

Please note this Application Guidance is for the 2025/26 round of the Transition Assistance Fund. Applications are currently closed and will open again in September 2026. Please note that details on application criteria and requirements may be subject to change.

# Ocean Stewardship Fund – Transition Assistance Fund

## Guidance for Applicants

Applications are welcome from all fisheries that are verified as improving towards MSC certification through the [MSC Improvement Program](#). The Transition Assistance Fund (TAF) aims to support the costs associated with implementing improvements identified in fisheries' Improvement Action Plans. The TAF is part of the MSC's [Ocean Stewardship Fund](#) (OSF).

### 1) Who can apply?

- a) The TAF is open to all fisheries that are in the MSC Improvement Program and demonstrating compliance with the requirements of the Improvement Program. Projects linked to fisheries outside the Improvement Program at the time of application are not eligible for the TAF.
- b) Each fishery can only submit one application in any given funding round. Fisheries that target the same stock must apply together if they have similar actions, and one organisation must have overall responsibility for managing the grant if the application is successful.
- c) All submissions must have a named individual (the Improvement Program Manager) responsible for the project. The lead organisation on the application must be the grant holder if the application is successful.
- d) MSC employees, trustees, agents, current contractors, and relatives of employees or trustees are ineligible.
- e) At the time of application, fisheries must have undergone an independent verification demonstrating that they meet MSC's Improvement Program entry requirements. If fisheries have already undergone an Progress Verification as well, they must also be in receipt of an "Adequate" progress determination by a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB). Further information regarding the Improvement Program and its eligibility requirements can be found on the [Improvement Program web page](#). Applicants can also contact [fisheries@msc.org](mailto:fisheries@msc.org) for more information on the Improvement Program.
- f) Once an Improvement Program fishery enters MSC Full Assessment, it will no longer be eligible to apply for a TAF grant after the Announcement Comment Draft Report (ACDR) has been published as this marks the fishery's official exit from the Improvement Program. If a fishery enters MSC Full Assessment during the course of a TAF grant, the grantee may continue to use the funds to support implementation of the Action Plan until the Public Certification Report (PCR) resulting from the Full Assessment has been published on the MSC database, eCert.
- g) If the fishery is applying for a second TAF grant, the term of the first TAF grant must have concluded by the time of application.
- h) Applicants must be able to accept the OSF Privacy Policy, which can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the circle icon in the upper right corner with the applicant's initial on it.

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## 2) What kind of projects will the TAF fund?

- a) Projects must start between April and June and be no longer than two years in duration.
- b) Projects must support the implementation of one or more actions identified in the fishery's Improvement Action Plan.
- c) Only Tasks that have a Completion Date before the end of the TAF grant (i.e. within a 2-year period) should be included.
- d) Applicants will be required to provide more detail on the Actions and Tasks that will be funded by the TAF grant within the "Improvement Action Tasks" section of the Application Form.
- e) Any actions that do not form part of the Action Plan are not eligible for TAF funding.

## 3) What does the TAF cover?

- a) The maximum funding available is £50,000 per TAF application.
- b) Fisheries can receive a maximum of two grants throughout their involvement in the Improvement Program.
- c) The scope of activities that can be funded by TAF include the following and must align with the "Resources - Cost" outlined in the Improvement Action Plan:
  - i) cost of retaining the services of an Improvement Program Manager
  - ii) internal staff salary costs directly incurred in the delivery of the grant
  - iii) improvement action costs e.g., data collection, implementing a new assessment tool, meetings/workshops, hire of essential equipment
  - iv) essential fixed asset costs that will support the delivery of improvement actions. Any fixed assets/equipment purchased with TAF funds must be used to support fisheries in accordance with the charitable purposes of the grant after the term of funding has ended.
  - v) CAB progress verification costs (but NOT any costs associated with entry into the Improvement Program or MSC certification)
  - vi) improvement activities that relate to addressing traceability risks within the fishery if these are captured in the relevant section of the Improvement Action Plan.
- d) MSC's Indirect Cost Recovery Rate for TAF grants is 12%; up to 12% of TAF grants can be recovered by grantees to support their overhead costs.

## 4) What should the project description include?

- a) All applicants are required to provide a full description of their project. This description must only focus on those activities that would be funded by the grant:
- b) **Project title**  
Please provide a project title that conveys the main aims and focus of the project in a clear and succinct way. The title also needs to include the name of the fishery or fisheries involved in the project.
- c) **Project summary**  
Applicants must provide a brief overview of their project that summarises all the key elements: the introduction, aim, method, expected results and associated timelines. The project summary should be written in such a way that reviewers will be able to read it as it stands and understand the purpose of the project.

