

COMMONWEALTH BLUE CHARTER INCUBATOR

ROUND II

APPLICATION GUIDELINES & ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Application deadline: 11 December 2026, 23:59 GMT (UTC+0)



Purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines explain who may apply, what the Incubator will fund, how to prepare each part of the application, what documents to submit, and how applications will be assessed and selected. Applicants should read them alongside the application form and Frequently Asked Questions.

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1. Key Information at a Glance

Item	Requirement
Grant amount	£20,000 to £50,000 per project.
Application stages	• Grant Application Form; • Request for detailed budget, work plan and due diligence from eligible applications; • Scoring and project selection; • Signing grant agreement; • Project commencement.
Application deadline:	Friday 11 December 2026, 23:59 GMT (UTC+0)
Eligible countries	All 56 Commonwealth Member Countries Each country may submit up to 2 project applications per incubator funding round.
Lead applicant	One legally established national or sub-national government entity of a Commonwealth member country, such as a government ministry, department, agency or other public body with formal government status. Each lead applicant may put forward only one project proposal per Incubator funding round.
Project duration	Minimum 6 months and maximum 18 months.
Earliest project start	From Q3 2027 - This will allow sufficient time to complete the grant selection process, sign grant agreements, undertake banking and due diligence checks, onboard grantees, and facilitate the first disbursements.
Submission method	Online application form on SurveyMonkey. The Word version is for drafting and review only.
Application structure	Five pages: Basic Information; Alignment with Commonwealth and Government Priorities; Project Details; Project Financing; Supporting Documents and Declarations.
Selection outlook	It is anticipated that 10 to 15 projects will be selected by Q2 2027.
Contact	bluecharter@commonwealth.int , subject: Blue Charter Incubator - Application Query.

Important: The online form cannot be saved and returned later. Draft and internally approve all answers in the Word version available on the [Round II page](#), assemble all uploads, and check figures and word limits before beginning the online submission on SurveyMonkey.

2. Background and Purpose

The Commonwealth Blue Charter Incubator provides catalytic grants of £20,000 to £50,000 to Commonwealth member countries to develop and pilot country-led initiatives that address ocean challenges and advance sustainable, inclusive and resilient blue economies.

The Incubator enables governments to initiate and scale solutions aligned with national priorities. Projects may generate evidence, strengthen institutional capacity, inform policy, legal or regulatory reform, and provide training or technical assistance. Projects may be delivered at national or sub-national level and may involve NGOs, academic or research institutions, community organisations or the private sector as implementing partners.

The Incubator is aligned with the goals of the [Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration](#), adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government at CHOGM in 2024. Applications should show a direct relationship between the problem, proposed activities, expected results and the relevant Declaration theme or themes.

3. Funding Partners and Geographic Windows

Round II is supported by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, and CAF - Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation: core support for technical assistance and capacity building.
- [Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation](#): dedicated support for projects in South Asia and Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- [CAF - Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean](#): dedicated support for projects in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

All 56 Commonwealth member countries may apply and will be assessed through a common process. **The dedicated windows do not prevent all Commonwealth countries outside those regions from applying.**

4. Application and Selection Process

Stage	What happens
1. Grant Application Form	Applicants submit the full online form on SurveyMonkey , including an indicative budget and the required supporting documents.
2. Eligibility review, detailed budget, work plan and due diligence	The Secretariat conducts an initial eligibility assessment. Applicants progressing beyond Stage 1 will be asked for a more detailed budget, work plan and due-diligence documentation.
3. Scoring and selection	Eligible applications are scored against the published criteria and presented to the Blue Charter Incubator Steering Committee. Clarifications may be requested.
4. Grant agreement	10-15 selected projects enter into a grant agreement setting out the funding

	amount, disbursement schedule, reporting requirements and other conditions.
5. Project commencement	Following signature, funds are disbursed according to the grant agreement. Baseline information and reporting templates are provided at the project start.

Timeline: The Secretariat aims to sign grant agreements with successful applicants by the end of Q2 2027. Applicants should therefore propose a start date from Q3 2027. This will allow sufficient time to complete the grant selection process, sign grant agreements, undertake banking and due diligence checks, onboard grantees, and facilitate the first disbursements.

