptation. Community Grant and Partnership Grant applicants are therefore asked in the application to **demonstrate how their proposed projects will contribute to climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation**. Applications that demonstrate how their proposed projects will contribute to climate adaptation and or climate mitigation will be prioritised.

Projects are expected to contribute to this directly or indirectly and should detail in the application any impact or contribution their projects anticipate having on climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation.

> ***What is the difference between climate adaptation and climate mitigation?***
>
> ***Climate adaptation*** *measures increase the capacity of communities and natural systems to adapt to the impacts of climate change, reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience.*
>
> ***Climate mitigation*** *measures that directly contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere by reducing emissions or enhancing the capacity of carbon sinks to absorb them.*

**Projects can contribute to climate adaptation** by supporting alternative livelihoods which are more climate-resilient or provide an alternative source of income to existing sources which are being affected by climate change.

**Projects can contribute to climate mitigation:**

- **Directly**: through actively restoring carbon sinks (for example mangroves) or limiting greenhouse gas emissions by improving access to renewable energy.
- **Indirectly**: by increasing the protection of carbon sinks in the coastal and marine environment (for example mangroves, seagrasses, coral reefs). An activity which actively restores, protects, or increases the health of these ecosystems will be considered to indirectly reduce the amount of greenhouses gases in the atmosphere by enhancing the capacity of carbon sinks to remove them.

## 6.4. Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

Social characteristics (such as disability, socio-economic status, migration and displacement status, ethnicity, race, age, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity) combine to influence who has power and access to resources, who makes decisions, and who loses out. Not considering these dynamics risks exacerbating inequalities and undermining climate and biodiversity goals.

Social characteristics are intersectional, and multiple forms of discrimination can compound each other, creating additional barriers. Through prioritising Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), climate and biodiversity programmes can tackle intersecting forms of exclusion and barriers to equal participation.

> ***GEDSI comprises three closely related and equally important concepts:***
> - *An approach focused on **Gender Equality** aims to remove the unequal power relations between different gender identities in the pursuit of equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all. It is about addressing inequalities and transforming the distribution of opportunities, choices and resources available to girls, women and non-binary individuals so that they have equal power to shape their lives and participate in the process thereby increasing equality between people of all genders.*
> - ***Disability inclusion** is the process of ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and ensuring the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights.*
> - ***Social inclusion** is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged and historically excluded from decision making and spheres of influence on the basis of their identity.*

**OCEAN's ambition is to take an empowering approach with respect to gender equality, disability inclusion and accessibility, and social inclusion**. As such:

- Partnership Grants must take a GEDSI Empowering approach, and
- Community Grants must, at minimum, take a GEDSI Responsive approach, though those that meet a GEDSI Empowering approach will be prioritised.



Further details can be found in 9.9 and 11 and in the GEDSI Guidance.

# 7. Round 2 timeline

## 7.1. Community Grants

The call for **Stage 1. applications (concept note)** will open on 06 January 2025 and close at 23:59 GMT on 17 February 2025. Results are expected to be circulated to all applicants in May 2025.

The call for **Stage 2. Applications (detailed application)** is by invitation of successful Stage 1. applications only. It will open on 19 May 2025 and close at 22:59 GMT (23:59 BST) on 30 June 2025. Results are expected to be circulated to all applicants in October 2025.

## 7.2. Partnership Grants

The call for **Stage 1. Applications (detailed application)** will open on 13 January 2025 and close at 23:59 GMT on 24 March 2025. Results are expected to be circulated to all applicants in June/July 2025.

The call for **Stage 2. Applications (interview)** is by invitation of successful Stage 1. applications only. It will be in the form of an online interview with the OCEAN Expert Committee. Interviews are expected in July 2025. Results are expected to be circulated to all applicants in October 2025.

> *Can extensions to the submission deadline be requested?*
>
> *Unfortunately, not. However, if you experience exceptional circumstances beyond your control, for example where conflict or natural disasters have an impact on your ability to complete your application in time, get in touch via applications@oceangrants.org.uk well before the application deadline. Decisions will be made before the application deadline and in accordance with Defra, on a case-by-case basis.*

## 7.3. Projects' expected start date

Community Grants and Partnership Grants projects are expected to start between November and December 2025. **The encouraged start month is November 2025.**

# 8. How to apply

## 8.1. Before starting an application

**In addition to this guidance document, Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are strongly encouraged to read the latest versions of the following guidance notes**, which are available via the OCEAN [website](#) and [Flexi-Grant](#) ahead of each new funding round.

> *IMPORTANT: Competition for funding is very strong. Applications will be rejected as ineligible if they:*
> - *are incorrect or incomplete, or*
> - *do not match all published criteria, or*
> - *are submitted using an incorrect/unofficial template/file format, or*
> - *exceed word count limits,*

## 8.2. Flexi-Grant

Community Grants and Partnership Grants **applications must be submitted through [Flexi-Grant](#), using the provided templates where indicated**. All mandatory questions in the application form must be answered, and all required attachments must be uploaded to meet application requirements. Word limits must be respected and adhered to.

Templates and guidance materials are available for download from [Flexi-Grant](#). **We recommend that you review the Flexi-Grant Guidance to learn how to use and navigate the platform, before you start your application.**

## 8.3. Language

**Application forms and supporting documents are accepted in the following languages:**

|  | Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|---|
| **Application form and provided templates** | Bahasa Indonesian<br>English<br>French<br>Portuguese<br>Spanish | English |
| **Supporting documentation to be uploaded** | Bahasa Indonesian<br>English<br>French<br>Portuguese<br>Spanish | English. Unofficial translations are accepted. |

## 8.4. Supporting materials at application stage

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants **must submit various supporting materials as part of their application form**. These are to be uploaded on Flexi-Grant and

detailed in the following table. Note the distinctions made between Stage 1. and Stage 2. Partnership Grants Stage 2. has not been included as this is an online interview.

**In addition to mandatory supporting materials,** Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants can also upload on Flexi-Grant optional (non-mandatory) supporting materials. A **maximum of five pages of optional (non-mandatory) supporting material** (for example, maps of the area they plan to work on) is allowed together with **option of a video of a maximum duration of five minutes and/or a maximum of ten photos**. Any material exceeding the length indicated will be disregarded. See the Flexi-Grant Guidance for details on file extensions accepted.

| Requirements | Community Grants – Stage 1. | Community Grants – Stage 2. | Partnership Grants - Stage 1. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Completed application form** | All mandatory questions answered on Flexi-Grant Stage 1. application form. | All mandatory questions answered on Flexi-Grant Stage 2. application form. | All mandatory questions answered on Flexi-Grant Stage 1. application form. |
| **Project workplan** | Not required. | Required on workplan template. | Required on workplan template. |
| **Project budget** | Not required. | Required on budget template. | Required on budget template. |
| **Project logframe** | Not required. | Required on logframe template. | Required on logframe template. |
| **Project Theory of Change (ToC)** | Required on ToC template. | Required on ToC template. | Required (no template). |
| **Project risk framework** | Not required. | Required in application form (table to be filled in). | Required on risk framework template. |
| **E-signature of lead applicant** | Required scan of a real (not typed) signature. Do not upload a QR code. | Required scan of a real (not typed) signature. Do not upload a QR code. | Required scan of a real (not typed) signature. Do not upload a QR code. |
| **Evidence of legal status of lead organisation** | Required upload of registration certificate. For applications under below £100,000, this can be replaced by a letter of support from Host Governments/ British Embassy or High Commission. | Required upload of registration certificate. | Required upload of registration certificate. |
| **Lead organisation's financial annual report and accounts** | Required upload of financial accounts covering the last two financial years. For projects over £100,000 these must be either audited or independently examined accounts. | Required upload of financial accounts covering the last two financial years. For applications over £100,000 these must be either audited or independently examined accounts. | Required upload of relevant documentation (must be audited). |
| **Project partners' staff capacity and capability** | Not required. | Required pen portrait of each named key staff (from lead organisation and each partner organisation). | Required upload of one-page CV of each named key staff (from lead organisation and each partner organisation). |

| Requirements | Community Grants – Stage 1. | Community Grants – Stage 2. | Partnership Grants - Stage 1. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Lead organisation's project references** | Not required. | Required upload of one reference letter for a project/grant/partnership held in the last five year by the lead organisation. If you do not have this, use a reference for the project leader and/or a letter of support from the Host Government (no template, must be on the letterhead of the funder/partner. Do not upload a copy of the contract). | Required upload of three project references from last five years of a similar size to the grant requested (no template, must be on letterhead of a funder and include the monetary amount). |
| **Letter of support from each partner organisation** | Not required. | Required upload of a letter from each partner organisation (no template, letter to be on partner organisation letterheaded paper). | Required upload of a letter from each partner organisation (no template, must be on letterheaded of partner organisation). |
| **Lead organisation's safeguarding policy** | Not required. | Required upload of relevant policy. | Required upload of relevant policy. |
| **Lead organisation's whistleblowing policy** | Not required. | Required upload of relevant policy. | Required upload of relevant policy. |
| **Lead organisation's GEDSI policy** | Not required. | Required upload of relevant policy. | Required upload of relevant policy. |
| **Lead organisation's code of conduct** | Not required. | Not required. | Required upload of relevant policy. |
| **Lead organisation's equal opportunities and diversity policy** | Not required. | Not required. | Required upload of relevant policy. |
| **Evidence of engagement with British embassy / high commission** | Not required. | Required upload of relevant evidence. | Required upload of relevant evidence. |

# 9. What to consider

In addition to the eligibility criteria and application requirements, Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants will need to consider the following elements. These will help contribute to the successful development of an application.

- Details of lead and partner organisation(s)
- Budgeting and timeframe
- Evidence
- Alignment with national priorities and international commitments
- Innovative approaches
- Value for money
- Ethics
- Scalable approaches
- Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)
- Safeguarding against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)
- Project design, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)
- Risk management
- Communications
- Engagement with British Embassy / High Commission
- Policies required at application stage
- Funding from any other UK Government body
- Use of artificial intelligence
- Modern slavery
- Terms and conditions

## 9.1. Details of lead and partner organisation(s)

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants must declare in the application form key information on the lead organisation and the partner organisation(s) where applicable. Such key information includes the organisation's full name and website, registered address, average annual income (see the Finance Guideline for how to calculate this), legal status, primary focus, number of staff, and number and roles of volunteers. This key information will be used to better understand the size, operating context, and capacity of each organisation.

