

Ocean Stewardship Fund 2026-27

Transition Assistance Fund: Request For Proposals

A grant funding opportunity for fisheries verified as improving towards MSC certification through the MSC Improvement Program

Document Versions:

Document Title	Publication Date	Revisions Made
Transition Assistance Fund – Application Guidance 2026-27	04 September 2026	n/a
Transition Assistance Fund – Application Guidance 2026-27 2.0	16 September 2026	Terminology regarding fisheries in the MSC Improvement Program has been updated, replacing "Fishery Improvement Projects" with "Fisheries in the MSC Improvement Program"

Fund	Transition Assistance Fund
Maximum grant	GBP 50,000
Project duration	Maximum two years, starting between April and June 2027
Eligible applicants	The Lead Organisation must be an implementing organisation responsible for leading a fishery in the MSC Improvement Program. This organisation must have capacity to enter into a legally binding grant agreement. The Lead Applicant must be the Improvement Program Manager involved in coordinating the MSC IP fishery or an individual who works closely with the Improvement Program Manager.
Deadline	23:59 UTC, 1 December 2026
Queries	Potential applicants are advised to contact their local MSC representative for guidance Further questions are welcome at OSF@msc.org

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1. Purpose of the Transition Assistance Fund

The Transition Assistance Fund (TAF) is part of MSC’s Ocean Stewardship Fund. It supports fisheries verified as improving towards MSC certification through the MSC Improvement Program by funding the costs associated with implementing their Improvement Action Plan.

The Fund is intended to help eligible fisheries make practical, time-bound progress against verified improvement actions, strengthen performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard, and support readiness for future MSC assessment.

2. How to apply

2.1 Deadline

The deadline for TAF applications is **23:59 UTC on 1 December 2026**.

2.2 Process for applying

Applicants must submit their application on the Ocean Stewardship Fund Grants Portal at:

<https://msc.smartsimpleuk.com/>

Applicants must register an account on the Grants Portal to access and submit the application form. To create an account, applicants must click on the “Register Here” button and follow the onscreen instructions. After registering their account, an email will be sent with a URL to set a password.

When applicants subsequently log into the Portal, they will receive a one-time verification code via email or phone number. This verification code will expire **3 minutes** after sending. When they enter the verification code, applicants are advised to tick the “Remember this device” box, to avoid having to authenticate their account every time they log in. The Grants Portal will remember the device for a period of 14 days.

2.3 Questions

Interested applicants are encouraged to contact their local MSC representative for guidance and are advised to reach out at the earliest opportunity to ensure that all requirements are met before the application deadline.

Further questions about the Transition Assistance Fund should be sent to OSF@msc.org.

Questions about the MSC Improvement Program and eligibility requirements may be sent to fisheries@msc.org.

3. Eligibility

3.1 Who can apply

The TAF is open to all implementing organisations leading fisheries that are in the MSC Improvement Program (IP) and demonstrating compliance with the Improvement Program requirements. These organisations will be defined as the **“Lead Organisation”** on the TAF application.

The Lead Organisation must have capacity to enter into a legally binding grant agreement and they must be the grant holder if the application is successful.

All submissions must have a named individual, defined as the **“Lead Applicant”**, who will be responsible for the project.

The Lead Applicant must be the Improvement Program Manager for the FIP linked to the application or an individual who works closely with the Improvement Program Manager.

At the time of application, MSC IP fisheries must have undergone independent verification demonstrating that they meet MSC’s Improvement Program entry requirements.

MSC IP fisheries that have already undergone Progress Verification in the Improvement Program must either have received an “Adequate” progress determination or a maximum of one “Inadequate” progress determination by a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) at the time of application. MSC IP fisheries that have received two consecutive “Inadequate” progress determinations are not eligible for the TAF.

