



Frequently asked questions

A guide for applicants



Ocean Community
Empowerment
and Nature

About OCEAN

What is OCEAN?

Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature (OCEAN) is a new Official Development Assistance (ODA) competitive grants programme. The programme will run for seven years and will provide an investment of up to £60m. OCEAN will support innovative proposals from local coastal communities that aim to deliver marine protection and reduce poverty worldwide. The programme was launched on 5 February 2024.

Why?

While the global population relies on the health of the oceans, it is community-led initiatives that have the biggest potential to make a positive impact. Yet up until now, there hasn't been enough competitive funding for programming that tackles marine issues and for organisations that specifically focus on reaching local communities and local organisations. OCEAN seeks to redress this imbalance and support coastal communities impacted most acutely by climate change.

Despite 10% of the global population having high dependence on the nutritional, economic, and coastal protection benefits the ocean provides¹ and it contributing US\$1.5 trillion to the global economy^{2,3}, less than 1% (US\$13 billion) of this total value was invested in the ocean economy through sustainable projects in the past decade.

Approximately three billion people rely on the ocean for their food security and livelihoods, with those in developing countries particularly dependent on the ocean⁴. 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 2019.⁵

The ocean economy is expected to grow faster than the global economy over the next decade. We want the benefits of this growth to be shared with coastal communities so that positive and sustainable changes can be made to their livelihoods and to the oceans around them.⁶

What size grants are available?

The first call for proposals opened on 5 February 2024 and there are two pots of funding available. Community grants, up to £250,000, will fund projects led by small to medium, local, in-country organisations annual income of less than £1m. Partnership grants, from £250,000 up to £3 million,

¹ Selig, E R et al (2018), [Mapping global dependence on marine ecosystems](#), Conservation Letters 2019;12:12617; UN (press release, 2017)

² 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

³ Economist Impact (2022) [Why we need to tackle the ocean funding crisis](#)

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/ocean/topics/developing-countries-and-the-ocean-economy/>

⁵ 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

⁶ For Further information on this issue can be found in [The Ocean Economy in 2030](#) on the OECD website.

will be awarded to medium to large organisations who partner with locally led organisations and have the capacity to deliver projects at scale.

- The closing date for community grants is 18 March 2024, 22:59 GMT (23:59 BST)
- The closing date for partnership grants is 02 April 2024, 22:59 GMT (23:59 BST)

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). The Grant Administrator for OCEAN is NIRAS.

What types of projects will OCEAN fund?

Funding is available for projects that focus on both:

Marine Protection: Applications must focus on marine protection. This could directly relate to one of the Blue Planet Fund's following seven key outcomes, but this is not a requirement:

- Marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures (OECMs);
- Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU);
- International and large-scale fisheries;
- Marine pollution;
- Critical marine habitats;
- Small-scale fisheries;
- Sustainable aquaculture.

Poverty Reduction: Applications must also address poverty reduction directly or indirectly, taking into consideration the disproportionate impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss on women and girls, people living in poverty and marginalised groups.

Information for applicants

Who can apply?

OCEAN welcomes applicants working in countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA). For a full list of countries currently eligible for funding, please refer to Annex A of our applicant guidance or contact us at helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk.

We are particularly interested in receiving proposals from in-country organisations working with hard-to-reach coastal communities across the globe.

We also want to hear from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Profit Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Academic / Research Institutions. Government agencies, inter-governmental organisations and organisations working in the private sector are encouraged to partner with a non-profit organisation but cannot be the lead organisation.

Applicants should supply a registration certificate to confirm that they have permission from the Host Government to work in their proposed country/countries. If you are unable to provide this, but are applying for a Community Grant below £100,000, you will need to provide a letter of support from Host Governments/ FCDO Post to prove you are a non-profit organisation operating in the country. This document will need to be uploaded onto Flexi-Grant.

What is a 'lead' or 'partner' organisation?

A 'lead' organisation is an 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. They will be the organisation who submits the application via the online application portal – Flexi-Grant. Lead organisations may create partnerships with other organisations to support the implementation of their projects.

Partner organisations have a formal role in the project through a relationship with a lead organisation. This may involve staff costs, budget management responsibilities, and responsibility for supporting and delivering project activities.

How much can my organisation apply for?

Applicants to the Community Grants can apply for up to £250,000, whilst applicants to the Partnership Grants can apply for between £250,000 and £3m. Projects should consider how much funding they need to successfully implement their project and ensure that they are able to demonstrate good value for money in their application. Getting good value for money means using resources in the best way possible to achieve the results you want.

In addition, the annual value of any grant application should not be more than 50% of the lead organisation's annual income (calculated as an average of the past two years of the organisation's accounts for Community Grants and three years for Partnership Grants). 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.

If you are still unsure and would like to talk to someone, contact helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk.

How long should the project run for?

Projects can last from one year up until 31 March 2029. Longer term projects are encouraged but please be aware that project activities must conclude by 31 March 2029.

When can my organisation apply?

The first call for proposals for both community and partnership grants opens on 5 February 2024.

- The closing date for community grants is 18 March 2024, 22:59 GMT (23:59 BST)
- The closing date for partnership grants is 02 April 2024, 22:59 GMT (23:59 BST)

How can my organisation apply?

Applicants are invited to send their proposals through an online system called Flexi-Grant which can be accessed through the OCEAN website (oceangrants.org.uk). The application form will include a set of questions for projects to complete that must be answered. All the documents on Flexi-Grant are available to download on the platform and a check list will be provided. These documents are also available on the OCEAN website. However, all applications should be submitted through Flexi-Grant where possible. For the Community Grants, applications may be submitted by email only if the applicant has contacted the OCEAN Grant Administration Team via the Helpdesk to request this.