### 9.1.1. Information on staff and volunteers

Information on the number of staff will be asked as full-time equivalent (FTE). FTE is a unit of measurement used to figure out the number of full-time hours worked by all employees. The FTE of an employee is calculated by dividing the number of hours in the employee's working week by the total number of hours they work. For example, an employee working 21 hours in a 35-hour working week would equal 0.6 FTE.

Information on the number and roles of volunteers will be requested only from those organisations that rely substantially on volunteers.

### 9.1.2. Information on annual income

Annual income is calculated as an average from the organisation's past accounts. Lead organisations applying to Community Grants must have an annual income of **less than £1 million** calculated as an average of the **past two years** of the organisation's accounts which are submitted as part of the application. Community Grants applicants requesting more than £100,000 are required to submit audited or independently examined financial accounts.

For lead organisations applying to Partnership Grants, **the maximum annual budget value in any given year must not exceed 25% of the lead organisation's average annual income calculated as an average of the past three years** of the organisation's accounts which are submitted as part of the application. These must be audited.

## 9.2. Budgeting and timeframe

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to present **a realistic budget and realistic timeframe**. Applications will be assessed against whether the amount that has been applied for is appropriate to complete the project in the local context, and whether the timeframe proposed is realistic and sufficient to undertake the project.

The **size and length of a project must be determined based on evidence** and what is needed to deliver intended outcomes and impacts. Overambitious or overly optimistic proposals can undermine confidence in the application to deliver its outcomes.

**The maximum annual value of funds requested for Community Grants should not exceed 50% of the lead organisation's average annual income**. **While the maximum annual value of funds requested for Partnership Grants should not exceed 25% of the lead organisation's average annual income**. See the Finance Guidance for further details and support with budgeting.

## 9.3. Evidence

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **use evidence, including best practices, to demonstrate the need for the project proposed, understanding of the context, to have made fair assumptions and identified and managed risks.**

---

*What is evidence?*

*Evidence ranges greatly in format, quality and relevance and **includes documented and undocumented experiences, data, studies, experiments, observations, peer-reviewed papers, policies, best practices.** Evidence is particularly **valuable when it is**:*

- *accessible – people should be able to access it.*
- *comprehensible – people should be able to understand it.*
- *useable – it should suit their needs.*
- *assessable – interested parties should, if necessary, be able to assess its quality.*
- *ethical – see 9.7 for details.*

*The role of **local knowledge** and evidence held by indigenous groups and local communities is vital and should be considered by projects in their design and delivery, abiding by ethical best practices.*

---

Applicants should **strengthen, promote and use evidence to inform and, where appropriate, scale activities and action**. Improving the quality, accessibility and use of evidence and best practices should lead to **more effective solutions and greater impact**. For these reasons, applicants are encouraged to **set out the central role of evidence throughout the project and beyond**, in developing the idea and approach, strengthening the implementation of the project, and the uptake of new evidence to help secure the project's legacy.

All evidence gathering and use must be conducted within a **robust ethics framework** (see 9.7). As such, applicants must respect the prior informed consent of participants, clearly show how benefits will be shared, the owners of such evidence, and seek to remove barriers to participation from women, disabled individuals and socially excluded groups. Evidence gathering and use must also adhere to **appropriate procedures related to the collection, storage and use of personal data**.

## 9.4. Alignment with national priorities and international commitments

**Alongside demonstrating the relevance of their proposed project in the local context, applicants are also expected to demonstrate how their proposed activities align with existing national policies, priorities and relevant international conventions, treaties or agreements**. Where possible, applicants should use evidence to illustrate how their project complements or advances identified national or international priorities and how their proposed projects will add value towards achieving these goals. Examples of various national and international priorities and commitments are detailed in the box below. Where possible, it is recommended that you consult with local or national government departments to ensure that your project aligns with current policies, priorities, or related initiatives in your area.

Ensuring that your proposed activities reflect and reinforce national priorities and international commitments not only increases the likelihood of delivering long-term, sustainable impact, but also helps ensure that political and national priorities, as well as key issues, are considered in project design. Over time, ensuring alignment is expected to facilitate local ownership and long-term political support, increase the likelihood of success and sustainability; and foster more coherent, coordinated efforts that magnify impact and more effectively address marine conservation and poverty reduction challenges.

> *Examples of national priorities and international commitments*
>
> *Many countries will have specific targets and commitments to multilateral agreements including but not limited to:*
>
> - *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*
> - *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*
> - *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)*
> - *the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)*
> - *the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)*
> - *the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*

- the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)

*National priorities are often set out in action plans and strategy documents such as:*

- *National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)*
- *National Action Plans (NAPs)*
- *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)*

## 9.5. Innovative approaches

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **consider innovative approaches to addressing marine conservation and multi-dimensional poverty**. Applicants must provide robust evidence for how the approach will be successful and show that the organisation(s) have the capacity to trial and implement it.

*What is innovation?*

*Within OCEAN we understand innovation to be the implementation of a novel or significantly improved approach (product, ways of working, and/or process) that differs from previous approaches. There are broadly three types of innovation:*

1. ***Novel to the area**, the diffusion, replication, or application of proven approaches in another geography or to a different issue or stakeholder group.*
2. ***Novel to the sector**, an approach proven in a different sector is adapted to deliver results and impact in the marine protection and poverty reduction sector.*
3. ***Novel to the world**, an innovation unproven in any sector, is applied to the marine protection and poverty reduction sector.*

## 9.6. Value for money

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are required to demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering good value for money i.e. **maximise the expected impact from each Great British Pound (GBP) spent**.

*What is value for money?*

- ***Value for money means aiming for the best feasible project for amount spent.** This means drawing on evidence to carefully appraise possible objectives and delivery options.*
- ***It does not mean only doing the cheapest things.** We need to understand what drives costs and make sure that we are getting the best outcomes for the lowest price.*
- ***Nor do we just do the easiest things to measure.** We need to explain what we value, be innovative in how we assess and monitor value for money and what results we are trying to achieve with UK taxpayers' money.*
- ***Value for money is not something that applies only to project design.** It should drive decision making throughout the project cycle and in relation to running costs and evaluations.*

Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate that they are **pursuing continuous improvement and applying stringent financial management and governance to reduce waste and improve efficiency**. This can include the consideration of evidence from relevant historical and existing initiatives, and reflect this in project design, incorporating lessons learnt, to maximise the chance of success.

Applicants are encouraged to secure **matched funding** to help meet the total cost of the project, from public and/or private sources, as well as **quantified in-kind contributions** as far as possible.

## 9.7. Ethics

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **meet the key principles of good ethical practice and demonstrate this in their application.** If awarded a grant, projects will be required to meet these in order not to have funding frozen or withdrawn.

*What are the key principles of good ethical practice?*

*These include:*

- *meet all legal and ethical obligations of all countries and organisations involved in the project, including securing necessary ethics approvals.*
- *follow best practice where legislation is incomplete or absent.*
- *include strong leadership and participation from contributing countries and the communities involved to enhance the incorporation of their perspectives, interests and knowledge, in addressing the wellbeing of those directly impacted by the project.*
- *recognise the value and importance of traditional knowledge, alongside international scientific approaches and methods.*
- *respect the rights, privacy, and safety of people who are impacted directly and indirectly by project activities.*
- *use Prior Informed Consent (PIC) principles with communities.*
- *protect the health and safety of all project staff.*
- *uphold the credibility of evidence, research and other findings.*
- *remove barriers to participation in research.*
- *enhance transparency as a commitment to share and communicate research and evidence findings.*
- *be of practical value.*

*Staff involved in the design or conduct of research should maintain the independence and integrity of the process, including intellectual detachment from personal convictions relating to the topic.*

## 9.8. Scalable approaches

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **consider aspects of their projects that have the potential to be applicable in other contexts or can benefit more people**. OCEAN is particularly interested in approaches and evidence that, if proven, have the potential to be scaled to deliver greater impact, given that the resources available to meet marine

conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction challenges are globally limited and there is an urgent need to have a greater impact to meet this challenge.

> ***What are scalable approaches?*** *Work can be scaled in any of the following ways:*
> - ***Landscape scaling****: test an approach and then apply it more broadly at the landscape/seascape level.*
> - ***Replication scaling****: test an approach and apply it in another geography, or to another issue or stakeholder group.*
> - ***Systems change scaling****: support system changes (e.g., legislation) that have impacts beyond their original scale.*
> - ***Capacity scaling****: leaving a legacy of higher capacity to achieve change through improving the capacity of organisations, key individuals, or regionally (e.g., geographic clusters of projects, combining to build capacity and momentum).*
> - ***Post-project scaling****: achieved through new finance or through uptake by stakeholders, markets or other mechanisms.*

## 9.9. Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

**Projects will need to consider how they will contribute to enhancing gender equality, strengthening disability inclusion, and advancing social inclusion more broadly.** As no action is neutral, by not giving due consideration to GEDSI, projects could unintentionally exacerbate inequalities, reinforce barriers, or cause harm to already disadvantaged groups. OCEAN aims to take an ambitious GEDSI approach, reducing gender and social inequalities and empowering community members. This can be accomplished by reducing barriers and increasing equitable access to assets, resources, and capabilities for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

Incorporating GEDSI approaches will support the project's goals toward reducing multidimensional poverty. Women, youth, and people with disabilities, as well as other marginalised community members, may lack access to and/or ownership of land, resources and financing, infrastructure services, education, etc. This is particularly important within coastal communities that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and wellbeing and are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Because of the intimate connections between multi-dimensional poverty, livelihoods, coastal resource management, climate change, and social inequalities, efforts to address any one of these areas will be strengthened by incorporating the others.

**Projects will be assessed against the approaches taken to promote equality and inclusion and ensure individuals achieve equitable outcomes**. To shape and inform all marine protection and poverty reduction actions, it is **vital to understand** gender and social characteristics in differentiating marine protection practices, knowledge acquisition and usage, as well as inequalities in control over resources.

