

The Commonwealth Blue Charter Project Incubator

Assisting governments and their partners transition to ocean sustainability through the development and support of equitable, climate-resilient projects

Frequently Asked Questions

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The Basics

1. What makes this Project Incubator different?

- A. We are an incubator with several differences!

The Incubator supports the development of government-led projects under the Commonwealth Blue Charter. The focus on governments (and their partners) distinguishes it from other incubators, as well as many granting bodies, that usually focus on assisting the private sector and non-governmental actors.

All 56 Commonwealth countries that are part of the relevant Blue Charter Action Groups can apply. Unlike international development opportunities that are available to only some governments, we do not limit participation according to the OECD Official Development Assistance (ODA) categories, or other such restrictions.

Finally, the Incubator supports the full lifecycle of projects, beginning with developing ideas, to testing and implementing pilot projects, through to upscaling, and writing proposals to larger international development funds.

2. Who may lead the project?

- A. All applications must have a Commonwealth Government as the lead project entity, responsible for the delivery of the project. However, partnering with non-governmental entities is strongly recommended (see Q11, below).

3. Does the lead Government have to write and submit the application?

- A. It doesn't matter who actually writes and submits the online application. It could be the lead Government or it could be a non-governmental partner. What matters is that the Government has agreed beforehand to be the responsible lead entity, with whom the grant agreement will be signed. (See also question 6, below.)

4. How much money can we apply for?

- A. £5000 to £50,000.

Grants cannot be split into smaller grants per recipient to circumvent the £50,000 limit.

As explained in the questions below, not all awards will be for money. Some awards may be for training or direct technical assistance, perhaps also with some granting.

If we receive two similar applications from different entities, we may contact you about the possibility of combining efforts.

All grants need to demonstrate some in-kind support; e.g., volunteered labour, expertise, office space, and/or free use of equipment.

Partnerships are strongly encouraged.

Co-funding is encouraged, particularly for larger projects.

5. Do you treat applications for small grants differently than for larger ones?

- A. Yes. Applications for larger amounts of money will undergo further due diligence. So, it is somewhat easier to get a smaller grant than it is to get a larger one. Smaller grants are a good way to establish new ideas.

6. Who will manage the grant's funds?

- A. All funds will flow through the lead Government, being disbursed to project partners per the accepted project budget. The Commonwealth Secretariat will also be applying its due diligence in overseeing all grants.

In a situation where the Government may not be equipped to receive international funding, it may assign a notarised third-party fiscal agent,¹ or one of the project partners, to manage the project finances. However, the Government remains responsible for the proper disbursement of the grant's funds, regardless of who receives and manages the award.

7. Are all Commonwealth Governments eligible?

- A. Yes, in principle, noting:
- The country must be a member of the Blue Charter Action Group(s) under which this proposed project best fits. A list of Action Group members is at the very end of this document (Annex 2). More information on joining Action Groups can be found [here](#). Countries can join Action Groups before or after applying (a letter from a minister or senior official to the Secretariat is sufficient);
 - The country must be fully up to date in meeting its Commonwealth membership obligations i.e. not in breach of the 'Abuja Guidelines' (we will inform the Government representative if their country is in arrears).

8. On how many applications may a single Government be the lead?

- A. For each intake, a country may submit up to three applications for each Action Group theme, up to five applications in total.

¹ Fiscal agents are financial institutions or other third parties receiving remittances and/or making disbursements on behalf of the state.

- However, a single Government may receive only up to four separate grants / awards in a 12-month period. If more than four Project Incubator applications are approved in principle, the country must choose which ones will be actioned;
- If a country is involved in multi-country applications (see below), we may in some cases waive the four-award limit outlined in the bullet above.

9. How many countries may be involved?

- A. We encourage and prefer multi-country (e.g. regional) applications. However, we acknowledge that with this level of granting, there may be insufficient support for large collaborations.

The majority of countries involved need to be Commonwealth.

If your project has broad pan-Commonwealth or global engagement, you will need to explain in a sentence or two how this will work.

10. May non-Commonwealth Governments be involved?

- A. Yes, in the case of multi-country applications or as a delivery partner.

