



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 [In-Transition to MSC](#) (ITM) Program¹. The Transition Assistance Fund (TAF) aims to support the costs associated with implementing improvements identified in ITM 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 ITM Program and demonstrating compliance with the requirements of the ITM Program. Projects linked to fisheries outside the ITM Program at the time of application are not eligible for the TAF.
- b) At the time of application, the fishery must have undergone an independent verification demonstrating that it meets MSC's ITM entry requirements. If the fishery has already undergone an ITM Progress Verification as well, it must also be in receipt of an "Adequate" progress determination by a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB).
- c) Further information regarding the ITM Program and its eligibility requirements can be found in the [ITM Program brochure](#). Applicants can also contact fisheries@msc.org for more information on the ITM Program.
- d) If an ITM fishery enters MSC Full Assessment and is currently in receipt of TAF funding, the grantee may continue to use the funds to support implementation of the ITM Action Plan until the Public Certification Report (PCR) resulting from the Full Assessment has been published on the MSC database, eCert. However, the fishery cannot apply for another TAF grant once the Announcement Comment Draft Report (ACDR) has been published on eCert, as this marks the official start of the Full Assessment and exit from the ITM Program.
- e) 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.
- f) Each ITM fishery can only submit one application in any given funding round.

¹ The ITM Program has been redeveloped and launched as the MSC Improvement Program. Fisheries that enter the MSC Improvement Program will be eligible for the TAF. Fisheries previously in the ITM Program will be moved to the MSC Improvement Program and will remain eligible for the TAF during their term in the Program.



- g) All submissions must have a named individual (the ITM Project Manager) responsible for the project.
- h) MSC employees, trustees, agents, current contractors, and relatives of employees or trustees are ineligible.
- i) Applicants must be able to accept the OSF Privacy Policy, which can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the padlock icon in the upper right corner.

2) What kind of projects will the TAF fund?

- a) Projects must be no longer than two years in duration and must support the implementation of one or more actions identified in the fishery's ITM Improvement Action Plan.
- b) Only ITM Tasks that have a Completion Date before the end of the TAF grant (i.e. within a 2-year period) should be included.
- c) Applicants will be required to provide more detail on the ITM Actions and Tasks that will be funded by the TAF grant within the "ITM Action Tasks" section of the Application Form.
- d) Any actions that do not form part of the ITM 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 ITM 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 ITM Improvement Action Plan:
 - i) cost of retaining the services of an ITM Project Manager
 - ii) ITM improvement action costs e.g., data collection, implementing a new assessment tool, meetings/workshops, hire of essential equipment
 - iii) essential fixed asset costs that will support the delivery of ITM improvement actions (up to £2,500 of the total grant request to cover essential assets such as a computer, software etc.)
 - iv) CAB progress verification costs (but NOT any costs associated with entry into ITM or MSC certification)
 - v) 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 5%; up to 5% 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 involved in the project as well as the title of any fishery improvement project of which the TAF project forms part.
- 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.
- 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 ITM action tasks of the project that will demonstrate how the project has achieved this aim in the “ITM Action Tasks” section of the Application Form.
- f) **Rationale for the selection of ITM Actions for which funding is being sought**
Applicants must provide a rationale for the ITM Actions they have selected for TAF funding. These Actions should be listed in the “ITM Action Tasks” part of their application (see Section 5 “How should the “ITM 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) **Timeline of proposed TAF-funded work**
Applicants should also provide a basic timeline that includes all the significant milestones of their project, from the planning stages through to completion. Overall, the project’s duration should be no longer than two years. This timeline must be supported by a more detailed project time plan, attached to the application form within the “Supporting Documents” section.

h) **Timing of Interim Grant Report**

TAF Awardees are expected to provide the MSC with at least one Interim Grant Report approximately midway through the project and a Final Grant 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 Grant 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 “ITM Action Tasks” table be completed?