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d) **Introduction**

Please give brief details about the background and context of the project, the fishery or fisheries involved and the particular issues that the fishery(ies) face with respect to the MSC Standard and intends to address through this project.

e) **Aim of the project**

Please describe how the project connects with improved sustainability and performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard. Applicants will be required to provide more detail on the action tasks of the project that will demonstrate how the project has achieved this aim in the “Improvement Action Tasks” section of the Application Form.

f) **Rationale for the selection of Improvement Actions for which funding is being sought**

Applicants must provide a rationale for the Actions they have selected for TAF funding. These Actions should be listed in the “Improvement Action Tasks” part of their application (see Section 5 “How should the “Improvement Action Tasks” table be completed?”). The rationale should also describe the sequence and timeline of selected Actions and how the selected Actions will fit within the timeline of the TAF grant period (maximum 2 years) and the overall timeline of the Improvement Action Plan implementation. Applicants should also explain the order of the selected Actions and whether any Actions are dependent on the completion of others for implementation of the Improvement Action Plan.

g) **Timing of Interim Report**

TAF Awardees are expected to provide the MSC with at least one Interim Report approximately midway through the project and a Final Report at the end of the project (see Section 11 “What happens if a TAF application is successful?”) Applicants are invited to propose a timing for the Interim Report that would suit the project plan.

i) **Risk Assessment**

Applicants must carry out a risk assessment of their proposal and provide a brief summary of their risk assessment in their application. This summary must outline any actions that the risk assessment identified as being at high risk of non-delivery. For each high-risk action, applicants must provide details of any specific measures they are taking to mitigate the risks involved and how they will be monitoring these risks during the course of the project.

## 5) How should the “Improvement Action Tasks” table be completed?

- a) Applicants must specify which Actions and Tasks from the fishery’s Improvement Action Plan they are seeking funding for. This information must be identical to the information provided in the “Actions at Performance Indicator and/or Scoring Issue Level” section of their Action Plan.
- b) If the application involves multiple Improvement Program fisheries that share the same or similar Actions, only one fishery should lead on each common Action and the name of this fishery must be supplied against each Action in “Improvement Action Tasks” table. The fisheries must decide among themselves which Action/Task from which Improvement Action Plan will be most suitable for the grant.
- c) **Action ID no.:** This corresponds to the field “Action ID no” in the Action Plan. Applicants must use this number when referring to this Action throughout their TAF application, including within “Roles and Responsibilities”, “Match Funding” and “Grant Budget”.
- d) **Action Name:** This corresponds to the field “Action name” in the Action Plan.

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- e) **MSC PI(s):** This corresponds to the field “Performance Indicator(s) and/or Scoring Issue(s)” field in the Action Plan.
- f) **Task(s) of this Action:** This corresponds to the field “Task/s No” field in the Action Plan. If an Action contains more than one Task, applicants must separate the Tasks and enter only one Task per row in the “Improvement Action Tasks” table. This will help to facilitate monitoring of the grant if the TAF application is successful.
- g) **Evidence of Completion:** This field has the same name in the Action Plan. If a Task contains more than one item under Evidence of Completion, applicants must separate the items and enter only one item per row in the “Improvement Action Tasks” table. This will help to facilitate monitoring of the grant if the TAF application is successful.
- h) **Date of Completion:** This field has the same name in the Action Plan. Applicants must only submit Tasks that will take place after the proposed Start Date of the TAF grant and have a Date of Completion before the proposed End Date (i.e. within a maximum of 2 years). If the same Task is to be repeated on an annual or regular basis throughout the period of the Action Plan (i.e. spanning more than 2 years), then applicants can include these Tasks as well but they must specify the number of times that the Task will be completed by the proposed End Date of the TAF grant.
- i) Any proposed Actions or Tasks that are not part of the fishery’s Improvement Action Plan will not be eligible for TAF funding.

## 6) How should the “Roles and Responsibilities” table be completed?

- a) Applicants must provide details of all the key personnel and organisations that would be involved in delivering the Actions proposed in their TAF application. If the Lead Organisation is registered in a country outside the area in which the fishery operates, they must consult or otherwise involve researchers, fishers and other relevant stakeholders based in the area of fishing operations where possible.
- b) **Name of Individual**
- c) **Name of Organisation:** please provide the individual’s job title if self-employed.
- d) **Role in this project (including specific Actions):** for each individual or organisation, applicants must outline their role in the project and specify which Actions they would help to implement with reference to the “Action ID no.” (see 5c). If the individual or organisation would be involved with all aspects of the project, then applicants should just enter “All Actions” instead.
- e) **Expertise and previous experience relevant to this project:** applicants are also encouraged to include an institution profile URL where applicable.
- f) If an organisation is providing match funding, applicants must include this information in the “Match Funding” part of the TAF application (see section 7 “What information should be submitted in the “Match Funding” table?”)