5. Eligibility

5.1 Overall

- The application must be submitted by a Commonwealth member government*. Each country may submit up to 2 project applications per incubator funding round.
- Lead applicant: This can include a legally established national or sub-national government entity of a Commonwealth member country, such as a government ministry, department, agency or other public body with formal government status. Each lead applicant may only put forward 1 project proposal per incubator funding round.
- The lead entity will be responsible for receiving and managing the grant, implementation, and compliance with grant conditions.
- The application must name a government focal point and may provide up to three additional government contact points.

Please note that the Commonwealth 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).

5.2 Country coverage and multi-country applications

- Regional, national, and sub-national proposals are welcome.
- For a multi-country or regional submission, list every country directly engaged and explain the shared rationale, delivery model and added value of the multi-country approach in no more than 100 words.
- Where more than one country is involved, the majority must be Commonwealth member countries.
- Only one government entity can be the contractual lead, who will sign the grant agreement.

5.3 Partners

- Any non-government organisation or entity supporting or delivering the project is considered a partner.
- Partners may include NGOs, academic or research institutions, community organisations and private sector organisations etc.
- Name only partners that have confirmed their interest. Up to three principal partners may be entered in the application, in order of importance to delivery.

- For each partner, provide organisation and contact details, its proposed role, relevant expertise, experience and track record, and explain why it is well placed to deliver that role.
- Written evidence is required for each named partner, such as a letter of intent, letter of support, memorandum of understanding, partnership scoping letter or other written confirmation.

5.4 Previous applicants

Unsuccessful Commonwealth Blue Charter Incubator Round I applicants are encouraged to resubmit, and previously successful Round I applicants may also apply.

5.5 Ethical requirements

All selected projects must comply with the Commonwealth Secretariat [Code of Ethics](#). Applicants must confirm at submission that they have read it, agree in principle to comply, and will incorporate its principles into project activities if selected.

6. Types of Projects Funded

The funding is intended to support a broad range of practical, government-led ocean projects that contribute to the goals of the [Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration](#). Projects may be at any stage of development or implementation, from early-stage research, planning and feasibility work to implementation, demonstration, evaluation and scale-up.

- Eligible projects may include, but are not limited to:
- Pilot, demonstration and proof-of-concept projects
- Feasibility studies and technical or economic assessments
- Technical training, capacity building and institutional strengthening
- Projects that strengthen access to finance or develop investment-ready project pipelines
- Research, assessments, studies and data collection
- Policy, strategy, planning and regulatory development
- Development, testing or implementation of practical tools, technologies and approaches
- Implementation of existing national ocean policies, strategies or action plans
- Community engagement, stakeholder participation and awareness activities
- Replication, adaptation, scale-up or improvement of existing initiatives
- Other activities that directly contribute to the goals of the [Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration](#).

This is not an exhaustive list. Applicants should contact bluecharter@commonwealth.int before submission if they are uncertain whether their project proposal would be eligible for funding.

7. Priority Areas and Strategic Alignment

Applicants may select up to two themes from the [Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration](#) that are most relevant to the proposal:

- Blue Economy
- Marine Pollution
- Marine Protection and Restoration

- Ocean-Climate Nexus
- Sustainable Fisheries
- Other, where clearly explained.

The alignment response should identify the selected theme or themes and explain the direct connection between the project challenge, activities and intended results. Applicants are encouraged to avoid simply describing the Declaration and instead show what the project will contribute.

Applicants must also explain alignment with country and ministry priorities in the short to medium term. Applicants are encouraged to cite the relevant national or ministry policy, strategy, action plan, agreement, international commitment or target, and describe the specific contribution the project will make. Examples include policy development, implementation of an agreement, institutional capacity building, or progress towards a national or global target.

8. Preparing the Application, Section by Section

The guidance below mirrors the five pages of the online application and explains what assessors need from each response. Complete every required question and remain within each stated word limit. Text over the limit will not be considered.

You can download the [Word version of the application form](#) to prepare your responses before completing the online form.

8.1 Page 1: Basic Information

Application item	What to provide
Project title	A short, specific title that distinguishes the project and reflects its purpose.
Duration and dates	Duration in months, plus estimated start and end dates. The duration must be 6 to 18 months and the start date must be from Q3 2027.
Region and countries	Select the Commonwealth region and list all directly engaged countries. For multi-country proposals, provide the shared rationale in up to 100 words.
Lead government entity	Full official name and address. Only one lead may be named; it will sign the grant agreement and receive and manage funds. The lead entity must be a legally established national or sub-national government entity of a Commonwealth member country, such as a government ministry, department, agency or other public body with formal government status.
Government focal point	Name, position, department or agency, ministry, city or town, country, email and telephone number with country code.
Additional government contacts	Up to three additional officials, where applicable.
Partners	Confirm whether partners will assist. For up to three principal partners provide organisation name and address, lead contact, title, email,

	telephone and proposed role.
Partner role and relevance, 500 words	Explain each partner's contribution, expertise, experience and track record, why it is suited to the role, and how the partnership strengthens delivery.