Only one application can be submitted on behalf of each MSC IP fishery in any given funding round. MSC IP fisheries can receive a maximum of two TAF grants during their involvement in the Improvement Program. If an applicant is applying for a second TAF grant for the same fishery, the first grant must have concluded by the time of application.

MSC IP fisheries involving 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.

3.2 Restrictions

- MSC employees, trustees, agents, current contractors, and relatives of employees or trustees are ineligible.
- Projects linked to FIPs outside the Improvement Program at the time of application are not eligible.
- Any Actions or Tasks that are not part of the fishery’s Improvement Action Plan are not eligible for TAF funding.
- If the Lead Organisation is registered outside the area in which the fishery operates, applicants are strongly encouraged to consult or otherwise involve researchers, fishers and other relevant stakeholders based in the area of fishing operations where possible.
- Once an MSC IP fishery enters MSC Full Assessment, it is no longer eligible to apply for a TAF grant after the Announcement Comment Draft Report has been published.

- If a fishery enters MSC Full Assessment during a TAF grant, the grantee may continue to use the funds to support implementation of the Action Plan until the Public Certification Report resulting from Full Assessment has been published on eCert.

4. Funding available

4.1 Grant size

The maximum funding available is £50,000 per TAF application. The total funding request must include the 12% indirect cost recovery allowance and must not exceed £50,000 or the equivalent amount in other currencies.

4.2 Duration

Projects must start between April and June 2027, and must be no longer than two years in duration. All proposed improvement Actions and Tasks must be completed within this timeframe.

4.3 Number of expected awards

The TAF has limited funds available and the number of awards will depend on the quality and relevance of applications.

4.4 Eligible costs/activities

- Retaining the services of an Improvement Program Manager.
- Internal staff salary costs directly incurred in delivery of the grant.
- Improvement Action costs such as data collection, implementing a new assessment tool, meetings or workshops, and hire of essential equipment.
- Essential fixed asset costs that support delivery of improvement actions and continue to be used for the charitable purposes of the grant after the funding term ends.
- CAB progress verification costs, but not any costs associated with entry into the Improvement Program or MSC certification.
- Improvement activities that address traceability risks within the fishery, where these are captured in the relevant section of the Improvement Action Plan.
- Up to 12% indirect cost recovery to support overhead costs.

5. Application requirements

5.1 What should the project description include?

Applicants must provide a full description of the project. The project description must focus only on the activities that would be funded by the grant.

Requirement	What to include
Project title	A clear and succinct title that conveys the main aims and focus of the project and

	includes the name of the fishery or fisheries involved.
Project summary	A brief overview summarising the background, aims, actions, expected outcomes, and timeline of the project.
Introduction	Brief background and context of the project, the fishery or fisheries involved, and the issues they face in relation to the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Aim of the project	How the project connects with improved sustainability and performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Rationale for selected Improvement Actions	Why the selected Actions have been chosen for TAF funding, including details of whether/how they are linked to the completion of other Actions in the Improvement Action Plan.
Timing of Interim Report	A proposed timing for an Interim Report on the TAF grant that suits the project plan.
Risk assessment	A brief summary of the applicant's risk assessment for the project, including any high-risk actions, mitigation measures, and how these risks will be monitored during the project.

5.2 How should the “Improvement Action Tasks” table be completed?

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 the Action Plan.

If an application involves multiple MSC IP 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.

- **Action ID no.:** must correspond to the “Action ID no.” field in the Action Plan and should be used consistently throughout the TAF application, including within Roles and Responsibilities, Match Funding and Grant Budget.
- **Action Name:** must correspond to the Action Plan.
- **MSC PI(s):** must correspond to the “Performance Indicator(s) and/or Scoring Issue(s)” field in the Action Plan.
- **Task(s) of this Action:** must correspond 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.
- **Evidence of Completion:** if a Task contains more than one item under Evidence of Completion, applicants must separate the items and enter only one Evidence of Completion item per row.
- **Date of Completion:** applicants must only submit Tasks that will take place after the proposed Start Date of the TAF grant and which have a Date of Completion before the proposed End Date. If the same Task is repeated during the Action Plan period, applicants must specify the number of times it will be completed by the proposed End Date.

