

# Frequently Asked Questions

Annual Application Round 2,  
FY 2024/25

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**Ocean Community  
Empowerment  
and Nature**



**UK International  
Development**

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

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# About OCEAN

## What is OCEAN?

The Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature (OCEAN) 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 (referred to as 'OCEAN Grants Administrator').

## What is the Blue Planet Fund?

OCEAN is part of the Blue Planet Fund (BPF) – the UK's £500 million initiative supporting developing countries in protecting the ocean and reducing poverty. BPF is jointly managed by the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

## Why OCEAN?

Approximately three billion people rely on the ocean for their food security and livelihoods, with those in developing countries particularly dependent on the ocean<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the ocean is facing serious and increasing threats from over-exploitation, pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change. Funding sustainable development of the marine environment at scale is critical to achieve global climate and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) objectives. Despite this, Life Below Water (SDG14) only received 0.01% of all SDG funding from development finance in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Community-led initiatives have the biggest potential to make a positive impact for coastal communities impacted most acutely by climate change. OCEAN addresses the lack of competitive funding for programming that tackles marine issues for organisations that specifically focus on reaching local communities and local organisations.

## What types of projects will OCEAN fund?

OCEAN will fund 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. Funding will be awarded via two distinct pathways: Community Grants and Partnership Grants.

## What is the Community Grants pathway?

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 coastal-country. Community Grants are up to £250,000, and fund projects which last at least one year.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/ocean/topics/developing-countries-and-the-ocean-economy/>

<sup>2</sup> For further information on this issue, see [SDG14 Financing Landscape Scan: Tracking Funds to Realize Sustainable Outcomes for the Ocean](#) (2022), White Paper, Washington DC: Friends of Ocean Action and World Bank

The lead organisation can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association.

### **What is the Partnership Grants pathway?**

The Partnership Grants pathway has been designed to meet the needs of large, established and international organisations, that work with small, locally-led organisations based in the country where they plan to implement their project. Partnership Grants are between £250,000 and £3 million, and fund projects which last at least one year. The lead organisation can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association, and must partner with at least one organisation based in the country of implementation.

# For applicants: eligibility and requirements

## What types of projects will Community Grants fund?

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 coastal-country. All Community Grants applications must:

- support a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty;
- focus on the protection, restoration, conservation or sustainable management of the marine environment;
- 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.

Please refer to the Guidance Note for Applicants for further information.

## What types of projects will Partnership Grants fund?

The Partnership Grants pathway has been designed to meet the needs of large, established and international organisations based more broadly in the world, that work with small, locally-led organisations based in the country where they plan to implement their project. All Partnership Grants applications must:

- support a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty;
- focus on the protection, restoration, conservation or sustainable management of the marine environment;
- partner with at least one organisation based in the main project country;
- 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;
- effectively engage with and work alongside the local communities they are seeking to support;
- contribute to developing new ideas, providing local solutions to local problems, and strengthening local capability and capacity and community empowerment; and
- implement a scalable approach via well-established networks to provide maximum impact and deliver long-term outcomes to the marine environment and local communities.

Please refer to the Guidance Note for Applicants for further information.

## Who can apply for a Community Grant?

The lead organisation must be small- to medium-sized, locally-led, in-country organisations, legally registered and working in an eligible coastal-country. The lead organisation can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association. The lead organisation must be legally registered in the same country where the project is implemented, have an annual income of less than £1 million, and must be formally

established for more than two years. The lead organisation can partner with other organisations but partnerships are not mandatory.

## **Who can apply for a Partnership Grant?**

The lead organisation must be a large, established and international organisation, that work with small, locally-led organisations based in the country where they plan to implement their project. The lead organisation can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association. The lead organisation must be formally established for more than three years, and must partner with at least one organisation legally registered in the main project country.

## **What is a 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 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 managing the budget. All grant funds will be paid to the lead organisation only.

## **What is a partner organisation?**

A partner organisation is an organisation that has a formal role in the project through a relationship with the lead organisation. This may involve staff costs, budget management responsibilities, and responsibility for supporting and delivering project activities.

## **Is a partner organisation necessary?**

Project partners are a mandatory element of the Partnership Grants. For Community Grants, partnerships are encouraged but not mandatory. A lead organisation can have more than one partner organisation.