8.2 Page 2: Alignment with Commonwealth and Government Priorities

Response	Applicant guidance
Declaration themes	Select no more than two themes that most closely match the proposal.
Alignment with the Declaration, 300 words	Explain how the problem, activities, deliverables and expected outcomes contribute to the selected theme or themes.
Country and ministry alignment, 300 words	Name the relevant priorities, policies, strategies, agreements or commitments and explain the proposed contribution in the short to medium term. Be specific about the responsible institution and intended change.

8.3 Page 3: Project Details

Response	What a strong response should include
Executive summary, 200 words	The problem, proposed response, location, lead and principal partners, beneficiaries, main activities and expected results. Write to a non-technical reader.
Problem definition, 300 words	The current situation affected people or institutions, evidence of need, why it is a priority, the gap in existing responses, and why action is needed now.
Project approach, 1,000 words	Purpose and objectives; methodology; main activities; sequence and indicative timing; milestones; roles of the lead and partners; how the approach responds to the problem; and why it is feasible within the grant period.
Project management, 500 words	Governance and oversight arrangements; roles and responsibilities; project manager; decision-making; coordination with partners; financial oversight; quality assurance; escalation and reporting arrangements.
Key deliverables, up to five, 25 words each	Specific and verifiable products, services or completed outputs. Deliverables should not be broad aspirations.
Results and monitoring, 500 words	Expected outputs and outcomes; related indicators and how monitoring and learning will inform delivery.
Risk management, 500 words	Identify the five most significant risks and dependencies to successful project delivery. Describe their potential impact and outline the mitigation measures that will be put in place.
Beneficiaries and inclusion, 500 words	Describe who will benefit from the project and how. Explain how relevant local stakeholders, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, will be meaningfully involved in the design and implementation of the project, where relevant to the project context. Describe the measures you will take to ensure meaningful participation, accessibility and equitable benefits, and how

	feedback from stakeholders will be gathered and used to inform the project. Projects are encouraged to demonstrate meaningful participation of at least one of these groups, where relevant to the project context.
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Distinguish outputs and outcomes

Outputs are the tangible products or services delivered by the project. Outcomes are the changes expected because those outputs are used, such as improved capacity, policy, practice, behaviour, environmental condition or livelihoods.

8.4 Page 4: Project Financing

Applicants must request between £20,000 and £50,000 in GBP. A grant cannot be divided into smaller grants per recipient to circumvent the £50,000 ceiling.

Co-funding accounts for 10% of the total application score. Therefore, projects that present co-funding will score higher against this criterion. Co-funding means cash or in-kind resources from outside the Incubator grant that directly support project delivery. It may come from the lead government, project partners, donors or other funders.

Response	What to include
Grant funding requested	The exact amount requested from the Incubator in GBP is correct.
Cash co-funding	Total amount, source, what it will support and whether it is confirmed or anticipated. Enter N/A if none.
In-kind co-funding	Reasonable GBP valuation, provider, nature of support and status. Examples include staff time, technical expertise, equipment, facilities and data. Enter N/A if none.
Value for money, 500 words	How costs are reasonable and proportionate; how resources will be used efficiently; how existing assets, partnerships and contributions are leveraged; and how the requested funds will achieve the proposed outputs and outcomes.
Sustainability, 500 words	How activities and results will continue after the grant; institutional ownership; capacity developed; maintenance arrangements; knowledge sharing; future financing; and opportunities for replication or scale-up.

Consistency check

The grant request, cash co-funding, in-kind valuation and totals must be consistent across the application answers, indicative budget and supporting evidence. Evidence is required for confirmed co-funding.

8.5 Page 5: Supporting Documents and Declarations

Prepare uploads before opening the online form. Use clear file names that identify the project and document type. Where multiple partnerships or co-funding letters exist, they may be combined into one file for upload.

