

COMMONWEALTH BLUE CHARTER INCUBATOR

ROUND II

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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



Purpose of the Frequently Asked Questions document

These FAQs answer common questions about eligibility, partnerships, project design, financing, supporting documents, submission and selection. They should be read alongside the Application Guidelines and Grant Application Form.

Contents

1. [Eligibility](#)
2. [Countries, partners and project arrangements](#)
3. [Project scope, duration and strategic alignment](#)
4. [Funding, co-funding and eligible costs](#)
5. [Preparing and submitting the application](#)
6. [Assessment, selection and next steps](#)
7. [Appendix A. Glossary of terms](#)

1. Eligibility

1. Who can apply?

All Commonwealth governments are eligible to apply*. The lead applicant must be one legally established national or sub-national government entity of a Commonwealth member country, such as a ministry, department, agency or other public body with formal government status. This is the organisation which will sign the grant agreement.

**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).*

2. Can an NGO, university, research institution, community organisation or private company apply directly?

No. A non-government entity cannot be the lead applicant, but it may participate as a project partner. The government lead remains responsible for the application, grant agreement, grant management, implementation and compliance.

3. Can a sub-national government entity apply?

Yes. A legally established sub-national government entity with formal government status may apply as the lead applicant.

4. How many applications may be submitted?

Each Commonwealth member country may submit up to two project applications in the funding round. Each lead applicant (e.g. a particular Ministry) may put forward only one project proposal per funding round.

5. Can previous applicants apply again?

Yes. Unsuccessful Round I applicants are encouraged to revise and resubmit. Previously successful Round I applicants may also apply, provided the Round II eligibility requirements are met.

6. There are two dedicated funding windows for the Caribbean, and South Asia/Pacific SIDS. Do applicants need to be located in a region covered by these dedicated funding window?

All 56 Commonwealth member countries are eligible to apply through a common application and assessment process. While dedicated funding is available, countries outside these regions are equally welcome to apply and will be considered for funding through the Incubator.

2. Countries, partners and project arrangements

7. Are multi-country or regional projects eligible?

Yes. National, sub-national, multi-country and regional proposals are welcome. Where more than one country is involved, the majority must be Commonwealth member countries.

8. Who signs the grant agreement for a multi-country project?

Only one Commonwealth government entity may be the contractual lead. It will sign the grant agreement and receive and manage the grant.

9. Is a partner required?

No. However, partnerships are encouraged where they add relevant expertise, capacity, resources, networks or delivery reach.

10. Who is considered a partner?

Any non-government organisation or entity supporting or delivering the project is considered a partner. This may include an NGO, academic or research institution, community organisation or private-sector organization.

11. How many partners can be listed?

The application form allows details of up to three principal partners, listed in order of importance to delivery. The wider project may involve other stakeholders, but the application should focus on the principal delivery partners.

12. What evidence is required from partners?

Each named partner must have confirmed its interest. Upload written evidence such as a letter of intent, letter of support, memorandum of understanding, partnership scoping letter or other written confirmation that describes the proposed role.

13. Can a fiscal agent or partner receive the grant instead of the government lead?

The published Round II guidance states that the lead government entity will receive and manage the grant. However, in a number of Round I projects, governments and their implementing partners established fiscal

agreements that, as an exception, enabled the grant funds to be transferred directly to the implementing partner.

Where this arrangement is proposed, it should be established as early as possible in the application and grant agreement process to help avoid delays to disbursement at the start of the project.

3. Project scope, duration and strategic alignment

14. What types of projects may be funded?

Round II will 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 different stages of development or implementation, from 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.

15. What is the required project duration?

Projects must run for at least 6 months and no more than 18 months.

16. When may a project start?

Applicants should propose a start date from Q3 2027. Grant agreements are expected to be signed by the end of Q2 2027, subject to completion of selection, due diligence, banking checks and onboarding processes.

17. Which Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration themes may be selected?

Applicants may select no more than two themes: Blue Economy; Marine Pollution; Marine Protection and Restoration; Ocean-Climate Nexus; Sustainable Fisheries; or Other, where clearly explained.

18. How should alignment with the Declaration be demonstrated?

Show the direct connection between the identified problem, proposed activities, deliverables and expected outcomes and the selected theme or themes.