Projects that have successfully mainstreamed GEDSI appropriately into their design at an early stage, including via a social and gender analysis to better understand the context and potential

project implications, typically result in more equitable outcomes reflecting their community needs.

Projects are expected to:

- Contribute to poverty reduction and deliver **equitable net benefits** within communities;
- Provide **at least one GEDSI related risk as part of their risk framework**, both at the application stage and at the project implementation stage;
- Report **indicators disaggregated by GEDSI** where applicable (see the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance for more information); and
- Meet minimum required GEDSI level, which is GEDSI Empowering for Partnership Grants and GEDSI Responsive at a minimum, though GEDSI Empowering is prioritised, for Community Grants (see 11 for more information).

## 9.10. Safeguarding against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **ensure that everyone regardless of age, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, or other protected characteristic[2] has the right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation.**

**Safeguarding is an iterative process. All project partners must be prepared to discuss and strengthen their safeguarding capability and capacity to prevent, listen, respond, and learn. The lead organisation must:**

- Have appropriate and proportionate safeguarding policies and procedures in place (including but not limited to SEAH), tailored to the project and reflecting GEDSI factors and power relationships, to protect staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries.
- Take all reasonable and adequate steps to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) of any person (staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries) linked to the delivery of the grant. An acceptable adherence to either the IASC Six Core Principles relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the IASC Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA and/or the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)[3] on Quality and Accountability [4], as required by the terms and conditions of the grant (see Annex B: Safeguarding). Adherence to the Common Approach to PSEAH (CAPSEAH) principles and minimum standards will also fulfil the requirements of the grant agreement.
- Ensure that all partners understand and meet the safeguarding standards.
- Swiftly and appropriately action any suspicions or complaints of SEAH to stop harm occurring, investigate and report to relevant authorities (for criminal matters) when safe to do so and after considering the wishes of the survivor.

---

[2] OCEAN is a UK government fund, and it is against UK law to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic, these are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics).

3 See CHS PSEAH Index https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/pseah-index/

[4] https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/update/iasc-six-core-principles

- Promptly report to Defra ([ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk)) any and all credible allegations including SEAH relating directly to the grant or related indirectly to the grant but could impact the relationship with Defra.

**Defra has a zero tolerance for inaction to tackling abuse and/or exploitation of any person (staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries) by staff or associated personnel involved in grants**. Raising a safeguarding concern with Defra does not necessarily mean funding will be paused if the concern is investigated, and robust action is taken when allegations are upheld. However, **failure to report to Defra any credible allegation that warrants investigation, even in the case where it is determined to be unfounded, may result in the funding being stopped**. The reporting to Defra is in addition to, not a replacement of any mandatory reporting required by others.

**The lead organisation must be capable of demonstrating that they have:**

1) A **safeguarding policy**, which includes a statement of commitment to safeguarding and a zero-tolerance statement on inaction to tackling bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.
2) A detailed and up to date **register of safeguarding issues** raised and how they were dealt with.
3) **Clear investigation and disciplinary procedures** for allegations and complaints, as well as a clear processes for disclosure.
4) **Proactively shared** safeguarding policies with all **partner organisations**, ensuring that they understand and meet the required standards, offering support where required.
5) An **accessible and clearly communicated whistle-blowing mechanism** which protects whistle blowers from reprisals and includes clear processes for dealing with concerns raised.
6) **Identified, assessed and monitor safeguarding risks including SEAH** in the project risk framework.
7) Have in place a **Code of Conduct** signed by all staff and volunteers that sets out clear expectations of behaviours - inside and outside the workplace - and what will happen in the event of non-compliance or breach of these standards.
8) A **safer recruitment approach** that includes appropriate background checks of new recruits and consultants.
9) **All staff trained** in safeguarding and protection from SEAH.

**Failure to be able to demonstrate any of the above does not automatically exclude you from applying, rather it can help you identify priority areas for strengthening. If you feel that this applies to you, please contact the OCEAN Grants Administrator. The Safeguarding Resource & Support Hub ([safeguardingsupporthub.org](https://safeguardingsupporthub.org)) also provides a valuable resource to support the development and delivery of safeguarding objectives.**

## 9.11. Project design, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **adhere to a robust monitoring framework to support a sound design and efficient delivery of project activities,**

**and to demonstrate impact and value for money achieved.** Examples of different MEL tools and descriptions are provided in the table below.

| Tool | Description |
|------|-------------|
| **Pathway to change** | A narrative description of how your project activities will lead to a desired change in marine environment and a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty. |
| **Theory of Change** | A visual depiction of how the project will lead to a desired change by outlining the problem, the drivers, enabling conditions and/or potential barriers to project success. It will show how activities, outputs, outcome and impact are linked, and illustrate the narrative in your Pathway to Change. |
| **Logframe** | A monitoring tool to measure progress along a chain of actions and results (i.e. Activities to Outputs to Outcome to Impact). It sets out planned and actual results using indicators, baselines, and targets, and specifies the sources of evidence |

For more information on project design and MEL, see the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance.

## 9.12. Risk management

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are encouraged to **identify and assess risks, treat or mitigate them, as well as monitor and report risks.** All projects will need to maintain a risk register and regularly submit it as part of the required reporting (see 9.12).

Partnership Grants will also be required to maintain and regularly submit a Delivery Chain Risk Mapping (DCRM) and an issues log. Risk management should be considered a continuous process throughout the duration of the project, continually being improved through learning and experience.

See examples of different risk types and descriptions in the table below.

| Risk Type | Description |
|-----------|-------------|
| **Contextual** | in-country socio-political events or unrest, or natural disasters. |
| **Delivery** | associated with achieving the aims and objectives of the project (likely to be higher for innovative or high impact programmes). |
| **GEDSI** | potential negative impact that your project or its activities may have on gender equality and/or other marginalised or vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities within a society or community. |
| **Safeguarding** | 'doing harm' including sexual exploitation abuse and harassment, safety and welfare, or unintended harm to beneficiaries, the public, implementing partners, and staff. |

| Risk Type | Description |
|-----------|-------------|
| **Operational** | internal capacity and capability to manage the project (professional competence, experience, and appropriate level of resource in managing programmes and funds). |
| **Fiduciary (financial)** | funds not used for intended purposes or not accounted for (fraud, corruption, mishandling or misappropriated). |
| **Reputational** | interventions or delivery partners' actions risk any partner's, including Defra's, reputation. |

**At the application stage, Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants must identify and record at least one fiduciary, one safeguarding, one delivery chain, and one GEDSI related risk.** Further guidance is included in the risk register templates provided (one template for Community Grants and one for Partnership Grants).

## 9.13. Communications

**Projects will need to clearly communicate how public money is being utilised, given that all OCEAN projects are funded by UK public money (raised through taxation).**

**Initially at the application stage**, Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are asked to provide a very short, simply worded summary of what the project will do. If the project is successful, this summary will be used in communication activities. To this end, the summary should be written for a non-technical audience with little or no prior knowledge of the issue, and clearly describe the project plan and intended outcome.

**During delivery**, projects will be expected to engage and support wider communications and awareness raising activities to inform audiences what they are planning, learning, and achieving. The Grant Administrator will provide guidance and support in this regard.

### 9.13.1. Open access policy and data sharing

The UK Government is committed to push for greater transparency in the availability and use of data to improve accountability, decision making, and to help deliver sustainable development outcomes to people living in poverty.

Projects are likely to generate significant outputs including datasets, best practices, peer-reviewed journal articles and technical reports which will be of value to other countries and stakeholders. **Projects must make all evidence and data produced freely available and accessible to the public, unless there are particular sensitivities involved.**

Data collection, analysis, management, and storage **protocols** should be established to ensure the **integrity of evidence and its subsequent use** within the project, OCEAN and beyond. This includes all derived and raw data on marine protection and poverty reduction, through appropriate national, regional, and global databases.

> **Examples of some databases**
>
> *For help in identifying databases, please refer to [Compendium of guidance on key global databases related to biodiversity-related conventions](#). We encourage that where possible and appropriate data is shared directly or indirectly with **Global Biodiversity Information Facility** ([GBIF.org](#)) for wider accessibility.*

Applicants may include appropriate costs in their budget to support open access publishing but be realistic about when articles will be published. It is likely that dates will fall outside the formal project, so it is worth considering matched funding for these costs. Further information on open and enhanced access can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

### 9.13.2. Transparency

In order to support understanding and in line with the aim of OCEAN, **successful project applications, along with subsequent reporting**, **will be published** on the OCEAN website and elsewhere. If there are **any sensitivities** within any of these, for example political sensitivities, or prosecutions for illegal activities, or security of staff, applicants should state them in their application form so that sensitivities can be considered for **redaction prior to publication**.

### 9.13.3. Data protection and use of personal data

Information supplied in the application form, including personal data, will be used by Defra as set out in the **Privacy Notice**, available at [https://oceangrants.org.uk/privacy-policy/](https://oceangrants.org.uk/privacy-policy/). This Privacy Notice must be provided to all individuals whose personal data is supplied in the application form. Some information may be used when publicising OCEAN including project details (usually title, lead organisation, project leader, location, and total grant value).

## 9.14. Engagement with British Embassies / High Commissions

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are **required to contact their nearest regional Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)[5] to discuss their project proposal** to provide an opportunity for the British Embassies / High Commissions to be aware of proposed work before an application is submitted, and potentially advise on any security or political sensitivities.

To contact the Embassy/High Commission, go to [https://www.gov.uk/world/embassies](https://www.gov.uk/world/embassies), search for your project country and click on it. Scroll down to the 'Contact Us' section. There you will find the contact details for you to use. Send an email outlining your project idea and your intention to apply for an OCEAN grant and seek any feedback from the Embassy / High Commission. In the application form, you will find a template available for FCDO to use. If your project covers more than one primary country, email all relevant Embassies / High Commissions. You can copy them in the same email.

Do not worry if you do not receive a response from the Embassy / High Commission. We recognise that the capacity of British Embassies / High Commissions to support or engage projects is varied. **You must be able to prove you have contacted the Embassy / High Commission within three**

---

[5] [https://www.gov.uk/world/embassies](https://www.gov.uk/world/embassies)

weeks from the start of the application process. For example, you can prove this by providing a pdf copy of the email you sent to the Embassy / High Commission.