## 7) What information should be submitted in the “Match Funding” table?

- a) If any match funding or in-kind support is being provided for implementation of the fishery Improvement Action Plan as a whole, applicants should list each commitment individually and provide details. This applies to both internal (including in-kind) support being supplied by the Lead Organisation as well as external support from other organisations.

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- b) Applicants should only include details of match funding that has already been secured and they must provide supporting evidence for each commitment listed in the “Match Funding” table. This supporting evidence should be uploaded in the “Supporting Documents” section of the TAF application.
- c) **Action Number:** for each commitment, applicants must specify which Actions would be supported with reference to the “Action ID no.” (see 5c). If the commitment is to support the project as a whole, then applicants should just enter “All Actions” instead.
- d) **Action Name:** this should align with the Action Name as specified in the “Improvement Action Tasks” table.
- e) **Organisation:** both the Lead Organisation and third parties can be listed here if applicable.
- f) **Match Funding:** applicants should specify the total value of each commitment and indicate any contributions that are in-kind where applicable.
- g) Applications with a higher degree of match funding committed in proportion to the TAF funding being requested, will receive higher scores in the assessment.

## 8) How should the “Grant Budget” table be completed?

- a) Applicants must provide a detailed summary of their TAF request for funding with respect to each Action in their proposal (see section 3 “What does the TAF cover?”) The currency of the Budget will be the same as the currency supplied by applicants at the top of their application.
- b) All costs must be defined (i.e. contingencies/unexpected costs are not acceptable) and they must be incurred between the proposed Start and End Dates of the grant. If there is a risk that a cost may be incurred outside this timeframe (e.g. publication of a scientific paper), applicants are advised not to include this item.
- c) **Action number:** for each request, applicants must specify which Actions would be supported with reference to the “Action ID no.” (see 5c). If the requested funding is to support the project as a whole, then applicants should just enter “All Actions” instead.
- d) **Action name:** this should align with the Action Name as specified in the “Improvement Action Tasks” table.
- e) **Cost type:** applicants must select one cost type from the dropdown menu i.e. “3<sup>rd</sup> party personnel” (e.g. consultant, external project manager, collaborator or partner providing a service), “Equipment (fixed assets)”, “Consumables”, “Travel”, “Meeting” (e.g. venue hire, catering, AV), “Internal Staff Costs” and “Other” for types of cost not covered elsewhere on the list e.g. equipment rental fees, stipends for fisher participation, publication fees.
- f) **Cost description:** please be as precise as possible i.e. include % FTE, daily fee rate, number of days, unit cost etc. where applicable.
- g) **Phase 1:** please outline expected costs between the Start Date of the project and the Interim Report date proposed in the “Project Description” section of the application.
- h) **Phase 2:** please outline expected costs between the proposed Interim Report date and the End Date of the project.

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- i) The total of Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be calculated automatically. 12% of the TAF grant will be allocated to support any overhead costs that would be incurred by conducting this project. This 12% for overheads is also calculated automatically and then added to the total of Phases 1 and 2 to constitute the grand TOTAL of TAF funding requested in the application. Applicants must note that this value must not exceed £50,000 or equivalent in other currencies.

## 9) What supporting documents are required?

- a) The following documents must be submitted in English:
  - i) **Copy of the fishery's Improvement Action Plan**
  - ii) **Copy of the fishery's last Progress Verification Report (if applicable)**
  - iii) **Supporting evidence for each match funding commitment listed under "Match Funding"**  
For each commitment listed within the "Match Funding" section of the Application Form, supporting evidence must be provided. This can take the form of a Grant Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding or Letter of Commitment if available.
  - iv) **Letter of endorsement from a previous or current funder (if applicable)**  
If the applicant has received grant funding before, they are welcome to submit a signed and headed letter of endorsement from the funder outlining their views of the applicant and their previous performance.
- b) The following documents may be submitted in the applicant's language of origin if they are not available in English:
  - i) **Copy of latest audited accounts**  
Applicants must provide a copy of their Lead Organisation's latest audited accounts, which should include a statement from an independent auditor regarding their view of the organisation's assets, liabilities, financial position and internal controls.
  - ii) **Proof of legal status of Lead Organisation**  
Applicants must provide evidence of the legal status of their Lead Organisation to ensure it has the capacity to enter into a legally binding grant agreement. This could be a letter of the organisation's legal registration with the relevant Government or a copy of an official document attesting that the organisation is a recognised University or has a main objective to carry out research.
  - iii) **Details of Lead Organisation's Board members/management team and length of service**  
Applicants must provide the names, positions and length of service of all the executive and non-executive members of the Lead Organisation's Board.
- c) If applicants are unable to provide any of the documents in 9b above, they can attach a statement explaining why and provide alternative information to evidence the financial stability of their application.