9. Budget

9.1 Indicative budget

An indicative budget is required with the initial application. It should show the main activities or cost categories, estimated costs, the amount requested from the Incubator, cash co-funding, in-kind contributions and other expenses. The figures must match the financing responses in the form. Applicants progressing beyond the initial eligibility review will be asked for a more detailed budget and work plan before scoring and project selection.

9.2 Valuing in-kind contributions

Use a reasonable and transparent monetary value in GBP. State the item or service, provider, basis of valuation where possible, and amount. Do not count the same contribution twice or include resources that are not directly available to the proposed project.

10. Eligible and Ineligible Costs

The grant should fund additional, project-specific costs that are necessary for the approved activities. Applicants should clearly identify all proposed subcontracting and ensure procurement requirements are followed.

Any expenditure that is not directly related to the approved project activities, is not reasonable and necessary for achieving the approved results, or has not been included in the approved budget, will not be eligible for funding.

The following non-exhaustive categories are ineligible:

- Salaries or staff costs for any government organisation
- Any costs that address normal government operations
- Exchange-rate losses or bank charges incurred in receiving, converting or transferring the grant. Funding will be transferred to the lead government in GBP, using the applicable exchange rate on the date of transfer.
- Bonuses, honoraria or performance-related payments to government officials or partner staff.
- Goods and services that have not been procured in accordance with the applicable procurement requirements.
- Entertainment, hospitality or social events that are not directly necessary for achieving the project results.
- Fines, penalties, interest, legal costs arising from non-compliance, or other costs resulting from the applicant's failure to meet its obligations.
- Contingency or unspecified costs that are not linked to a defined project activity.
- Costs incurred before the approved project start date, unless expressly agreed in writing.
- Costs incurred after the approved project end date, unless expressly agreed in writing.
- Purchase of vehicles or other major capital assets, unless specifically justified and approved.
- Land or property acquisition, construction or major infrastructure works, unless specifically approved.

- General operational and administrative costs that are not directly attributable to the approved project, including membership fees.
- Debt repayment, loans or financing costs.
- Recoverable taxes, including VAT/GST where the applicant is able to recover them.
- Costs already funded by another donor or funding source (double funding).
- Costs that benefit individuals or organisations without a clear link to the approved project objectives.
- Political campaigning, lobbying or partisan political activities.
- Gifts, donations or contributions to other organisations, unless directly related to an approved project activity.
- Duplication of existing Commonwealth Secretariat-funded activities or other donor-funded projects.

This is not an exhaustive list. Applicants should contact bluecharter@commonwealth.int before submission if they are uncertain whether a material cost is eligible.

Any grant funds that remain unspent at the end of the project must be returned to the Blue Charter Incubator. Please note that extensions to the grant period cannot be provided once the grant has expired.

11. Assessment Criteria

Eligible applications will be assessed and scored against these marking criteria.

The marks for the assessment of Stage I (Grant Application) and Stage II (Additional documentation request) will be added to provide a final score out of 100.

Applicants should ensure that evidence appears in the relevant responses rather than relying on assessors to infer it from attachments.

Criterion	What assessors will look for	Score
Application completion, including supporting documentation and additional information requested	Complete and clear responses; all required information and supporting documentation provided; responses address the questions directly and remain within word limits; requested additional information is provided when requested.	5
Strength of partnerships	Relevant and credible partners; clear roles and responsibilities; evidence that partners bring appropriate expertise, resources, networks or other value; realistic and meaningful contribution to project delivery.	5
Alignment with the Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration	Clear alignment between the identified Declaration theme(s) and the project's problem, activities, deliverables and expected outcomes; appropriate selection of no more than two themes.	5
Country and ministry alignment	Clear links to relevant national or sub-national priorities, policies, strategies, agreements or commitments; specific identification of the responsible government institution; clear explanation of the contribution the project will make in the short to medium term.	5