However, a non-Commonwealth Government cannot be the lead entity or receive funding, so would need to be self-supporting with respect to its involvement.

If non-Commonwealth Governments are involved, the support they bring to the project can be counted as co-financing to the project. Enter their names under the 'Partners' section of the form.

11. Do Governments need to partner outside of government?

- A. No. However, external partnerships are highly recommended, and will be given higher scores, particularly for larger projects.

Qualifying partnerships are usually from the inter-governmental sector, NGO sector, private sector, or academia. However, multi-country government partnerships (see above) also count as a partnership.

12. Will you support the development of a project before it is actually a project, or later when we want to scale it up?

- A. Yes. As an incubator, we are a bit unusual because we support the full lifecycle of project development
- i *Rapid assessments* of Government capacity, needs and priorities to address a given ocean issue;
 - ii *Early preparatory work* on possible solutions, which usually also entails some capacity building and/or working with technical experts;
 - iii *Pilot project development* (proof of concept -the usual role of incubators);
 - iv *Direct support* for established but still small-medium sized projects;

- v *Assistance writing funding proposals* for medium and large projects for consideration by 3rd party funders.

Note that requests for assistance in this last category may be met with direct assistance through contracted proposal writers, rather than granting. Indeed, any of the five categories may be met with some direct technical assistance or training, alongside possible granting.

(However, technical assistance is not provided to write your grant proposal for the Project Incubator. But, if a proposal is turned down, we will provide you with feedback on what could be improved.)

13. What sort of capacity building will the Incubator support?

- A. Any capacity building related to developing a new ocean-related project, or to better managing an existing one, will be considered. In the application form, we mention a few options, outlined below, but we remain open to other suggestions as well.
 - i *Training*: you have identified a training course that meets the needs of your project and would like support for one or more staff to enrol.
 - ii *Technical assistance*: you are requesting help on a specific issue, which could be provided by a Commonwealth Secretariat Adviser or perhaps a contracted expert.
 - iii *Knowledge Exchange*: The Incubator can arrange a visit to another Commonwealth country that is already undertaking the activity that you wish to learn more about. Our Knowledge Exchange Programme has not yet begun, but we are open to suggestions about where to begin, and for what topics.

14. What else are you looking for in a project?

- A. Each application will be considered on its own merits. Innovative ‘business *unusual*’ creative solutions are particularly welcomed. Regardless of their innovation, however, all solutions still need to be realistic and achievable within the project timeframe and budget, given the human and technical resources available.

15. Where is the ‘save’ button? Can we save our application online and come back to it?

- A. There is no option to save your work part-way through the online application. You will need to fill out the form in one sitting. Therefore, we suggest that you download the offline version of the form from the [Incubator web page](#), fill it out, and then paste your answers into the online form when you are ready.

Having the offline version gives you the ‘big picture’, so that your responses as-a-whole properly characterise your proposed solution. It will also assist with your record keeping for the submitted project.

Project details

16. Will you fund brand new ideas? How developed does our project need to be?

- A. Yes, this is an incubator, and therefore it is focussed particularly on new and early-stage projects. However, as noted above, our incubator is a bit different, and all stages of a project lifecycle will be considered.

If you are bringing a new idea, your proposal should indicate the novel elements, the intended results, and the possibilities for upscaling.

17. What do you mean by ‘approach / methods’?

- A. Please outline how the proposed project will set out to achieve its objectives, and who will be engaged. If you are proposing a rapid assessment, outline what sorts of indicators will be developed.

If you are seeking support for grant writing, outline the methods of the proposed project(s).

For the Blue Charter knowledge exchange programme, explain how time spent in the proposed host country will support you in achieving your objectives.

For other capacity building, explain the ways in which capacity will be built and for what purpose.

18. What about my intellectual property?

- A. The grant beneficiary is responsible for implementing the project, activity, or service and retains ownership of its results, including intellectual property (IP) rights generated or arising as part of the Project Incubator. Any pre-existing or arising IP remains with you and your partners per your internal agreements.

That said, we believe that all information that can be shared should be shared. Non-proprietary data, problem-solving and lessons learned, for example, should be shared.