19. How should alignment with government or ministry priorities be demonstrated?

Name the relevant national or ministry policy, strategy, action plan, agreement, commitment or target, identify the responsible institution, and explain the project's specific contribution in the short to medium term.

20. What is the difference between an output and an outcome?

An output is a tangible product or service delivered by the project, such as a completed assessment, tool or training programme. An outcome is the change expected because the output is used, such as improved capacity, policy, practice, behaviour, environmental condition or livelihoods.

21. How many risks and deliverables should be included?

List up to five key deliverables, each in no more than 25 words. Identify the five most significant risks and dependencies, their potential effects and proportionate mitigation measures.

4. Funding, co-funding and eligible costs

22. How much funding may be requested?

Applicants may 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 per project.

23. Is co-funding mandatory?

No minimum co-funding requirement is stated. However, co-funding is assessed and accounts for 10% of the total application score, so credible cash or in-kind contributions will strengthen an application.

24. What counts as cash co-funding?

Cash co-funding is additional financial support, outside the Incubator grant, that directly supports the project. It may come from the lead government, partners, donors, reserves or other funders.

25. What counts as in-kind co-funding?

In-kind co-funding is a non-cash resource directly available to the project, such as staff time, technical expertise, equipment, facilities or data. Please calculate a reasonable and transparent value in GBP; you will be required to explain the provider and basis of valuation in the detailed budget when requested.

26. Can anticipated co-funding be included?

Yes. State whether each contribution is confirmed or anticipated. Evidence is required for confirmed co-funding.

27. Can government salaries or normal operating costs be charged to the grant?

No. Salaries or staff costs for government organisations and costs relating to normal government operations are ineligible. Government staff time may, where appropriate and reasonably valued, be shown as an in-kind contribution rather than charged to the grant.

28. Are partner staff costs eligible?

Partner costs must be additional, project-specific, reasonable, necessary and included in the approved budget. Bonuses, honoraria and performance-related payments to government officials or partner staff are ineligible. Applicants should explain the basis of any partner personnel cost and ensure it complies with procurement and grant conditions.

29. Are equipment, capital assets, travel or subcontracting eligible?

These costs are not automatically eligible. All proposed costs must be directly related to the project, reasonable, necessary and appropriately budgeted.

- Equipment and capital assets: May be eligible where they are essential to project delivery and adequately justified. Major capital assets, vehicles, construction and infrastructure require specific justification and prior approval.
- Travel: May be eligible where it is necessary for project delivery and represents reasonable and proportionate costs.
- Subcontracting: May be eligible where clearly justified and must be disclosed in the application. All applicable procurement requirements must be followed.
- Land or buildings: The purchase of land or buildings is generally ineligible, unless essential to project implementation. In such cases, ownership must be transferred to the final beneficiaries of the project.

If you are unsure whether a particular cost is eligible, please contact us before submitting your application.

30. Can costs incurred before the project starts be reimbursed?

No, unless expressly agreed in writing. Costs incurred before the approved start date or after the approved end date are ineligible unless written approval is given.

31. What happens to unspent funds?

Any unspent grant funds must be returned to the Commonwealth Secretariat. If you anticipate challenges in delivering the project within the agreed timeframe or fully utilising the grant, please contact us as soon as

possible and, wherever feasible, before the grant expiry date. We will work with you to identify appropriate solutions. Please note that extensions to the grant period cannot be provided once the grant has expired.

5. Preparing and submitting the application

32. How is the application submitted?

Submit the complete application through the SurveyMonkey online form. The Word version is for drafting and internal review only and does not constitute a submission.

33. Can the online form be saved and completed later?

No. The online form cannot be saved and returned to later. Finalise and approve answers in the Word format provided, assemble uploads, and check financial figures and word limits before starting the online submission.

34. What is the application deadline?

The deadline is 11 December 2026 at 23:59 GMT (UTC+0). Applicants should allow sufficient time to complete all five pages and upload documents before the deadline.

35. What happens if an answer exceeds the word limit?

Text above the stated word limit will not be considered. Keep essential evidence in the relevant response rather than relying on attachments.

36. What documents are required at the initial application stage?

Prepare evidence of government endorsement; evidence for each named partnership; a project team overview; an indicative budget; and evidence for any confirmed co-funding. Additional directly relevant supporting documents are optional.