## **Who should applicants partner with?**

Partner organisations can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association. Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations can be a partner organisation but may not receive funding.

In the case of Partnership Grants, 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 partner also with at least one other organisation legally registered in the project country.

## **Can government agencies and inter-governmental organisations apply for funding?**

Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations cannot be a lead organisation. They can be a partner organisation but may not receive funding.

## What is the maximum funding available?

Applicants to the Community Grants pathway can apply for up to £250,000, whilst applicants to the Partnership Grants pathway can apply for between £250,000 and £3 million.

The annual value of any grant application should not be more than 50% of the lead organisation's annual income (further details in the Guidance Note for Applicants). For example, if your project request is for £250,000 (£75,000 in Year 1, £125,000 in Year 2 and £50,000 in Year 3), you would be assessed based on the largest annual value of £125,000. Your organisation would therefore need to demonstrate an average annual income of at least £250,000 per year.

## How long should a project run for?

Projects must last a minimum of 12 months. All project activities must conclude by 31 March 2029. There is a preference for multi-year projects, where possible, to support greater impact and better value for money, unless distinct objectives can be achieved within one year.

## Where should a project be based?

A full list of eligible countries will be available when we update our guidance for Round 2 in due course.

## Can a project be based in an upper middle-income country?

Yes. However, you must demonstrate a stronger case for support to be awarded funding. To do this, projects based in upper middle-income countries (UMICs) must demonstrate how they will share learning with projects based in least developed countries (LDCs) or lower middle-income countries (LMICs) and should involve government partners to ensure sustainability beyond the OCEAN funding. Projects based in a UMIC may strengthen their case if operating in areas of high importance for the marine environment and climate adaptation, or where there is a clear need to promote gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). This will be evaluated by the Expert Committee, and applicants must meet it to be considered for funding. Review the Guidance Note for Applicants for further details of the scoring criteria, as this will be assessed alongside the scoring criteria.

## When is the next application window open?

Round 2 of our annual application cycle opens for proposals in January 2025.

- Community grants opens on 06 January 2025 and closes on 17 February 2025, 23:59 GMT.
- Partnership grants opens on 13 January 2025 and closes on 24 March 2025, 23:59 GMT.

## What should be the start date of a project?

Project can start between November and December 2025.



## What does the application process involve?

Both Community and Partnership Grants pathways consist of two stages. Stage 2 is by invitation only.

### Community Grants

- **Stage 1: concept note:** applicants are required to submit an initial concept note outlining their project idea and its anticipated impact.
- **Stage 2: detailed application:** applicants are required to submit a detailed application form accompanied by supporting materials and demonstrate their response to the OCEAN Expert Committee's feedback from Stage 1.

### Partnership grants

- **Stage 1: detailed application:** applicants are required to submit a detailed application form, accompanied by supporting materials.
- **Stage 2 interview:** applicants are required to attend an online interview to respond to clarification questions stemming from the OCEAN Expert Committee's review from Stage 1.

## How should applications be submitted?

Applications must be submitted through the online application portal Flexi-Grant. This can be accessed via <https://ocean.flexigrant.com/> or through the OCEAN website [ocean.grants.org.uk](https://ocean.grants.org.uk). Please read the Flexi-Grant Guidance to learn how to use the platform.

## What support will be given during the application process?

Applicants who subscribe to the [OCEAN mailing list](#) will receive invitations to attend learning webinars to help develop their application. Anyone interested will need to register for these events to be able to attend.

## What languages can an application be submitted in?

For **Community Grants**, application forms and supporting documentation are accepted in the following languages:

- Bahasa Indonesia
- English
- French
- Portuguese
- Spanish

In addition, Stage 1 Community Grants applicants who feel more comfortable doing so, are welcome to submit answers as an audio or video file. Please note that the Expert Committee evaluating projects will be provided with a transcript of your audio or video file, and therefore only information communicated verbally will be assessed.

For **Partnership Grants**, application forms and supporting documentation are accepted in English only. Financial reporting can be submitted in Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, Portuguese, or Spanish.