All applications may be shared with other UK Government Departments including the FCDO. If your application is successful, the relevant British embassies or high commissions will be informed and may, depending on their resource levels, seek to publicise the award, or be involved in any formal launch, and may wish to develop a relationship with the project during delivery.

## 9.15. Policies required at application stage

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are **required to submit a safeguarding policy, a GEDSI policy, and a whistleblowing policy.** In addition to these, at the application stage, Partnership Grants applicants are required to submit also an equal opportunities / diversity policy and a code of conduct. Further details are provided in section 10.

### 9.15.1. Safeguarding policy

A safeguarding policy should include:

- A Zero Tolerance to Inaction Statement.
- A definition of SEAH and other forms of harm.
- The key principles how you will prevent and respond to safeguarding including a safeguarding code of conduct.
- A disciplinary action if policy is violated.
- Clear reporting channels.
- A commitment to reflect Safeguarding/PSEAH Principles. See CAPSEAH Principles for guidance.
- An appropriate reporting mechanism.
- Revisions, review dates, ownership (live document).

It is important that you create accessible versions of your safeguarding policy and share it widely so that your stakeholders are aware of your process. To support this, translate your policy into relevant languages, consider creating shorter or more visual versions to improve user-friendliness, and share with all staff, stakeholders and people involved with your organisation.

Available guidance on safeguarding policy is available from Safeguarding Essentials Guide, BOND Safeguarding Policy Template, and CAPSEAH Further guidance.

### 9.15.2. GEDSI policy

A GEDSI policy should include:

- A statement on your organisation's commitment to GEDSI.
- The key principles of your organisation's approach to promoting GEDSI.
- Details of any existing policies or procedures currently in place and how they will support your commitment to GESI.
- How you will implement and monitor this approach.

It is important to ensure that your GEDSI policy applies to your organisation as a whole and is not a project specific policy.

### 9.15.3. Whistleblowing policy

A whistleblowing policy should include:

- How to report a whistleblowing concern, both internally and externally.
- How you will ensure protection and confidentiality of someone making a report.
- How you will investigate, record and deal with raised concerns.
- How you will communicate the outcome of a concern to the reporter.

It is important that you communicate your whistleblowing arrangements effectively. It is good practice to feature your whistleblowing policy on your website if you have one. Otherwise, you could do this via posters, screensavers, education / awareness raising activities, newsletters or blogs, or surveys / data collection activities.

## 9.16. Funding from any other UK Government body

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are **required to indicate in their application form whether they have received, applied for, or plan to apply for any other UK Government funding for their proposed project or a similar project.** If this is the case, applicants are required to disclose details of their applications, explaining how the activities funded by OCEAN are distinct and complementary.

**Applicants cannot apply to both OCEAN and the Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) with the same project. Failure to declare this could result in applications being rejected under both OCEAN and BCFs.**

## 9.17. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

OCEAN recognises that artificial intelligence (AI) can be a useful tool to help develop your application. However, if a member of Defra, the Expert Committee or the Grants Administrator **suspects that an application has been fully developed using artificial intelligence and is not a legitimate application, then checks will be run and may lead to an application being rejected**.

The use of artificial intelligence as tool to help develop a strong proposal is not discouraged and should be used appropriately to support your application.

## 9.18. Modern slavery

In 2015, the UK Government enacted the Modern Slavery Act, which consolidated and strengthened existing laws to combat human trafficking, forced labour, servitude, and other forms of modern slavery. This legislation aims to enhance support for victims, increase accountability for perpetrators, and improve the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts, underscoring the UK Government's determination to tackle modern slavery crimes.

Modern Slavery is a global problem and is particularly prevalent in the marine industry. Unsustainable exploitation of marine and coastal environments is both a driver and result of modern slavery, due to increasing vulnerability to modern slavery risks by coastal communities in low-income countries / regions. For example, forced labour is frequently observed in the seafood industry and early marriage may increase in fishing communities battling declining fish stocks. Illegal fishing and fish-processing activities further perpetuate these practices and are associated with modern slavery and child labour due to lack of enforcement and regulation.

Meanwhile, climate change and increased resource scarcity - such as declining fish stocks - further increases the vulnerability of low-income coastal communities to modern slavery[6].

As a UK Government-funded programme, **OCEAN's multidimensional approach to poverty reduction includes reducing the risk of modern slavery and applicants are expected to take appropriate steps to mitigate the risks of and associated with modern slavery**. Applicants for Community Grants and Partnership Grants should acknowledge and detail any such risks in the project area as part of their application's risk management section.

## 9.19. Terms and conditions

Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants are **required to review and fully understand the terms and conditions** available from Flexi-Grant and from our website before making an application to ensure compliance will not be an issue. Successful applicants will be issued a grant award letter with the terms and conditions that apply to the grant, including the grant purpose, value, period, and reporting and financial arrangements. **Defra retains the right to amend these terms and conditions at any time.** Projects will need to uphold the latest version of the Terms and Conditions available via the OCEAN website.

---

[6] Jackson, Bethany, Doreen S. Boyd, Christopher D. Ives, Jessica L. Decker Sparks, Giles M. Foody, Stuart Marsh, and Kevin Bales. "Remote sensing of fish-processing in the Sundarbans Reserve Forest, Bangladesh: an insight into the modern slavery-environment nexus in the coastal fringe." *Maritime Studies* 19 (2020): 429-444.

# 10. Assessment and award process

## 10.1. General process

All applications that meet all eligibility criteria and application requirements will be assessed by the **OCEAN Expert Committee** (EC), who are independent experts in marine protection and sustainable development. The EC follows a **strict code of practice**: if any member has been involved in or is closely associated with an application, the applicant, or a project partner, they **declare their interest** and play no role in its assessment or any discussion around the application.

After applications are recommended for funding by the Expert Committee, the **OCEAN Programme Board**, comprising Defra and other representatives from His Majesties Government (HMG) who are responsible for the strategy of OCEAN, will make a final decision on which grants will be awarded. **Any grants awarded will be conditional upon applicants meeting pre-award requirements, passing due diligence checks (see 10.3), and may include additional caveats to funding if issues are identified during this process**.

### 10.1.1. Process for Community Grants

An overview of the steps for assessing Community Grants applications is:

1) **Initial Review:** Applications that are incomplete or do not meet the eligibility criteria will be rejected.
2) **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are reviewed and scored by at least three experts, against the assessment criteria (see 11) to inform the discussion at the first Sift meeting.
3) **First Sift meeting:** The experts discuss scores and comments and agree the shortlisted applications to be invited to Stage 2. and clarification points to request from them.
4) **Stage 2. applications:** Shortlisted applications are required to submit a Stage 2. application form.
5) **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are reviewed and scored by at least three experts, against the assessment criteria (see 11) to inform the discussion at the second Sift meeting.
6) **Second Sift meeting:** The experts discuss comments and agree the strongest applications to recommend for funding.
7) **Programme Board's funding decision:** The OCEAN Programme Board reviews the EC's recommendations and awards the grants.

### 10.1.2. Process for Partnership Grants

An overview of the steps for assessing Partnership Grants applications is:

1) **Initial Review:** Applications that are incomplete or do not meet the eligibility criteria will be rejected.
2) **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are reviewed and scored by at least three experts, against the assessment criteria (see 11) to inform the discussion at the first Sift meeting.
3) **First Sift meeting:** The experts discuss scores and comments and agree the strongest applications to recommend for inviting to interview.

4) **Interview:** The shortlisted applicants are required to attend an online interview to respond to clarification questions from EC.
5) **Second Sift meeting:** The experts discuss the applicants' responses and agree the strongest applications to recommend for funding.
6) **Programme Board's funding decision:** The OCEAN Programme Board reviews the EC's recommendations and awards the grants.

## 10.2. Supporting materials at pre-award stage

**Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants recommended for funding will be asked to provide additional documentation that will be subject to due diligence checks to ensure they are satisfactory prior to award of the grant agreement.** This additional documentation is detailed in the table below.

| Requirements | Community Grants | Partnership Grants |
|---|---|---|
| **Lead organisation's code of conduct** | Required. | Not required (submitted at Stage 1.) |
| **Lead organisation's equal opportunities and diversity policy** | Required. | Not required (submitted at Stage 1.) |
| **Lead organisation's counter fraud, bribery and corruption policy** | Required. | Required. |
| **Lead organisation's ethics policy** | Required only for applications over £100,000. | Required. |
| **Lead organisation's most recent organisation annual report (to include structure, governance and management processes; and recent achievements and objectives)** | Not required. | Required |
| **Lead organisation's risk management framework** | Not required. | Required |
| **Lead organisation's staff management and Human Resources processes** | Not required. | Required |
| **Lead organisation's financial processes (including foreign exchange policy, investment policy and reserves policy)** | Required only for applications over £100,000. | Required |

## 10.3. Due diligence

The Grants Administrator will carry out due diligence checks on all applications recommended for funding. These checks might relate to the legal, financial, and operating status of the lead

organisation and will include a review of pre-award requirements as well. Successful applicants will be issued with a grant award letter and accompanying terms and conditions only if all checks are passed. **Applications that do not pass due diligence checks will be rejected.**

## 10.4. Grant award

If your application is recommended for funding and successfully passes due diligence checks, then you will be issued with a grant agreement comprising of a grant offer letter, the terms and conditions associated with the grant and a grant acceptance form. You will be required to review, complete and sign this to confirm acceptance of the grant.

## 10.5. Feedback and results of applications

**After each application stage, all lead applicants (eligible/ineligible, successful/unsuccessful) will receive a letter via email**. The letter will outline the application's results and provide detailed feedback on eligibility criteria and technical merit. Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants invited to Stage 2. will be required to respond to all feedback points provided. A question to respond to feedback will be provided in the application form.