- a) Applicants must specify which Actions and Tasks from the fishery’s ITM 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 ITM Action Plan.
- b) ITM Action ID: This corresponds to the field “Action ID no” in the ITM 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”.
- c) ITM Action Name: This corresponds to the field “Action name” in the ITM Action Plan.
- d) MSC PI(s): This corresponds to the field “Performance Indicator(s) and/or Scoring Issue(s)” field in the ITM Action Plan.
- e) Task(s) of this ITM Action: This corresponds to the field “Task/s No” field in the ITM Action Plan. If an Action contains more than one Task, applicants must separate the Tasks and enter only one Task per row in the “ITM Action Tasks” table. This will help to facilitate monitoring of the grant if the TAF application is successful.
- f) Evidence of Completion: This field has the same name in the ITM 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 “ITM Action Tasks” table. This will help to facilitate monitoring of the grant if the TAF application is successful.
- g) Date of Completion: This field has the same name in the ITM Action Plan. Applicants must only submit Tasks that have a Date of Completion before the proposed End Date of the TAF grant (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 ITM 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.

- h) Any proposed Actions or Tasks that are not part of the fishery's ITM 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.
- b) **Name of Individual or Organisation:** information on individuals must also include details of their organisation or job title if self-employed.
- c) **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 “ITM Action ID” (see 5b). If the individual or organisation would be involved with all aspects of the project, then applicants should just enter “All Actions” instead.
- d) **Expertise and previous experience relevant to this project:** applicants are also encouraged to include an institution profile URL where applicable.
- e) 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 ITM 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 applicant organisation as well as external support from other organisations.
- 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 “ITM Action ID” (see 5b). 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 “ITM Action Tasks” table.
- e) **Organisation:** both the applicant organisation and third parties can be listed here if applicable.

- f) **Match Funding:** applicants should specify the total value and currency 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) **Action number:** for each request, applicants must specify which Actions would be supported with reference to the “ITM Action ID” (see 5b). If the requested funding is to support the project as a whole, then applicants should just enter “All Actions” instead.
- c) **Action name:** this should align with the Action Name as specified in the “ITM Action Tasks” table.
- d) **Cost type:** applicants must select one cost type from the dropdown menu i.e. “3rd party personnel” (e.g. consultant, external project manager, collaborator or partner providing a service), “Equipment (fixed assets)” (up to a maximum of £2,500 for items of equipment that will have a life beyond the grant e.g. a computer), “Consumables”, “Travel”, “Meeting” (e.g. venue hire, catering, AV) and “Other” for types of cost not covered elsewhere on the list e.g. equipment rental fees, stipends for fisher participation, publication fees. Essential fixed assets can only comprise up to 5% of the total TAF grant.
- e) **Cost description:** please be as precise as possible i.e. include % FTE, daily fee rate, number of days, unit cost etc. where applicable.
- f) **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.
- g) **Phase 2:** please outline expected costs between the proposed Interim Report date and the End Date of the project.
- h) The total of Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be calculated automatically. 5% of the TAF grant will be allocated to support any overhead costs that would be incurred by conducting this project. This 5% 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 copy this value in the “Total Amount Requested” field above the “Grant Budget” table and should 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 ITM Improvement Action Plan**
 - ii) **Copy of the fishery's last ITM Progress Verification Report (if applicable)**
 - iii) **Detailed project time plan**

Applicants must provide a separate time plan for their project, which outlines all the activities in detail and when each activity will be carried out in the two-year grant period. The time plan must also include any significant milestones and the grant report schedule. It should further indicate how much of the project will be completed in the first year of the grant versus how much will be completed in the second year.
 - iv) **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.
 - v) **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 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 organisation**

Applicants must provide evidence of the legal status of their 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 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 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.
- b) All TAF applications are assessed using quantitative appraisal criteria by the MSC review panel including:
 - i) rationale for the selection of ITM 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 ITM 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 applicant 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 2025 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 ITM Actions and Tasks outlined in the Application Form
 - ii) a final narrative/financial report at the end of the project including performance against the ITM 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 the outcomes of their project with a wider audience and keep MSC informed of their plans for such communication so that MSC can help maximise the reach of the research.
 - ii) 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 padlock icon in the upper right corner.
- 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.

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.