Specifically:

- The Commonwealth Secretariat does not seek to own any of the IP resulting from its activities funded under the Blue Charter Project Incubator. Ownership vests as agreed between the organizations collaborating on the research.
- Publications and underlying data generated by Blue Charter-funded activities must be made openly accessible, allowing others to build upon and re-use this knowledge and information.
- For non-commercial use, owners of IP resulting from Blue Charter-funded activities must provide a free-to-use, Creative Commons or Open Government-type license.

- For commercial use, Blue Charter-funded IP, developments and technologies should be made available and accessible on reasonable terms and at an affordable price.
- Applicants are asked to briefly outline the IP situation, if any, in question 13 (methods). At the acceptance stage, applicants must agree to the Commonwealth Blue Charter Project Incubator's IP Policy, as outlined above.

19. What is a 'key deliverable'? Do meetings count?

- A. A key deliverable is a product or service or action that directly fulfils one or more of the project's objectives. Meetings usually are a steppingstone towards creating a deliverable but are not a key deliverable themselves -with the notable exception of training sessions. Key deliverables should be either tangible or measurable; e.g., a physical prototype product, how many people were trained, how many mangrove trees were planted; or what elements were assessed in a rapid assessment. The deliverables need to be achieved within the timeframe of the project.

20. What do you mean by positive impacts and outcomes?

- A. We use these terms loosely to mean the positive change that your project hopes to achieve. *Don't worry about whether it is actually an impact or an outcome.* Just list what will be changed positively due to the activities and deliverables of this proposed project.

21. What do you mean by risks?

- A. Risk management is part of good project management. Risks are things that could happen or indeed have happened in the past that could impede your project's progress. All projects have risks. For example, is an election planned? What might a change of government mean for the project? Your stated risks should not be far-fetched, but rather reasonable issues that should be considered and planned for.

22. Does my solution have to be innovative?

- A. No. Not all worthwhile projects are innovative. *However, if you have a worthwhile and innovative idea, we are interested in hearing about it.* Or, if not, just tell us about why this project is needed, what gap it will fill, and how it may be improving on other similar projects that have preceded it.

23. What do you mean by 'sustainable'?

- A. We are looking for ways that your proposed solution can continue to exist, and perhaps even grow, after the grant ends. What will be the next steps? If this is a pilot project, how might you scale it up? If it is live training, perhaps it can be turned into self-paced online learning e-modules? If it is a rapid assessment, will it be taken to Cabinet? Perhaps your solution can be scaled up into a methodology that could be shared with other Commonwealth countries?

24. What do you mean by ‘inclusion and equity’?

- A. The Commonwealth Secretariat is committed to advancing gender equality and engagement of youth (under 30 years of age). Depending on the funding level, this question becomes of increasing value in our evaluation scoring scheme.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter has as cross-cutting themes the inclusion of gender, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Your application should preferably address one or more of these.

25. Tell me more about co-funding. Does the lead Government have to match exactly the amount that will be provided under the project?

- A. Co-funding is desirable but not strictly required; e.g., for smaller grants.

Co-funding can come from any third party; i.e. the Government and/or project partners and/or another funder.

Even though it is sometimes called ‘match funding’, it doesn’t have to match the exact value of the grant.

26. My project is small, so I don’t need to have partnerships or co-funding, right?

- A. Smaller projects will still be scored on these criteria, but they are not weighted as heavily as for larger ones. So yes, a promising smaller project may still receive support even without meeting these two recommended criteria. In other words, without partnerships or co-funding, it is easier to get a smaller grant than a larger one.

27. What costs are not eligible?

- A. Ineligible costs will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In general the following categories in this non-exhaustive list are not covered:

- i Government staff time;
- ii Work that is part of a government’s usual day-to-day activities;
- iii Ministerial-level travel;
- iv Excessive and unnecessary travel;
- v Sub-contracting not identified in the project proposal.

If you are in doubt, please ask us.

28. What if I don’t spend all the money?

- A. Unspent funds need to be returned to us. If there are issues in executing the project, please let us know as soon as you can, ahead of the expiry of the grant, and we will work with you to find solutions. Once grants have expired, we will not be able to provide extensions.

29. If I am turned down can I apply again?

- A. Yes, absolutely. We hope that the Incubator will lead to many successful projects, including ones that initially needed more work.