## 10) How are applications assessed?

- a) TAF applications undergo a competitive review process. The TAF has limited funds at its disposal for each funding round and can only fund the strongest applications that meet the TAF criteria most closely.

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- b) All TAF applications are assessed using quantitative appraisal criteria by the MSC review panel including:
  - i) rationale for the selection of Improvement Actions for which funding is being sought
  - ii) expertise of project action leads and contributors
  - iii) risk of non-delivery
  - iv) degree of match funding, both internal (in kind) and external, already secured for implementation of the Improvement Action Plan
  - v) project feasibility
- c) In addition to the quantitative assessment, reviewers will consider the following as priorities for funding:
  - i) The markets supplied by the applicant fishery (including the information provided by applicants in the “Fishery Details” section of their TAF application)
  - ii) Fisheries operating in developing economies as defined by the United Nations Stat M49 Standard
  - iii) Fisheries applying for their first TAF grant
- d) There will also be an assessment of the Lead Organisation’s financial health based on the documents listed under 9b.
- e) The decision of the MSC’s Executive Committee in respect of making TAF grant awards is final.
- f) The MSC reserves the right to request modifications to applications, in consultation with applicants, before reaching a decision regarding whether to fund an application.
- g) To ensure the best quality review of applications, the MSC’s assessments remain confidential.

## **11) What happens if a TAF application is successful?**

- a) Successful TAF applicants will be notified before the end of March 2026 and will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement contract, which will set out the terms and conditions of the grant awarded.
- b) The Grant Agreement will define the grant disbursement schedule and triggers required (i.e., interim and final reports) to release stage payments.
- c) TAF Awardees will be expected to provide:
  - i) at least one narrative/financial interim report approximately midway through the project including performance against the Improvement Actions and Tasks outlined in the Application Form
  - ii) a final narrative/financial report at the end of the project including performance against the Improvement Actions and Tasks, summary of expenditure and any supporting communication assets such as images, videos etc.
- d) TAF Awardees will also be expected to:
  - i) share all project data, research and knowledge produced as a result of their project with local researchers, fishers, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. This includes providing open access to any published research articles resulting from the project.
  - ii) keep the MSC informed of their communication plans so that MSC can help maximise the reach of the research.

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- iii) provide the MSC with timely contributions towards any Q&A, blog or social media posts relating to their project or the TAF as a whole.

## 12) How will the funding be disbursed?

- a) The Grant Agreement contract will define the grant disbursement schedule and triggers required (i.e., interim and final reports) to release stage payments.
- b) The grant disbursement schedule in the Grant Agreement will be informed by the phasing of costs supplied by the applicant within the “Grant Budget” section of the Application Form.
- c) Grant payments will be issued in three stages:
  - i) Upon signing of the Grant Agreement (Phase 1 from “Grant Budget”)
  - ii) Upon satisfactory receipt of the Interim Grant Report (Phase 2 from “Grant Budget”)
  - iii) Upon satisfactory receipt of the Final Grant Report (10% of Phase 1 + 2 total)
- d) MSC will retain a minimum of 10% of the total grant for disbursement at the end of the project, upon receipt of a satisfactory Final Grant Report.

## 13) Dissemination of personal data

- a) TAF applicants are strongly advised to read the OSF Privacy Policy before submitting their application. This can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the circle icon in the upper right corner with the applicant’s initial on it.
- b) All applications will be held by the MSC on secure servers in the European Union (the EU) or in the UK (on Microsoft Azure Servers (UK) and Amazon Web Services (AWS) Europe (London Region)).
- c) If an application is successful, details concerning the Award, including the Awardee’s name, may be made publicly available on the MSC’s website and other media outlets, e.g., annual report, a press release.
- d) Applicants have the right to obtain a copy of their personal data that MSC holds, and to require MSC to correct errors in the personal data if it is inaccurate or incomplete. They also have the right at any time to require that MSC deletes their personal data. To exercise these rights, or any other rights under applicable laws, please contact [OSF@msc.org](mailto:OSF@msc.org).

## 14) How to apply

- a) Interested applicants must contact their [local MSC representative](#) to begin the application process. Applicants are strongly advised to reach out at the earliest opportunity to ensure all requirements are met in good time before the application deadline.

## 15) Further questions

- a) Please email any further questions to [OSF@msc.org](mailto:OSF@msc.org).