*Defra reserves the right to apply more stringent assessment at the Initial Review if the number of applications is high in order to ensure that the EC can robustly review those with the highest chance of being discussed at the Sift Meeting.*

*Defra reserves the right to clarify any issues raised during the application process or to award funding subject to required amendments. If the applicant is subsequently unable to meet the requirements of the award, Defra retains the right to withdraw the offer.*

## 10.6. Resubmission of applications

OCEAN will accept the resubmission of an unsuccessful application for Community and Partnership Grants. However, **resubmitted applications must clearly demonstrate how they have addressed and responded to any feedback provided**. A question to respond to feedback will be provided in the application form. Applications that do not address feedback or clearly detail how they have responded to the recommendations made, will be identified as ineligible. Responses to feedback will also be reviewed by the Expert Committee as part of the assessment process.

## 10.7. Limit to the number of applications

There is **no limit** on the number of applications a **lead organisation** may submit. There is also **no limit** on the number of applications a **partner organisation** may join. **The same organisation could be the lead organisation of one or more applications, as well as a partner organisation of one or more applications**. **However, we strongly encourage internal co-ordination to ensure all submissions are truly competitive.** Defra will consider the number of applications from the same organisation as part of their decision-making process when awarding grants.

# 11. Selection and Assessment and criteria

Each application is evaluated against the selection and assessment criteria outlined in the table below. A minimum of **three experts from the OCEAN Expert Committee will assess** each application against the selection and assessment criteria before meeting to discuss the applications at the Sift Meeting. The selection criteria scores are combined to generate a **total application score**, while the assessment criteria are applied to evaluate each application against Defra's expected standards. **The results of these assessments are used to inform decision-making at the Sift Meeting and Programme Board.**

For the selection criteria, applications are expected to score a C or above in each criterion to exceed the **indicative competitive threshold.**

| Selection Criteria | Community Grants Scores | Partnership Grants Scores |
|---|---|---|
| Technical Merit | A – G | A – G |
| Marine Conservation Impact | A – G | A – G |
| Poverty Reduction | A – G | A – G |
| Community Empowerment | A – G | |
| Partnerships | | A – G |

To be awarded funding, applications must also **meet or exceed the expected standards of the assessment criteria.**

| Assessment Criteria | Community Grants Expected Standard | Partnership Grants Expected Standard |
|---|---|---|
| Gender Equality Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) | GEDSI Responsive | GEDSI Empowering |
| Value for Money (VfM) | Medium VfM | Medium VfM |
| Upper Middle Income Country (UMIC) Criteria | Pass | Pass |

Details of what is evaluated under each of the selection and assessment criteria and how the scoring range is applied are provided below.

## 11.1. Selection criteria

Applications for both Community Grants and Partnership Grants will be assessed against the following selection criteria. Each criterion will be scored between A - G.

## *Technical Merit (Score: A - G)*

1) **Methodology**: The methodology is robust, clear, and appropriate to meet the identified need and achieve the targeted outcome within a realistic timeframe. The project demonstrates appropriate use of evidence[7] in the design of its methodology and, where it includes innovative[8] and distinctive approaches or applies a novel theory of change, it uses evidence to demonstrate the feasibility of the approach. Its methodologies are also accessible and sensitive to the cultural context, considering and addressing barriers to participation for women, youth, people living with disabilities, and other marginalised communities.

2) **MEL & Project Design**: Project includes clear logic of why and how its outputs will contribute towards outcomes/objectives/contributions for both the marine environment and poverty reduction. The Theory of Change and a Logframe, where requested, are appropriate and feature measurable Outputs and Outcome, including how they will be monitored and evidenced. The Outputs and Outcome presented are clear and additional, building on, not repeating past or duplicating current activities..

3) **Sustainability**: Includes a thoroughly considered approach to lasting impact taking account of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, with a well-defined exit strategy in place.

4) **Project Team**: The Project Team has the capability and capacity to deliver at a high-quality technical and professional standard as evidenced by the submitted CVs/Pen Portraits and includes identified local partners. The proposed project team and partners have specialists relevant to their proposed activities, with the skills and experience necessary to deliver the different components of the project. Where consultants are included in the project team, they have been included to fill identified expertise gaps with a clear justification for their inclusion.

5) **Risk Management and Political Economy**: Risks are clearly identified, assessed, and have robust mitigation actions and there is a process in place to identify, assess and respond to risks through the project lifecycle. The application demonstrates a strong understanding of the political and governance situation in the project's context, and has clearly reviewed key factors such as power dynamics, stakeholder interests, decision-making processes, and political risks that could affect the project's success. In fragile and conflict-affected areas, the project shows a clear understanding of risks linked to fragility and conflict - such as challenges to security, instability, governance, project delivery and long-term sustainability, and relationships among stakeholders – and includes specific strategies to manage these risks, ensuring the project does not worsen conflicts, tensions or inequalities.

6) **Safeguarding / SEAH**: Safeguarding and ethical issues, including safeguarding against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, are identified and will be managed to Defra standards.

---

[7] Evidence is defined as information that demonstrates project actions, outputs, outcomes and impact. It varies in format, quality and relevance and can include, documented and undocumented experiences, data, studies, policies, best practices, from a range of perspectives. However evidence is particularly valued when it is quality assured, accessible and applicable.

[8] Innovation is defined as the implementation of a novel or significantly improved approach (product, ways of working, and/or process) that differs from previous approaches. Innovation can include the implementation of tried and tested approaches in geographies, scales, contexts and ways than have not been used before.

## *Marine Conservation Impact (Score: A - G)*

1) **Identified Need**: Will make a clear contribution to an identified need in the marine environment in the country/countries identified.

2) **Link to Poverty Reduction**: The application reflects a clear understanding and makes a well-articulated connection between the expected marine conservation, protection or restoration efforts and their contribution to a specific poverty reduction need.

3) **Methodology**: The proposed marine conservation activities are likely to support the achievement of the intended impact, demonstrate feasibility within the project's resources, context, and timeframe, and are guided by best practices, available evidence, or existing knowledge.

4) **Marine Impact**: The project objectives clearly state the lasting and meaningful improvements to the protection, conservation, restoration, and/or sustainable use of the marine and/or coastal environment and its biodiversity that it seeks to achieve.

5) **Adverse Environmental Impact**: The project has thoroughly considered the risks associated with its approach and has robust mitigation strategies in place to prevent any adverse impacts on the marine environment.

6) **Evidence Base**: The project will strengthen the evidence base or generate new evidence that will support improved marine conservation, protection or restoration, and/or decision making at the local and/or national level.

## *Poverty Reduction (Score: A - G)*

1) **Identified Need**: The project makes a clear contribution to addressing an identified poverty reduction need in the targeted country or countries, with a focus on supporting women, people living with disabilities, youth, and/or other marginalised communities experiencing multidimensional poverty.

2) **GEDSI**: The project ensures equitable access to and active participation in poverty reduction activities, clearly identifying who is marginalised in the local context of the project and how the project will address and include them in activities. GEDSI is understood and reflected in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of the project; and intentional or unintentional increased inequality will be prevented.

3) **Stakeholder Engagement**: Demonstrates strong understanding of in-country local organisations and communities, including through evidence of early engagement, identifying who the stakeholders are, how many stakeholders will benefit, how they will benefit, and how they can contribute. The project centres local communities and locally based stakeholders in the design, management and implementation of the project.

4) **Methodology**: The proposed poverty reduction activities are likely to support the achievement of the intended impact, are feasible within the project's resources, context, and timeframe, and are guided by best practices, available evidence, or existing knowledge. If engaging in markets or economic activities, up to date market evidence underpins the proposed approach and demonstrates that it is likely to be commercially viable.

5) **Link to Marine Conservation**: The application reflects a clear understanding and makes a well-articulated connection between the expected contribution to a poverty reduction need and the marine conservation, protection or restoration efforts.

6) **Poverty Reduction Impact**: The project objectives clearly demonstrate how it aims to deliver lasting and meaningful multi-dimensional poverty[9] reducing benefits, either directly or indirectly, for the identified beneficiaries and stakeholders.

7) **Unintended Negative Impacts**: The project has thoroughly considered the risks associated with its approach and any trade-offs when taking action to address marine conservation and poverty reduction. It has robust mitigation strategies in place to minimise risks or adverse impacts for all stakeholders and ensure that the project will do no harm.

## 11.2. Selection criteria for Community Grants

Applications for Community Grants only will also be assessed against the following scoring criteria – scored from A - G.

### *Community Empowerment (Score: A - G)*

1) **Understanding of Local Context**: The project clearly shows a deep understanding of the local context, cultural practices and identified need - including cultural, social, economic, and environmental aspects. It explains how this understanding guides the project's design and actions to effectively meet the specific needs of the local community.

2) **Local Knowledge and Evidence**: The project appropriately uses local knowledge and evidence, with a focus on developing local solutions to local problems. It clearly shows how it will use local insights, traditions, and evidence to inform design and implementation and builds on the community's own practices and knowledge.

3) **Local Connections and Networks:** The Lead Organisation has strong connections within the target area and its local communities and demonstrates how this deep understanding of local stakeholders and networks will support project design, implementation and management. It demonstrates evidence of a highly collaborative approach, involving early and strong participation of local partners, stakeholders, and communities; including women, youth, people living with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalised groups.

4) **Community Involvement:** Community members are actively and meaningfully engaged in project design and implementation and have real opportunities to participate and influence key decisions, as well as communicate their priorities and feedback. The project demonstrates clear ways of engaging with the community, like meetings, workshops, or surveys, and includes diverse voices within the community.

5) **Strengthened Capability and Capacity:** Where relevant, the project includes clear plans for training, knowledge sharing or capacity development activities with the local community, organisations or other stakeholders. Where activities are planned, the project connects these groups to project partners with relevant experience and clearly shows how enhancing local skills and resources will lead to long-term benefits for the stakeholders.

---

[9] Poverty is multidimensional and not solely about a lack of money; it encompasses a range of issues that hinder people's abilities to meet their basic needs and better their life with dignity including a lack of income, land, or other means of access to the basic material goods and services needed to live with dignity, or a deficiency in healthcare, security, education or necessary social relations. Applications may address poverty reduction directly, for instance, through activities that help secure increased income for local communities, whilst tackling marine issues. Applications may address poverty reduction indirectly, for instance, through safeguarding traditional rights and cultural values, increasing the voice of marginalised communities, increasing equality within communities (see 8.5), improved governance, protecting and restoring the marine environment through capacity building of local organisations.