## What criteria are projects scored against?

**Community Grants** applications are scored against:

- Technical merit
- Marine impact
- Poverty reduction
- Capability and capacity
- Community collaboration and empowerment

**Partnership Grants** applications are scored against:

- Technical merit
- Marine impact
- Poverty reduction
- Scaling potential
- Meaningful Partnerships

## What does OCEAN mean by financial year?

The financial year (FY) runs from 01 April to 31 March.

## How should an organisation calculate its annual income?

This should be the average of the past two years of your organisation's accounts if applying for a Community Grant and the past three years if applying for a Partnership Grant. Note that the annual grant value being requested must not exceed 50% of the lead organisation's annual income.

## Contact has been made with the nearest British Embassy or High Commission to discuss the application but no response has been received. Is it still possible to apply?

Yes. You will not be penalised if you are unable to submit comments from the British Embassy or High Commission alongside your application, provided you have tried to contact them in sufficient time to allow engagement and can provide evidence of this by attaching a pdf copy of the email chain with the Embassy or High Commission or another form of evidence of contact. This will need to be uploaded onto Flexi-Grant.

## Is it possible to apply without a registration certificate?

Only if you are applying for a Community Grant below £100,000 in which case you will need to provide a letter of support from Host Governments/ British Embassy or High Commission to

prove you are a non-profit organisation operating in the country. This will need to be uploaded onto Flexi-Grant.

## Who should sign the application form?

The lead applicant. A scan of a real (not typed) signature will need to be uploaded onto Flexi-Grant. Do not upload a QR code.

## Can extensions to the submission deadline be requested?

No. 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](mailto: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.

## Can changes be made to applications already submitted?

Yes, but only up to one hour after the application deadline. To do so, get in touch via [applications@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:applications@oceangrants.org.uk) quoting your application reference number. We will return your application. You will then be able to make changes and will need to re-submit your application for it to be valid.

## Can an application be withdrawn?

Yes. To do so, get in touch via [applications@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:applications@oceangrants.org.uk) quoting your application reference number.

## Can an application be resubmitted if not successful?

Yes. However, to be eligible for funding, 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.

## How can OCEAN be contacted?

You can 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. The Helpdesk can only provide clarifications on the information included in the published guidance. The Helpdesk is not able to comment on your project ideas, pre-assess your eligibility, or confirm if your draft application and supporting documents meet requirements.

## For applicants: using Flexi-Grant

### The application is complete, but the 'submit' button is not visible.

If you are not the lead applicant, you will not be able to submit the application. Ensure the lead applicant has access to the application on Flexi-grant before the submission deadline so that they can submit the application. If you are the lead applicant but still cannot see the submit button, ensure that any collaborators on the application have marked their inputs as complete or else you have revoked their invitation to collaborate. You should then be able to submit.

### Can changes be made to who is the lead applicant?

Only the person who started the application or who is currently the lead applicant has the authority to amend the roles of those involved. You cannot become the lead applicant if you have been invited to collaborate on the application. You must revoke your collaboration before changing to the lead applicant. The Grant Administrators also have the authority to change the lead applicant.

### Is an additional stage of sign-off required?

No, we have not configured an additional sign-off stage for our application forms. We do ask that applicants complete the *section Declarations and Certification* but we leave it up to you to manage any other necessary sign-off stages internally.

### What support is available for anyone having problems accessing the Flexi-Grant portal?

If you experience any issues accessing the online portal, firstly make sure you are using Google Chrome as your internet browser. Otherwise, contact [helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk) and we will respond to your query within five working days.

### How should an application be signed?

You can upload an e-signature in *Section. Declarations and Certification* of your application as a .jpeg, .jpg, .png or .pdf. You may also print out the relevant page of the Word application form to sign and submit as a PDF. Do not upload a QR code.

### How can guidance documents and templates be accessed?

All OCEAN guidance documents and templates are available from Flexi-Grant (<https://ocean.flexigrant.com/>) and from our website (<https://oceangrants.org.uk/>).

# For grantees: management requirements

## What are the management requirements of the grant?

The main grant management requirement can be summarised as follows:

- Upon grant award: sign a visibility statement.
- Upon grant award and at the start of each financial year: forecast quarterly instalments.
- Every quarter: confirm/update forecast.
- Every quarter: attend learning events.
- Every six months: report against project objectives.
- Occasional: submit a change request if any changes need to be made to the project
- Occasional: be subject to a yearly spot audit.
- Occasional: undergo an in-person monitoring visit from the Grant Administrator.