Actions or Tasks that are not part of the fishery's Improvement Action Plan are not eligible for TAF funding.

5.3 How should the “Roles and Responsibilities” table be completed?

Applicants must provide details of all key personnel and organisations that would be involved in delivering the Actions proposed in the TAF application.

- **Name of Organisation:** if an individual is self-employed, applicants can just enter the individual’s job title.
- **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 using the relevant Action ID number. If the individual or organisation would be involved in all aspects of the project, applicants may enter “All Actions”.
- **Expertise and previous experience relevant to this project:** applicants are also encouraged to include an institution profile URL as well where applicable.

If an organisation is providing match funding, this should be included in the Match Funding section of the application.

5.4 What information should be submitted in the “Match Funding” table?

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 internal support, including in-kind support from the Lead Organisation, as well as external support from other organisations.

Applicants should only include match funding that has already been secured and must provide supporting evidence for each commitment listed in the Supporting Documents section of the application. Supporting evidence may take the form of a Grant Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding, or Letter of Commitment where applicable.

- **Action Number:** for each commitment, applicants must specify the Actions that would be supported using the relevant Action ID number. If the commitment supports the project as a whole, applicants may enter “All Actions”.
- **Action Name:** should align with the Action Name in the Improvement Action Tasks table.
- **Match Funding:** applicants should specify the total value of each commitment and indicate whether contributions are cash or in-kind.

Applications with a higher degree of match funding committed in proportion to the TAF funding requested will receive higher scores in the assessment.

5.5 How should the “Grant Budget” table be completed?

Applicants must provide a detailed summary of the TAF request for funding with respect to each Action in the proposal. The currency of the budget will be the same as the currency supplied by applicants at the top of the application.

All costs must be defined. Contingencies or unexpected costs are not acceptable. Costs must be incurred between the proposed Start Date and End Date of the grant. If there is a risk that a cost may be incurred outside this timeframe, applicants are advised not to include it in the application.

- **Action number:** for each cost item, applicants must specify the Action(s) it would support using the relevant Action ID number, or write “All Actions” if the item supports the project as a whole.

- **Action name:** should align with the Action Name in the Improvement Action Tasks table.
- **Cost type:** applicants must select one cost type from the available categories: third party personnel, equipment (fixed assets), consumables, travel, meeting, internal staff costs, or other.
- **Cost description:** should be precise and include details such as percentage FTE, daily fee rate, number of days or unit cost where applicable.
- **Phase 1:** applicants should outline expected costs between the Start Date and the Interim Report date proposed in the Project Description section.
- **Phase 2:** applicants should outline expected costs between the proposed Interim Report date and the End Date.
- The total of Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be calculated automatically. A 12% overhead allocation will also be calculated and added to the total funding request.
- The grand total of TAF funding requested must not exceed £50,000 or the equivalent amount in other currencies.

5.6 What supporting documents are required?

The following documents must be submitted in English:

- Copy of the fishery's Improvement Action Plan.
- Copy of the fishery's last Progress Verification Report, if applicable.
- Supporting evidence for each match funding commitment listed under Match Funding. This may include a Grant Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding, or Letter of Commitment where applicable.
- Letter of endorsement from a previous or current funder, if applicable.

The following documents may be submitted in the applicant's language of origin if they are not available in English:

- Copy of the Lead Organisation's latest audited accounts, including a statement from an independent auditor regarding the organisation's assets, liabilities, financial position, and internal controls.
- Proof of the Lead Organisation's legal status, such as a legal registration document or official documentation showing that the organisation is a recognised university or has a main objective to carry out research.
- Details of the Lead Organisation's Board members or management team and length of service.