6) **Empowerment of the Local Community:** The project clearly explains why and how it aims to promote the empowerment of the local community, organisations, and/or other stakeholders via its approach and intended outcomes. It provides detailed strategies for achieving its outcomes and articulates how these actions will help lead to lasting positive change for the community.

7) **Community Ownership and Legacy:** There is clear evidence of community ownership of the project impact and outcomes, with structures in place to support sustainability and continuity of initiatives beyond the life of the project.

## 11.3. Assessment criteria for Partnership Grants

Applications for Partnership Grants only will also be assessed against the following scoring criteria – scored from A - G.

### *Partnerships (Score: A - G)*

1) **Lead Organisation**: The Lead Organisation has the capabilities, network and prior experience to manage the partnership and deliver the project at the identified scale.

2) **Contextual Knowledge**: The project demonstrates an extensive understanding of the local community, stakeholders, geography and broader context in which it will operate, including an understanding of local political economy dynamics such as power structures, governance challenges, and stakeholder relationships. It clearly explains how this understanding aligns with national, regional, and global contexts.

3) **Partnership Structure**: Project partners bring meaningful and complementary value to the project, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, a highly synergistic nature, and relevant experience and capacity. The justification for their selection as partners is well-articulated, demonstrating how their expertise and contributions align with the project's objectives. The project demonstrates evidence of a highly collaborative approach, involving early and strong participation of local partners, along with other stakeholders.

4) **Budget allocation**: The budget ensures an equitable and well-justified distribution of funding, with an appropriate allocation of resources to project partners.

5) **Partner roles:** Project partners are actively and meaningfully engaged in all relevant aspects of the project, including its design, implementation and management, taking due consideration of equity, appropriateness and expertise.

6) **Proven Approaches**: The project builds on prior work and is informed by demonstrated successes and effective strategies - for example scaling up a successful local initiative - providing confidence that the project can deliver at the identified scale. We encourage the use of innovative or novel strategic elements that build on or complement approaches that have been proven to be effective.

7) **Capability and Capacity:** where appropriate, the project demonstrates how it will strengthen the capability and capacity of local partner organisations, and further empower them, throughout the duration of the project.

8) **Impact of Partnership**: the partnership results in change at a level beyond the capability of individual partners; creating value beyond the sum of individual efforts.

## 11.4. Selection criteria scoring

Each Expert Committee member will be asked to provide a single score (A - G) for each of the selection criteria as detailed in table below:

| Scoring | Description |
|---|---|
| A | **Strong Demonstration:**<br>Substantial evidence presented that the grant application **meets all of the criteria, with no concerns raised**; the majority of which are met to a high standard. There may be a few minor issues which if addressed may improve the project, but they are unlikely to be detrimental to the delivery of the project and should not prevent it from being funded without changes being made. It is likely to significantly contribute to the objectives of the OCEAN grants programme. |
| B | **Good Demonstration:**<br>Good evidence presented that the grant application **meets most of the criteria, no major concerns identified.** The met criteria are mostly to a high standard. There are minor issues that could improve the project but should not prevent it from being funded. It is likely to strongly contribute to the objectives of the OCEAN grants programme. |
| C | **Acceptable Demonstration:**<br>The grant application **meets most of the criteria, no major concerns identified.** The criteria it does meet are often to a good standard. There are a few minor issues that would improve this grant application which they would be advised to consider if funded. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the OCEAN grants programme. |
| D | **Moderate Demonstration:**<br>The grant application **meets many of the criteria, some concerns raised.** Those met criteria are largely to an acceptable standard, and the concerns can be addressed. It has the potential to contribute to the objectives of the OCEAN grants programme, if the issues are addressed to strengthen it. |
| E | **Weak Demonstration:**<br>The grant application **meets some of the criteria or has raised concerns**. Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard, but the grant application requires important changes to address the concerns and assessment criteria in order to make it competitive. |
| F | **Minimal demonstration:**<br>The grant application is unsatisfactory and **meets only a few criteria or raises important concerns.** The grant application is likely to require significant revision. |
| G | **Not demonstrated:**<br>The grant application **fails to meet any of the criteria outlined and raises serious concerns** e.g., flawed approach, subject to serious technical difficulties or risks, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative. |

# 11.5. Assessment criteria

## *UMIC Criteria*

As an Official Development Assistance (ODA)-funded programme, OCEAN is primarily focused on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), as defined by the OECD DAC eligibility[10]. Consequently, projects based in an Upper Middle-Income Country (UMIC) must provide a compelling and well-justified case for support to be considered for funding.

To assess this, the OCEAN Expert Committee will evaluate applications against the UMIC Assessment Criteria detailed below as part of their assessment of applications. This is a pass-fail criterion, and applications must satisfy all requirements to be considered for funding. Applications for projects based in a UMIC must demonstrate that their project will:

1. **Directly benefit some of the poorest and most marginalised groups** within the [UMIC] country(ies), addressing their specific needs and ensuring equitable access to and active participation in poverty reduction activities.
2. **Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and broad applicability of approaches** aimed at poverty reduction and/or the protection, conservation, restoration, or sustainable use of the marine environment and its biodiversity, with potential for successful replication and scaling in LDCs, LICs or LMICs.
3. **Actively share lessons and strengthen the knowledge base** on the effectiveness of these strategies, with clear plans for disseminating these lessons to LDCs, LICs or LMICs detailed in the application, workplan, and budget.

To strengthen their case for support, applications for UMIC-based projects may further demonstrate alignment with the following priorities:

- Addressing a critical need to advance Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
- Operating in regions of significant importance to the marine environment and climate adaption as categories by the Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs)[11].
- Tackling critical and/or unique issues that present opportunities for significant advancements that are not feasible elsewhere.
- Partnering with host-country governments to support the long-term sustainable transition of projects into nationally-led initiatives.
- Delivering outcomes that include the adoption of new public policies or publicly financed practices to advance marine conservation and poverty reduction within the timeframe.

## *Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion*

OCEAN's ambition is to be at least a GEDSI Empowering programme. OCEAN's commitment is for all projects to be, or strive to be, GEDSI Empowering.

- Projects under the Community Grants must, at minimum, have a **GEDSI Responsive** approach, though Community Grants projects that are more ambitious in their GEDSI approach - by meeting or demonstrating a clear plan to meet the standard of **GEDSI Empowering** - will be prioritised.
- Projects under the Partnership Grants must have a **GEDSI Empowering** approach.

---

[10] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/dac-list-of-oda-recipients.html
[11] https://www.cbd.int/ebsa/

To support this, the OCEAN Expert Committee will assess all applications to understand how prospective projects will contribute to / promote GEDSI through their activities. Projects will be assessed and categorised into one of the GEDSI Levels detailed below. Projects will be expected to report against their progress towards promoting GEDSI in their Annual Reports.

| Level | Overview & detailed description |
|---|---|
| **GEDSI Unaware** | Does not acknowledge the role of gender and social dynamics for exclusion and marginalisation. May unintentionally exacerbate inequalities or perpetuate harmful norms. Project may align with the following characteristics:<br>• Lack of GEDSI analysis means that the project may fail to acknowledge the role of gender and exclusion. These do not necessarily do harm but may indirectly support the status quo.<br>• Failure to effectively inform or consult with women and marginalised groups (including people living in poverty, people with disabilities, Indigenous People and Local Communities) that are impacted by the project.<br>• Lack of disaggregated data in MEL systems.<br>• Lack of expertise / resourcing dedicated to GEDSI.<br>• Lack of GEDSI analysis may result in safeguarding risks not being identified or adequately mitigated against.<br>• Safeguarding policies and procedures may not be well established and/or project stakeholders may not be aware of available reporting channels to raise concerns. |
| **GEDSI Responsive** | Addresses basic needs of and barriers for women, people with disabilities, and marginalised groups, aiming to reduce gender and social inequalities. Project may align with the following characteristics:<br>• GEDSI analysis used to understand the specific context of gender and social norms and inequalities, and assess potential impact of activities on marginalised communities, including considering the differential impacts on women and men, and relationships between them.<br>• Women and marginalised groups (including people living in poverty, people with disabilities, Indigenous People and Local Communities, and depending on the specific context of the programme) are included as beneficiaries and stakeholders, and perhaps as partners / collaborators / decision-makers. Their feedback is valued and their concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.<br>• Logframe includes data disaggregated to track impacts of activities related to women and other targeted groups, where relevant.<br>• Relevant GEDSI expertise and resources are drawn on as needed throughout the programme cycle, from design/development, to implementation, to MEL.<br>• GEDSI analysis supports identification of suitable Safeguarding / GEDSI risks and mitigation actions which are monitored via the risk management process.<br>• Delivery partners have robust safeguarding measures in place, assessed through due diligence. Safeguarding policies and procedures are well established and effectively managed by all project partners. All project stakeholders are made aware of reporting channels to raise any concerns. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **GEDSI Empowering** | Reduces gender and social inequalities and empowers community members by reducing barriers and increasing equitable access to assets, resources, and capabilities for women, people with disabilities, and marginalised groups. Project may align with the following characteristics:<br>• GEDSI analysis used to understand and address practical barriers & support opportunities for increased empowerment and equality in access to assets, resources, capabilities and opportunities, such as jobs, markets, services, skills, knowledge and decision-making.<br>• Women and marginalised groups (including people living in poverty, people with disabilities, Indigenous People and Local Communities, and depending on the specific context of the programme) are included as stakeholders and partners / collaborators / decision-makers. Their input is valued and their concerns and aspirations are understood and considered. They are included in decision-making processes.<br>• Logframe includes data disaggregated to track impacts of activities related to women and other targeted groups, includes a GEDSI focused outcome and/or indicators.<br>• Dedicated staff time working on GEDSI and ability to draw on relevant expertise and resources.<br>• GEDSI analysis supports identification of GEDSI / Safeguarding risks and mitigation actions which are monitored via the risk management process.<br>• Delivery partners have robust safeguarding measures in place, assessed through due diligence. Safeguarding policies and procedures are well established and effectively managed by all project partners. All project stakeholders are made aware of channels to raise any concerns and feedback. |
| **GEDSI Transformative** | Addresses unequal power relationships and seeks institutional and societal change. Designed to address root causes of gender and social inequality. Project may align with the following characteristics:<br>• GEDSI analysis used to address prevailing power relations and support institutional and societal level change. Involves challenging social norms and breaking stereotypes for women, men and marginalised people.<br>• Women and marginalised groups (including people living in poverty, people with disabilities, Indigenous People and Local Communities, and depending on the specific context of the programme) are included as stakeholders and partners / collaborators / decision-makers. Their input is valued and their concerns and aspirations are addressed. They have power/ownership to make final decisions.<br>• Logframe includes data disaggregated to track impacts of activities related to women and other targeted groups, includes a GEDSI focused outcome and/or indicators, included GEDSI as a principal programme objective.<br>• Significant dedicated resources and GEDSI experts are a core part of the delivery team.<br>• GEDSI analysis supports identification of Safeguarding risks and mitigation actions which are monitored via the risk management process.<br>• Delivery partners have robust safeguarding measures in place, assessed through due diligence. Safeguarding policies and procedures are well established and effectively managed by all project partners. All project stakeholders are made aware of channels to raise any concerns and feedback. |

## 11.6. Value for Money

Projects are required to demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering good value for money. To evaluate this, the OCEAN Expert Committee will assess all applications against the Value for Money assessment framework detailed below.