Annex 1: Additional background information

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is the Commonwealth's flagship ocean initiative. Globally unique, it brings together member countries' governments actively addressing the myriad of ocean-related issues and commitments that they face. Currently, 47 governments from every ocean basin in the world participate in the 10 Action Groups.

Managed by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Blue Charter Project Incubator:

- Focuses on government-led projects, throughout their lifecycle, under the Action Group themes;
- Encourages 'rapid assessments' to guide marine policy-setting;
- Provides mentoring and technical support to governments on the development of ocean-related pilot projects that build social, ecological and climate resilience;
- Supports meeting global ocean commitments including '30 by 30' and the UN SDGs;
- Facilitates project partnerships with non-governmental entities;
- Provide leveraged seed funding for those ready to proceed;
- Assists in proposal writing for medium to large projects;
- Encourages planning for sustainability and scaling up, including regional initiatives;
- Follows best practices, including transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

Ocean space is a shared commons governed within national jurisdictions exclusively by government. Thus, even more than on land, *the government* (usually at the national level) *is critical to achieving lasting security and sustainability for the ocean*. Being government-led, the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups are uniquely positioned, thereby greatly increasing the prospects of lasting positive outcomes.

Ocean funding options are limited, however, especially for small island and coastal states. There are even fewer options for groups typically marginalised, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Of the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals, SDG 14 (the ocean), is by far the least funded.

Annex 2: The Blue Charter Action Groups (as of 01 Sept 2022)

Commonwealth

Clean Ocean

Alliance (Marine Plastics) (34)

UK (Champion)

Vanuatu

(Champion)

Antigua and

Barbuda

Australia

Bangladesh

Barbados

Belize

Cameroon

Canada

Fiji

The Gambia

Ghana

Kenya

Kiribati

Maldives

Mauritius

Mozambique

Namibia

Nauru

New Zealand

Nigeria

Rwanda

Saint Lucia

Samoa

Seychelles

Sierra Leone

South Africa

Sri Lanka

St Vincent and the

Grenadines

Tonga

Trinidad and

Tobago

Tuvalu

Uganda

Zambia

Coral Reef

Protection and Restoration (9)

Australia

(Champion)

Belize (Champion)

Mauritius

(Champion)

Bahamas

Barbados

Jamaica

Sri Lanka

Trinidad and

Tobago

UK

Mangrove

Ecosystems and Livelihoods (13)

Sri Lanka

(Champion)

Antigua & Barbuda

Australia

Bahamas

Bangladesh

Guyana

Jamaica

Kenya

Maldives

Nigeria

Pakistan

Trinidad and

Tobago

Vanuatu

UK

Marine Protected

Areas (18)

Barbados

(Champion)

Seychelles

(Champion)

Bahamas

Belize

Dominica

Gambia

Ghana

Guyana

Jamaica

Kiribati

Malta

Papua New Guinea

Samoa

Sri Lanka

St Kitts and Nevis

Tonga

UK

Vanuatu

Ocean Acidification (5)

New Zealand

(Champion)

Barbados

Malta

Seychelles

UK

Ocean and Climate Change (11)

Fiji (Champion)

Anguilla (UK)

Bahamas

Bangladesh

Barbados

Canada

Malta

Solomon Islands

Trinidad and

Tobago

St Vincent and the

Grenadines

UK

Ocean Observation (7)

Canada (Champion)

Australia

Barbados

Cyprus

Malta

Sri Lanka

Trinidad and

Tobago

Sustainable

Aquaculture (9)

Cyprus (Champion)

Bahamas

Bangladesh

Barbados

Fiji

Malaysia

Mauritius

Seychelles

Trinidad and

Tobago

Sustainable Blue Economy (14)

Antigua and

Barbuda

(Champion)

Kenya (Champion)

Anguilla (UK)

Bahamas

Bangladesh

Canada

Guyana

Mozambique

Papua New Guinea

Seychelles

Sri Lanka

St Kitts and Nevis

St Vincent and the

Grenadines

Trinidad and

Tobago

Sustainable Coastal Fisheries (6)

Kiribati (Champion)

Maldives

(Champion)

Australia

Guyana

Malta

Sri Lanka