37. What should the indicative budget contain?

Show the main activities or cost categories, estimated costs, the amount requested from the Incubator, cash co-funding, in-kind contributions and other expenses. All figures must match the financing answers and supporting evidence.

38. What file formats are accepted for the indicative budget?

The indicative budget may be uploaded as PDF, DOC or DOCX. If it is prepared in Excel, convert it to PDF before uploading.

39. Can several letters be combined into one upload?

Yes. Multiple partnership letters or co-funding letters may be combined into a single clearly named file for upload.

40. What should applicants do if a proposed activity or material cost may be ineligible?

Contact mail to bluecharter@commonwealth.int before submission, using the subject line “Blue Charter Incubator - Application Query”.

6. Assessment, selection and next steps

41. How will applications be assessed?

The Secretariat will first conduct an eligibility review. Applicants progressing beyond Stage 1 will be asked for a detailed budget, work plan and due-diligence documentation. Eligible applications will then be scored against the scoring criteria available in the Application Guidelines & Assessment Criteria document, and considered by the Blue Charter Incubator Steering Committee.

42. Will assessors review information in attachments that is missing from an answer?

Applicants should not rely on assessors to infer evidence from attachments. Put the relevant evidence in the response to the question and use attachments to support it.

43. How many projects are expected to be selected?

It is anticipated that 10 to 15 projects will be selected by Q2 2027.

44. May the Secretariat request clarification?

Yes. The Secretariat may contact applicants with clarification questions during assessment or Steering Committee review.

45. What additional information may be requested after the initial application?

Applicants passing the initial eligibility review may be asked for a detailed budget, work plan and documentation for basic due diligence. Selected projects will enter into a grant agreement covering the award, disbursement schedule, reporting and other conditions.

46. When may successful projects begin spending?

Projects may commence and grant funds may be used only after the grant agreement has been signed and in accordance with the approved start date, budget and disbursement schedule.

Appendix A. Glossary of terms

The definitions below are provided to support consistent interpretation of the Round II application documents.

Term	Definition
Anticipated co-funding	A proposed contribution that is expected but has not yet been formally confirmed.
Beneficiary	A person, community, institution, sector or other group expected to benefit from the project's outputs or outcomes.
Cash co-funding	Additional financial resources, outside the Incubator grant, that directly support project delivery.
Co-funding	Cash or in-kind resources from outside the Blue Charter Incubator grant that directly support project delivery.
Confirmed co-funding	A contribution for which the provider has made a documented commitment. Supporting evidence is required.
Deliverable	A specific and verifiable product, service or completed output produced by the project.
Due diligence	Checks undertaken on eligible or provisionally selected applicants and relevant delivery arrangements before a grant is finalised.
Fiscal agent	An entity that provides agreed financial administration or management functions. For Round II, the government lead remains the accountable lead under the published application arrangements.
Government endorsement	A letter confirming the government's role as lead applicant and commitment to sign the grant agreement if selected.
Government focal point	The principal government official named as the contact for the application and proposed project.
In-kind co-funding	A non-cash resource directly supporting the project, such as staff time, expertise, equipment, facilities or data, given a reasonable GBP value.
Indicative budget	The initial high-level budget submitted with the application, showing activities or categories, estimated costs, grant request and co-funding.

Term	Definition
Lead applicant / lead government entity	The single legally established national or sub-national government entity that submits the proposal, signs the grant agreement, receives and manages the grant, and is responsible for implementation and compliance.
Multi-country project	A project directly engaging more than one country through a shared rationale and delivery model. The majority of participating countries must be Commonwealth members.
Outcome	A change expected because project outputs are used, such as improved capacity, policy, practice, behaviour, environmental condition or livelihoods.
Output	A tangible product or service delivered by the project.
Partner	A non-government organisation or entity supporting or delivering the project, for example an NGO, academic institution, community organisation or private-sector organisation.
Project-specific cost	An additional cost that is directly related to, reasonable and necessary for the approved project activities and results.
Sub-national government entity	A legally established public body below national level, with formal government status, that may be eligible to act as lead applicant.
Sustainability	The arrangements through which activities, benefits, capacity, outputs or outcomes will continue after grant funding ends.
Value for money	The extent to which costs are reasonable and proportionate and resources are used efficiently to achieve the proposed outputs and outcomes.

Questions not covered here?

Email bluecharter@commonwealth.int with the subject line “Blue Charter Incubator - Application Query”.