Problem definition	Clear description of the current situation affected people or institutions, evidence of need, why the issue is a priority, gaps in existing responses, and why action is needed now.	5
Project approach	Clear purpose and objectives; appropriate methodology and activities; logical sequencing and timing; realistic milestones; clear roles for the lead and partners; strong connection between the approach and identified problem; and feasibility within the grant period.	10
Project management and Project Team Profiles	Clear governance and oversight; defined roles and responsibilities; appropriate project management arrangements; robust project team with relevant capacity, expertise and experience; clear decision-making, partner coordination, financial oversight, quality assurance, escalation and reporting arrangements.	5
Results and monitoring	Clear and realistic outputs and outcomes; appropriate indicators, baselines and targets; monitoring and review mechanism; and evidence that learning will inform project delivery.	5
Risk management	Identification of the five most significant risks and dependencies; understanding of their potential impact on delivery; and realistic, proportionate mitigation measures.	5
Beneficiaries and inclusion	Clear identification of beneficiaries and expected benefits; meaningful involvement of relevant stakeholders, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities where relevant; consideration of participation, accessibility and equitable benefits; and clear use of stakeholder feedback.	5
Co-funding (cash and in-kind)	Level and quality of cash and in-kind contributions; clear identification of sources and intended use; credible GBP valuation of in-kind contributions; and clarity on whether contributions are confirmed or anticipated.	10
Sustainability	Clear plans for continuing activities and results after the grant; institutional ownership; maintenance of outputs or assets; capacity developed through the project; knowledge sharing; future financing; and potential for replication or scale-up.	5
Value for money	Costs are reasonable and proportionate to the proposed activities and results; resources will be used efficiently; existing assets, partnerships and contributions are leveraged; and there is a clear link between requested funding and the proposed outputs and outcomes.	5
Indicative and detailed budget	Budget is realistic, appropriate and proportionate to the proposed activities and results; costs are clearly allocated; expenditure is eligible and justified; and the detailed budget requested at Stage 2 provides sufficient information to assess the proposed expenditure.	10
Work plan	This will be collected at Stage 2. Clear and realistic sequencing of activities, milestones and deliverables; appropriate timing within the grant period; and consistency with the proposed approach and key deliverables.	5
Overall project quality and merit	Overall strength, coherence and credibility of the proposal; the extent to which the different elements form a convincing and feasible project; and any material strengths or weaknesses not	10

	fully captured by the individual criteria.	
Total	The marks for the assessment of Stage I (Grant Application) and Stage II (Additional documentation request) will be added to provide a final score out of 100.	100

12. Supporting Documentation

Document	Requirement and content
Evidence of government endorsement	Required. A letter confirming the government's role as lead applicant and commitment to sign the grant agreement if successful.
Evidence of partnerships	Required where partners are named. Written confirmation of the partnership and proposed role, such as a letter of intent, support letter, MOU or partnership scoping letter.
Project team overview	Required. One concise paragraph per core government and partner team member, covering project role, relevant experience and qualifications.
Indicative budget	Required. PDF, DOC or DOCX. If prepared in Excel, convert to PDF. Include activities, estimated costs, grant requests, cash co-funding and in-kind contributions. A more detailed budget will be requested if the project passes Stage 1: Grant Application Form.
Evidence of co-funding arrangements	Required for confirmed co-funding. May include a commitment letter, grant agreement, letter of intent or other relevant evidence.
Additional supporting documents	Optional. Upload only material that directly supports claims in the application and is relevant to assessment. A work plan, detailed budget and any basic due diligence documents will be requested in the next round.

13. Final Applicant Checklist

- ☐ One eligible Commonwealth government entity is clearly identified as lead - this can be an established national or sub-national government entity of a Commonwealth member country, such as a government ministry, department, agency or other public body with formal government status.
- ☐ The project duration is between 6 and 18 months and must the project start from Q3 2027.
- ☐ All directly engaged countries and the Commonwealth region are correctly listed.
- ☐ For a multi-country proposal, the rationale and shared delivery model are clear.
- ☐ Each named partner has confirmed interest and has supporting evidence.
- ☐ No more than two Declaration themes are selected and alignment is explained.
- ☐ Government or ministry priorities and the project's short- to medium-term contribution are specific.
- ☐ The problem, approach, deliverables, outcomes, monitoring and management arrangements form a coherent results chain.

- ☐ Up to five major risks and realistic mitigations are provided.
- ☐ Beneficiaries and meaningful stakeholder participation are explained.
- ☐ The grant request is between £20,000 and £50,000.
- ☐ Cash and in-kind contributions are separated, valued in GBP and marked confirmed or anticipated.
- ☐ All financial figures match the indicative budget and supporting evidence.
- ☐ Sustainability, institutional ownership, future financing and opportunities for scale are addressed.
- ☐ All required supporting documents are ready in accepted file formats.
- ☐ All required questions are complete and within word limits.
- ☐ The final application is submitted through the online form before the deadline.

Questions

For questions not answered in these guidelines or the Frequently Asked Questions, email bluecharter@commonwealth.int with the subject line “Blue Charter Incubator - Application Query”.