If applicants are unable to provide any of the organisational documents listed above, they may attach a statement explaining why and provide alternative information to evidence the financial stability of the application.

6. Selection criteria

6.1 How are applications assessed?

TAF applications undergo a competitive review process. The TAF has limited funds available and can only fund the strongest applications that meet the TAF criteria most closely.

Criterion	What reviewers will consider
Technical merit	The rationale for selecting the Improvement Actions for which funding is sought

	and the extent to which they support the Improvement Action Plan.
Expertise	The expertise and experience of project action leads and contributors relevant to their role in the project.
Risk of non-delivery	Whether key risks have been identified and mitigation and monitoring measures are credible.
Match funding	The degree of internal or external match funding, including in-kind support, already secured for implementation of the Improvement Action Plan.
Feasibility	Whether the project is realistic within the grant period, including timing, sequencing, dependencies, and resources.

6.2 Strategic priorities

Priority consideration may be given to:

- the markets supplied by applicant fisheries
- fisheries operating in developing economies as defined by the United Nations Stat M49 Standard
- fisheries applying for their first TAF grant

The decision of MSC in respect of making TAF grant awards is final. MSC reserves the right to request modifications to applications, in consultation with applicants, before reaching a decision on whether to fund an application. The details of application assessments remain confidential.

7. Timeline

Stage	Date / details
Applications open	00:00 UTC, 4 September 2026
Submission deadline	23:59 UTC, 1 December 2026
Award decisions	March 2027
Project start	Projects must start between April and June 2027

8. What happens if an application is successful?

Successful TAF applicants will be notified by email before the end of March 2027. A draft Grant Agreement will be shared. The Grant Agreement will set out the terms and conditions of the grant awarded, the grant disbursement schedule, and conditions required to release stage payments.

Awardees are required to provide at least one narrative and financial interim report approximately midway through the project, including performance against the Improvement Actions and Tasks outlined in the application form. Awardees must also provide a final narrative and financial report at the end of the project, including performance against the Improvement Actions and Tasks, a summary of expenditure and any supporting communications assets such as images or videos.

Awardees will be expected to share all project data, research and knowledge produced as a result of the project with local researchers, fishers, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. This includes providing open access to any published research articles resulting from the project.

Awardees will also be expected to keep MSC informed of their communication plans and provide MSC with timely contributions towards any published content relating to their project or the TAF as a whole.

9. How would the funding be disbursed?

The Grant Agreement would define the grant disbursement schedule and the conditions required to release stage payments, such as interim and final reports. The disbursement schedule would be informed by the phasing of costs supplied by the applicant in the Grant Budget section of the application form.

Grant payments would be issued in three stages:

1. Upon signing of the Grant Agreement, covering Phase 1 from the Grant Budget.
2. Upon satisfactory receipt of the Interim Grant Report, covering Phase 2 from the Grant Budget.
3. Upon satisfactory receipt of the Final Grant Report, covering 10% of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 total.

MSC would 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.

10. Further questions

Please email any further questions to OSF@msc.org.

11. Applicant checklist

- The Lead Organisation has capacity to enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement and will host the grant funds if the application is successful.
- The Lead Applicant is the Improvement Program Manager or an individual who works closely with the Improvement Program Manager.
- The fishery is in the MSC Improvement Program and meets eligibility requirements.
- The proposed activities are included in the fishery's Improvement Action Plan.
- The project can be completed within the maximum two-year grant period.
- The funding request does not exceed £50,000 including indirect cost recovery.
- The budget includes only defined eligible costs incurred within the grant period.
- All required supporting documents have been attached.

Additional support available:

Fisheries in the MSC Improvement Program are also eligible to apply for a loan guarantee through the Walton Loan Guarantee Facility. Established with funds from the Walton Family Foundation, the Loan Guarantee Facility provides partial guarantees to lenders to unlock loans for fisheries making improvements to meet or maintain MSC certification.

For more details, contact: lgf@clarmondial.com