## How will paperwork be received and exchanged?

All paperwork will be received and exchanged electronically.

## Can changes be made to a project? If so, how?

Grantees can accommodate emerging significant technical (e.g. change in key personnel, changes to logframe) and/or financial (>10% change to any budget line) project needs by submitting a change request form on the provided template. Grantees must discuss this with the Grants Administrator before submitting any request to ensure that proposed changes are acceptable. Changes can only be made to current and future years; unless the case is exceptional and clearly justified. Please review the Finance Guidance for detailed and further information.

## Is it possible to request additional funds?

It is not possible to request additional funds once the grant is awarded. Budgetary changes of >10% to a budget line must be requested through a Change Request. If projects overspend, costs must be covered from another budget line or funded through another source. In exceptional circumstances, for example where conflict or natural disasters have an impact on your ability to deliver, flexibility may be offered over budget changes. However, any such changes must be justified and be due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the project.

## When are claims due?

Grantees are required to submit advance claims of forecasted amounts for each quarter. Claims are due in the following schedule:

- Quarter 1 (01 April – 30 June): due 01- 30 April
- Quarter 2 (01 July – 30 September): due 15 June – 31 July
- Quarter 3 (01 October – 31 December): due 15 September – 31 October
- The final quarterly claim is known as the Actual Claim and will be based on the total actual expenditure for the year (01 April – 31 March) minus the advance claims paid. Due 31 May.

For projects that start after 01 April, the payment schedule will be recalculated on a pro rata basis; with the first payment made at the start of the project before reverting to the above quarterly timings.

### **Can OCEAN send funds directly to my project partner?**

No. All funds are paid to the lead organisation only.

### **Can the signatory information for a project be changed?**

Yes. To do so, get in touch via [helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk) quoting your project reference number.

### **What is a spot audit?**

Every year, a proportion of projects will be identified for a spot audit to ensure the grant has been spent in accordance with the agreement with Defra. Grantees must be able to provide electronic information about all the transactions accounted for, and to produce copies of original receipts and invoices backing up claims if requested. The spot audits may include a review of internal financial controls and procedures, a record of which should be kept supporting this.

### **How will I be supported as a grantee?**

Upon the project starting, grantees are invited to join the OCEAN Grants Community – our online learning and networking site dedicated to supporting grantees to connect, share learning, request peer support and exchange resources and ideas. As part of the OCEAN Grants Community, grantees are invited to attend regular learning events with the Grants Administrator to support peer-to-peer learning and grants implementation. The Helpdesk will continue be available to grantees.

## For grantees: reporting requirements

### What reporting requirements are in place and when is reporting due?

Grantees must provide robust reporting against intended project objectives to continue to receive funding from OCEAN. The reporting schedule is as follows:

- **Half Year Report:** must be submitted by 31 October of each year in the funding period.
- **End of Year Report:** must be submitted by 30 April in each year of the funding period.
- **Final Report:** must be submitted within three months from project end date for multi-year grants or one month from project end date for single year grants.

### Are templates of technical and financial reports available?

Yes. All templates are available for download from Flexi-Grant (<https://ocean.flexigrant.com/>).

### Can I discuss queries before the reporting deadline?

Yes. To do so, get in touch via [helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk) quoting your project reference number.

### Can I request a deadline extension?

If you encounter unforeseen circumstances beyond your control which impact on your ability to deliver reports on time, get in touch via [helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk) quoting your project reference number. We will discuss an agreement for an extension on a case by case basis.

### When will I receive feedback on my reporting?

Approximately eight weeks after the reporting deadline.

## For grantees: communications requirements

### **What are the main communication requirements?**

At the application stage, applicants are asked to provide a very short and non-technical summary of their project. If the application is successful, this summary will be used in communication activities. During project delivery, grantees are expected to engage and support wider communications and awareness raising activities to inform audiences what they are planning, learning, and achieving.

### **What are the guidelines for communicating about a project?**

Successful grantees will be supported by the Grant Administrator to share news about their projects as widely as possible.

Grantees are required to sign a visibility statement and acknowledge funding from the UK Government in written materials and verbal statements and through use of the UK International Development (UK Dev) logo on project assets as part of their Grant Agreement.