If you are having difficulty applying, are unable to use Flexi-Grant, or wish to request to submit your application via email, you are welcome to contact us at helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk and a member of the OCEAN Grant Administration Team will be in touch.

A link to access Flexi-Grant can be found on our website: oceangrants.org.uk

For further updates follow us on:

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How will applicants be supported?

If you have any queries or need support with your application, and you cannot find the answer in the guidance documents, then you can contact a member of the OCEAN Grant Administration Team via our helpdesk and we will respond to your request within five working days.

If you would prefer to discuss your query with a member of the OCEAN team rather than via email, contact us using one of the emails below to request a call.

Contact details for the helpdesk are detailed below:

- General enquiries and requests for support: helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk

Applicants will also be invited to attend regular learning webinars and support sessions run by the Grants Administrators to support applicants to develop their concepts and applications. Please see our website for latest updates and events.

How will Grantees be supported?

Grantees will join a community focussed on mutual learning, peer support and networking facilitated and supported by the OCEAN team. They will also have access to a Learning and Networking Platform available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish where they can exchange resources and ideas with other members. An invite to this will be sent to Grantees upon award. Support webinars will also be hosted by the Grant Administrators to help Grantees successfully implement their projects.

The same support provided to applicants via the OCEAN Helpdesk will also be available to Grantees. All Grantees need to do to request support with their project is contact the OCEAN Grant Administration Team via its helpdesk.

Contact details for the helpdesk are detailed below:

- General enquiries and requests for support: helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk

How can I contact OCEAN if I have any more questions?

Want to find out more, in need of some support, unsure whether you are eligible to apply, or have any other questions about the process, you can contact us at helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk.

Application requirements

What are the funding criteria?

Funds will be awarded through an open and transparent process against clear criteria. Applications will be scored and recommended for selection by a committee of marine and development experts. Feedback will be provided to all applicants at each stage regardless of their success.

Selection and eligibility criteria will be found in the Applicant Guidance Note which is due for publication in early 2024.

Where does our project need to be based?

All projects should be implemented in countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA). For more information, refer Annex A of our applicant guidance or contact us at helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk

What types of organisations can apply?

We are particularly interested in receiving proposals from in-country organisations working with hard-to-reach coastal communities across the globe.

We also want to hear from Non-Profit Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Academic / Research Institutions. Government agencies and organisations working in the private sector are encouraged to partner with a non-profit organisation but cannot act as the lead organisation.

Applicants should supply a legal registration certificate to demonstrate that they have permission from the Host Government to work in their proposed country/countries. If you are unable to provide this, but are applying for a Community Grant below £100,000, you will need to provide a letter of support from Host Governments/ FCDO Post to prove you are a non-profit organisation operating in the country. This document will need to be uploaded onto Flexi-Grant with your application.

What is the ‘financial year’ for OCEAN?

Applicants should be aware that project budgets are required to follow the UK Government financial year which runs from 1 April to 31 March each year. You should consider this in the design of your project and application and where possible, organise activities accordingly.

Grants will be paid in four quarterly installments, the first three in advance in April, July, October, and the final in arrears in May. Funding cannot be carried forwards between financial years, so you should consider avoiding significant expenditure between January – March each year, as any underspend will not be able to be carried forwards into the following Financial Year.

Submitting an application

What languages can we submit our application in?

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

	Community Grants	Partnership Grants
Application form and provided templates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English French Portuguese Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English
Supporting documentation to be uploaded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English French Portuguese Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English. Unofficial translations are accepted. Only financial reporting can be submitted in French, Portuguese or Spanish.

Applicants who face challenges meeting the language requirements outlined are encouraged to contact us by emailing helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk.

Please note that for community grants only, it will be possible to answer some questions of your Stage 1 application through an audio or video file instead of in writing to be uploaded on Flexi-Grant. 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.

We have contacted our nearest FCDO office to discuss our project but have yet to hear back. Can we still apply?

Yes, you can. 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. You can prove this through a pdf copy of the email chain with the Embassy or High Commission or another form of evidence of contact. This document will need to be uploaded onto Flexi-Grant.

We do not have a registration certificate. Can we still apply?

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

Where can we find a list of eligible countries?

Please check Annex A of the Guidance Note to Applicants. If you are still unsure, please email us at helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk.

How do we calculate our organisation's annual income?

You should calculate this as an 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.

Can we partner with a UN agency?

Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations, such as UN agencies, can be partner organisations but may not receive any OCEAN funding. They can only provide in-kind partnership.

We represent a Government agency or an inter-governmental organisation, such as a UN agency. Can we apply?

Unfortunately, government agencies and inter-governmental organisations, such as UN agencies, are not eligible to be the lead organisation but are welcome to be a partner organisation. They will not be eligible for OCEAN funding but can provide in-kind partnership.

We represent a private sector organisation, business, or business association. Can we apply?

Unfortunately, private sector organisations, businesses, or business associations are not eligible to be the lead organisations however, they can be partner organisations. In the case of Partnership Grant, there needs to be more than one partner organisation.

Our project is based in an Upper Middle-Income Country. Can we apply?

Projects based in Upper Middle-Income Countries (UMICs) are eligible; however, projects applying to work in a UMIC should clearly demonstrate a stronger case for support, and this will be assessed. The reason for working in a UMIC could include operating in areas of high importance for marine environment and climate adaptation, or where there is a clear need for gender equality and social inclusion. Applications for projects based in a UMIC should demonstrate that they will:

- advance knowledge, evidence and impact in Least Developed or Low-Income Countries; or
- contribute to a global public good, for example by improving our understanding or building knowledge about sustainable management and protection of the oceans; or
- contribute to serious and unique advancements on a critical marine issue as a result of specific circumstances of the UMIC that could not be made elsewhere.