The Expert Committee will evaluate the five Value for Money criteria outlined in the table to determine an overall Value for Money classification for the project, assigning it as either Low, Medium, or High. **It is expected that all applications demonstrate at least a Medium Value for Money as a minimum standard.**

| Criterion | Low (1) | Medium (2) | High (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Economy | Project costs, salaries and/or consultancy fees are significantly above market rates, with limited justification. | Project costs, salaries and/or consultancy fees are reasonable, with efforts made to contain costs, but some elements lack thorough justification. | Project costs, salaries and/or consultancy fees are competitive or below market rates, with clear, well-supported cost justification. |
| Efficiency | Project team lacks relevant expertise, timeline is unclear or unrealistic, resources are not well-allocated including the spread of budget across categories, and risks are poorly managed. | Project team has moderate expertise; timeline, risk management and resource allocation including the spread of budget across categories are mostly reasonable, though some areas could be refined. | Project team has strong expertise; timeline is well-structured with achievable milestones, risks are proactively managed, and resources are optimally allocated with an appropriate spread of budget allocations across budget categories. |
| Effectiveness | Limited likelihood of achieving intended outcomes, with no clear pathway to impact or consideration for sustainability. There is no apparent added value of OCEAN funding. | Moderate likelihood of achieving outcomes; some pathway to impact and consideration for sustainability but not fully articulated or substantiated. Limited evidence is provided, but OCEAN funding is likely to be additional[12]. | High likelihood of achieving intended outcomes with a well-articulated pathway to impact, sustainability and measurable results. Evidence is provided that OCEAN funding is highly likely to be additional. |
| Equity | Project is unlikely to reduce inequalities, as a result of limited consideration of marginalised or underserved groups; and minimal plans to achieve inclusive and equitable contribution to poverty reduction. Proportion of budget spent in eligible country(ies) is inappropriate. | Project is likely to reduce some inequalities through consideration of marginalised or underserved groups; though plans to achieve inclusive and equitable contribution to poverty reduction lack depth or specificity. Proportion of budget spent in eligible country(ies) is mostly appropriate, with some room for improvement. | Project has a strong emphasis on reducing inequalities by working with marginalised or underserved groups; with robust, specific plans to achieve inclusive, equitable and measurable contribution to poverty reduction detailed in the application. Proportion of budget spent in eligible country(ies) is appropriate. |
| Cost effectiveness | Project is likely to yield minimal, limited or insufficient impact relative to the size of the investment, with benefits narrowly focused or unclear. The project is unlikely to leverage additional finance, | Project is expected to achieve moderate impact in relation to the size of investment, with some clear benefits but there is potential for broader reach. The project is likely able to leverage additional finance | Project is expected to deliver significant impact relative to the size of investment, with clear, measurable, and far-reaching benefits. The project demonstrates an ability to leverage significant |

---

[12] OCEAN funding is considered 'additional' where the impact arising from an OCEAN funded intervention would not happen if the intervention did not take place.

| Criterion | Low (1) | Medium (2) | High (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | through matched funding or other mechanisms[13], now or in future. | through matched funding or other mechanisms, but this may be minimal or not yet secured. | additional finance through secured matched funding or other mechanisms. |

# Appendix 1: Global context

## Marine ecosystems, poverty and livelihoods

Over-extraction, habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change all threaten the health of the ocean. Marine environments and the biodiversity within them have historically been undervalued in economic and policy decision-making, as have the goods and services that they provide such as cultural and traditional significance, societal well-being and resilience, and natural infrastructure to mitigate the effects of climate change.

The most severe impacts from marine ecosystem degradation, such as food and water insecurity, loss of nutrition, loss of employment and income, and the erosion of social cohesion, will be felt most by those who rely directly on marine resources for their livelihoods[14]. Those living in coastal communities and small island developing states (SIDS) are especially vulnerable, where the poorest and other marginalised often rely on the ocean not only for their livelihoods, but for nutrition, economic growth, and climate resilience[15] [16]. By 2030 it is expected there will be 900 million people living in these areas[17] where poverty, vulnerability, and a lack of alternative livelihoods can also be drivers of marine habitat loss, with resulting impacts on communities' resilience to climate change compounded.

Poorer households and communities are also less likely to have access to the services (such as innovative technological solutions, public/social services, opportunities for savings, equitable access to markets etc.) or resources (social, political, financial, technological etc.) to build resilience. They often have significantly less involvement in the decision-making processes necessary to increase their ability to protect the marine environment and to adapt to climate change. This lack of resources disproportionately affects women[18], who make up the majority of the world's poor, and other vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples[19], remote communities, persons with disabilities, vulnerable children, and the elderly[20]. If projects or policies are implemented without women's meaningful participation, it has been shown that their effectiveness can decrease, and existing inequalities increase[21].

Despite advancements in achieving an end to poverty, global extreme poverty rose in 2020 for the first time in over 20 years, with the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic compounding the forces of conflict and climate change, which were already slowing poverty reduction progress[22].

---

[13] See the 'Source of Matched Funding' tab in budget. Please note that while encouraged, secured matched funding is not required of OCEAN projects, so is considered secondary to the evaluation of the expected impact relative to size of the investment.

[14] IPCC (2022), *Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, United Nations, NYC
[15] Ibid.
[16] FAO (2020), *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture*, Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, Rome
[17] *Future Coastal Population Growth and Exposure to Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Flooding - A Global Assessment*, Neumann (2015)
[18] UNFCCC (2019), *Introduction to Gender and Climate Change*, United Nations Climate Change Secretariat, United Nations, YouTube
[19] IPCC (2022), *Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, United Nations, NYC
[20] UNFCCC (2018), *Considerations regarding vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems in the context of the national adaptation plans* (2018), Least Developed Countries Expert Group, United Nations Climate Change Secretariat, Bonn
[21] UNFCCC (2019), *Introduction to Gender and Climate Change*, United Nations Climate Change Secretariat, United Nations, YouTube
[22] World Bank (2020), *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune*, World Bank Group

About 100 million additional people are now living in poverty as a result of the pandemic[23]. As such, over the past decade we have seen environmental and corresponding societal risks grow and steadily climb to the top of the World Economic Forum's annual risk reports[24].

# Addressing the challenge: key barriers

The ocean economy is expected to grow faster than the global economy as a whole over the next decade[25], presenting opportunities for developing countries to grow their blue economies and improve the livelihoods of their people. However, there are considerable challenges to ensuring this growth also tackles the key marine and development issues at the local and community level in a sustainable way.

## The ocean financing gap

In the last 10 years, less than 1% (USD ~$13 billion) of the total value of the ocean has been invested in sustainable projects, mostly through philanthropy and ODA[26][27], despite the fact that the ocean supports the livelihoods of one in ten people globally[28]. Available evidence indicates that current financial flows are insufficient to meet the costs of the coastal and marine impacts of climate change[29]. In their report, the cost of saving our ocean - estimating the funding gap of sustainable development goal 14, researchers estimate that restoring the health of our ocean by 2030 would require total finance flows of US$174.52 billion per year[30].

## Marine resources are not equitably managed

Access to ocean resources is rarely equitably distributed, and inequity is a systemic feature of the current ocean economy[31]. Inequalities are also deeply embedded and rooted in existing political and economic systems, the result of historical legacies and prevailing norms[32].

Inequity manifests in multiple ways, for example: in the unfair distribution of commercial fish catches; in areas where sectors such as tourism, urban development, port infrastructure, energy and transport are expanding and competing; in the limited political power of local communities, particularly women, disabled persons and other minority groups, and their limited engagement in decision-making; and the consolidated interests of certain agenda-setting groups[33]. The 2022 IPCC report, the latest on climate impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, introduced new, unprecedented language to reflect this: *Vulnerability to climate change differs substantially among and within regions driven by patterns of intersecting socio-economic development, unsustainable ocean and land use, inequality, marginalisation, historical and ongoing patters of inequality such as colonialism, and governance*[34]. Without appropriate action climate change

---

[23] Mahler, D G, et al (2021), *Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Turning the corner on the pandemic in 2021?*, World Bank Group

[24] WEF (2022), The Global Risks Report, The Global Risks Report 2022, 17th Edition, World Economic Forum

[25] OECD (2020), Reframing Financing and Investment for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, OECD Environment Policy Paper No. 22

[26] Sumaila, U.R., M. Walsh, K. Hoareau, A. Cox, et al. (2020), *Ocean Finance: Financing the Transition to a Sustainable Ocean Economy*, Washington, DC: World Resources Institute

[27] Economist Impact (2022) Why we need to tackle the ocean funding crisis

[28] Selig, E R et al (2018), *Mapping global dependence on marine ecosystems*, Conservation Letters 2019;12:12617; UN (press release, 2017)

[29] Sumaila, U.R., M. Walsh, K. Hoareau, A. Cox, et al. (2020), *Ocean Finance: Financing the Transition to a Sustainable Ocean Economy*, Washington, DC: World Resources Institute

[30] Johnsen, D F., and Vestik, R A (2020), 'The cost of saving our ocean - estimating the funding gap of sustainable development goal 14', Marine Policy, Vol. 112 (103783)

[31] Österblom, H., C.C.C. Wabnitz, D. Tladi et al. (2020), Towards Ocean Equity, Washington, DC: World Resources Institute

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] IPCC (2022), *Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, United Nations, NYC

will create new - and worsen existing - challenges of fairness and equity faced by developing countries, regions and communities reliant on marine livelihoods[35].

## Local communities are unable to access funding to ensure viable alternative livelihoods

As they battle a warming ocean, rising sea level and other challenges, vulnerable and other marginalised communities are increasingly facing depleted resources without the ability to seek alternative livelihoods, or employment opportunities. Local poverty is often a proximate driver of marine biodiversity and ecosystem loss and degradation, e.g., through overexploitation of natural resources, waste mismanagement, or increasing coastal development. Since the 1980s, efforts have sought to reconcile local conservation and development priorities[36], which is now widely recognised as imperative if solutions are to be sustainable[37]. However, the provision of alternative, less environmentally damaging livelihoods can only be successful if they are of genuine economic benefit to the communities concerned and are supported by an understanding of the social-cultural drivers behind current practices[38].

## Inaccessible/difficult-to-access decision-making processes

Poorer households and communities often have significantly less involvement in the decision-making processes necessary to increase their ability to protect the marine environment and to adapt to climate change. Indigenous and local communities, locally based NGOs, and civil society organisations, including those that prioritise women's participation in decision-making, should form an integral part of the decision-making process on these issues. They form a vital link to local authorities and governance agencies, which in turn are connected to national, regional, and international institutions. The ability for these people and organisations – including those focused on women - to partake and influence state policies is, therefore, fundamental to achieving a balance of local and strategic objectives[39] and to align local socio-cultural concerns and global environmental issues.

## Information gaps

A lack of awareness of marine resource measures, understanding of the differential impacts of activities by gender (for example), and accessibility of information, resources, and options to manage marine ecosystems sustainably limits the effectiveness of policymakers, communities, and private agents.

[35] Österblom, H., C.C.C. Wabnitz, D. Tladi et al. (2020), *Towards Ocean Equity*, Washington, DC: World Resources Institute
[36] Roe, D (2008), 'The origins and evolution of the conservation-poverty debate: a review of key literature, events and policy processes', *Oryx* 42(4), 491-503
[37] Salafsky and Wollenberg (2000), 'Linking livelihoods and conservation: a conceptual framework and scale for assessing the integration of human needs and biodiversity', *World Development* 28, 1421-1438
[38] Wright et al. (2015), 'Reframing the concept of alternative livelihoods', *Conservation Biology* 30 (1), 7-13
[39] Jones P J S (2014), Governing marine protected areas: resilience through diversity, London: Routledge

# Annex A: Eligible countries

Below is the list of countries eligible for an OCEAN grant. Ensure your country is on the list below before submitting an application for funding. This table is adapted from the OECD-DAC list[40], with modifications to focus on eligible coastal countries only.

**For countries marked with \***: any funding allocated to these countries is likely to be limited, as these countries are expected to graduate from the OECD DAC list on 01 January 2026, after which they will no longer be eligible for ODA funding.

| Least developed countries | Lower middle-income countries | Upper middle-income countries |
|---|---|---|
| Angola | Algeria | Albania |
| Bangladesh | Cabo Verde | Argentina |
| Benin | Cameroon | Azerbaijan |
| Cambodia | Congo | Belize |
| Comoros | Côte d'Ivoire | Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| Democratic People's Republic of Korea | Egypt | Brazil |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) | Ghana | China (People's Republic of) |
| Djibouti | Honduras | Colombia |
| Eritrea | India | Costa Rica |
| Gambia | Iran | Cuba |
| Guinea | Jordan | Dominica |
| Guinea-Bissau | Kenya | Dominican Republic |
| Haiti | Lebanon | Ecuador |
| Kiribati | Micronesia | El Salvador |
| Liberia | Morocco | Equatorial Guinea |
| Madagascar | Nicaragua | Fiji |
| Mauritania | Nigeria | Gabon |
| Mozambique | Pakistan | Georgia |
| Myanmar | Papua New Guinea | Grenada |
| São Tomé and Príncipe | Philippines | Guatemala |
| Senegal | Samoa | Guyana* |
| Sierra Leone | Sri Lanka | Indonesia |
| Solomon Islands | Tokelau | Iraq |
| Somalia | Tunisia | Jamaica |
|  | Ukraine | Kazakhstan |

---

[40] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/dac-list-of-oda-recipients.html#asterisk

| Least developed countries | Lower middle-income countries | Upper middle-income countries |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Sudan | Vanuatu | Libya |
| Syrian Arab Republic | Viet Nam | Malaysia |
| Tanzania | | Maldives |
| Timor-Leste | | Marshall Islands |
| Togo | | Mauritius |
| Tuvalu | | Mexico |
| Yemen | | Moldova |
| | | Montenegro |
| | | Montserrat* |
| | | Namibia |
| | | Niue |
| | | Palau |
| | | Panama* |
| | | Peru |
| | | Pitcairn Islands |
| | | Saint Helena |
| | | Saint Lucia |
| | | Saint Vincent and the Grenadines |
| | | South Africa |
| | | Suriname |
| | | Thailand |
| | | Tonga |
| | | Tristan da Cunha |
| | | Türkiye |
| | | Turkmenistan |
| | | Venezuela |
| | | Wallis and Futuna |
| | | West Bank and Gaza Strip |

# Annex B: Safeguarding

**Adapted from on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Six Core Principles[41]:**

1) Sexual exploitation and abuse by anyone associated with an OCEAN Grants Programme project constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.

2) Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.

3) Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.

4) Any sexual relationship between those associated with an OCEAN Grants Programme project and a person benefitting from the project that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.

5) Where anyone associated with an OCEAN Grants Programme project develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by anyone else associated with an OCEAN Grants Programme project, whether in the same organisation or not, they must report such concerns via established reporting mechanisms.

6) Everyone associated with an OCEAN Grants Programme project are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

**Adapted from the Common Approach to PSEAH collected vision[42]:**

The Common Approach to PSEAH summarises and aligns the key actions from previous policies, commitments and standard for anyone working in humanitarian, development and/or peace (HDP) settings to try and improve PSEAH standards globally, improve accountability to victim-survivors, and support preparedness and dialogue on PSEAH across HDP sectors and actors. OCEAN use the CAPSEAH minimum actions to assess the PSEAH policies and procedures of applicants.

---

[41] psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/update/iasc-six-core-principles

[42] https://capseah.safeguardingsupporthub.org/

# Annex C: Blue Planet Fund

**The [Blue Planet Fund (BPF)](#) has the following seven key outcomes:**

1) **Marine protected areas (MPAs) and Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs)**

    Countries have increased willingness, capacity, and access to sustainable finance to establish and sustainably, effectively, and inclusively implement and manage MPAs and OECMs within national and international waters.

2) **Illegal Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing**

    IUU fishing activities are more effectively monitored, prevented, and deterred and international enablers of IUU are increasingly minimised.

3) **International and large-scale fisheries**

    Management of regional and national fisheries and aquaculture is strengthened to deliver sustainable fish stocks and healthy marine ecosystems provide inclusive livelihoods, and reduce overfishing, including by removing or repurposing environmentally harmful subsidies.

4) **Solid waste and other forms of marine pollution**

    Waste management systems are strengthened and move towards circular economy approaches that reduce solid waste and other forms of pollution – including ghost gear – entering the marine environment, while supporting inclusive poverty reduction and women's empowerment.

5) **Small scale fisheries management**

    Local communities have improved fisheries management knowledge, capacities and incentives, supporting more climate resilient, inclusive and sustainable livelihoods.

6) **Critical marine habitats for coastal resilience**

    Locally inclusive approaches that protect, sustainably manage and restore marine ecosystems are demonstrated, scaled, and financed with private sector support, leading to improved biodiversity, ecosystem services and climate resilience of coastal communities.

7) **Aquaculture**

    Sustainable, inclusive aquaculture approaches that help restore and avoid harm to the environment are demonstrated and increasingly adopted with private sector support.

# Annex D: Key staff

**Community Grants and Partnership Grants applicants must name their key staff in the application form and budget.** Key staff includes those that make up the main project team and are critical to project success. Key staff can be from the lead organisation and any partner organisation. **If a key staff member is yet to be recruited, applicants must include a job title and job description**.

**Community Grants** applicants are required to submit a pen portrait of each key staff by compiling the table in the application form (word limit applies). **Partnership Grants** applicants are required to submit a one-page CV of each key staff.

The table below provides a guide to what is relevant and useful to include in a pen portrait or CV, and what is less relevant to demonstrating the capability of the key staff.

| Useful evidence | What it demonstrates | How assessors will use this |
|---|---|---|
| **Previous roles/ positions on similar projects** | Up to date and relevant expertise. | If the roles listed are relevant to the proposed project, it will demonstrate appropriate experience leading or working on a similar type of project. |
| **Skills and knowledge** | Technical or specialist skills and knowledge relevant to the proposed project role. | Relevant skills and knowledge tailored to the project; it will provide evidence of the individual's match to the project. |
| **Country experience** | This individual has recent experience of working in project environment (e.g., political, social, legislative). | We do not expect all of the team to have worked in the host country but, we do expect some will have experience working in similar countries. This is especially valued in the senior project roles. |
| **List and scale of project funding received** | The individual is good at leading projects, managing the budgets, and fulfilling reporting requirements. | Good evidence of an experienced project leader in running projects. |
| **Less useful evidence** | | |
| **List of courses/ lectures given** | The individual is a recognised teacher. | Gives no indication of their ability in a non-academic setting. |
| **List of job titles held** | Range of experience. | If this is a list of job titles i.e., lecturer, coordinator, researcher then it is unlikely this list will provide much useful detail. |
| **List of published papers** | Academic or scientific achievement but may not be relevant to the project. | A list of all papers ever published is of little interest to reviewers. A tailored list of papers, relevant to the project, will demonstrate expertise in this area. |
| **List of post graduate students** | This individual is a recognised research supervisor. | Doesn't show that the individual is capable of undertaking project work, although may be relevant if the project involves significant mentoring of local students. |