

Guidelines for applying a business approach to the financial management of MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

SUMMARY



MPA
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Guidelines for applying a business approach to the financial management of **MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**



is a publication developed by [Blue4All](#), an EU-funded project (GA 101094014) focusing on developing science-based tools for achieving Marine Protected Areas that meet conservation and restoration objectives, while addressing the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.



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This guideline is also a publication supported by the “[MPA Community Network](#)” an umbrella initiative, developed to centralise and connect

MPA-related projects across Europe, as well as fostering collaboration among MPA managers, stakeholders, and conservation experts.



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Contact

Mariana Mata Lara (mml@submariner-network.eu)
or Franziska Drews-von Ruckteschell (fdr@submariner-network.eu), **SUBMARINER Network**





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Authors

Mariana Mata Lara, SUBMARINER Network

Franziska Drews-von Ruckteschell, SUBMARINER Network

Tin-Yu Lai, SYKE

Venla Ala-Harja, HELCOM

Annaïk Van Gerven, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences

Michela Congiu, MEDSEA



Acknowledgments

Isabell Storsjö, Syke

Francesca Frau, MEDSEA

Rita Trabulo, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences



The European Commission



Abbreviations

B4A - Blue4All project

EU - European Union

MPAs - Marine Protected Areas

OECMs - Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures



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About



This document serves as a summary of the full "[Guideline for Applying a Business Approach to the Financial Management of Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\)](#)", from now on called 'the Guideline', which provides detailed guidance for MPA managers, planners, and stakeholders on how to apply a business-oriented mindset to secure sustainable financial resources for the effective management of MPAs. The full guideline is comprehensive and designed to be a resource for long-term financial planning and sustainability, while this summary provides a concise, easy-to-understand introduction to the key elements covered in the full version.

Purpose of this Summary:

The main aim of this short version is to provide a **digestible entry point** for those seeking an overview of how business principles can be applied to marine conservation finance. Given the complexity of managing MPAs in an increasingly pressure-filled environment, many MPA managers struggle with limited financial resources, which undermines their ability to achieve conservation goals. This summary outlines how the full guideline addresses these challenges by offering **practical, actionable strategies** for securing diverse funding sources, improving resource management, and ensuring financial sustainability.

This summary highlights:

- The critical importance of **adopting a business mindset** in MPA planning, which does not mean turning the MPA into a business, but rather it involves strategic financial management to balance conservation and social objectives.
- The need for **diversified funding sources** and the ability to evaluate financial mechanisms to address financial gaps, reduce reliance on short-term grants, and create long-term, sustainable funding strategies.
- A high-level **overview of the diverse financial mechanisms** and the introduction of **Blue4All MPA Finance Planner**, a tool that can help MPA managers assess their financial needs, identify revenue streams, and manage operational costs efficiently.

The full version of the guideline provides a detailed exploration of all the steps, tools, and financial mechanisms available to MPA managers, together **with multiple templates** that help the reader go step-by-step in the thinking and planning process. However, due to the extensive content, it can be challenging to grasp the core concepts and methods without a structured introduction. This summary condenses the key messages to help stakeholders quickly understand how the guidelines can benefit their financial planning efforts.

1 Introduction

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are vital tools in the conservation of marine biodiversity, playing a crucial role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, supporting sustainable fisheries, and protecting coastal communities. However, MPAs face significant challenges in securing adequate and sustained funding to support their management and enforcement. Currently, many MPAs struggle with limited financial resources, which hampers their ability to achieve their conservation objectives effectively.

As the threats to marine ecosystems continue to escalate due to overfishing, climate change, pollution, and habitat destruction, the need for well-financed and effectively managed MPAs has never been more urgent. The European Union's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 highlights the importance of expanding MPAs, **with the goal to legally protect 30% of EU seas and ensure that at least 10% of these areas are strictly protected by 2030**. However, despite the progress made, only a small proportion of MPAs in Europe are fully protected, and many still allow harmful activities that undermine their conservation value.

The challenge, therefore, is not only to expand the network of MPAs but to ensure their financial sustainability over the long term. This guidebook is designed to help MPA managers and planners adopt a business-oriented approach to securing sustainable funding for their areas. By applying business principles—such as strategic planning, financial management, and resource allocation—MPAs can diversify their funding sources, reduce financial vulnerability, and ensure they meet their conservation goals effectively.

This executive summary presents a streamlined version of the full guideline, outlining the key steps, tools, and financial mechanisms available for MPAs to enhance their financial sustainability. Through this guide, MPA managers will gain insight into how to structure their conservation efforts with a clear, actionable plan for securing and managing funding. By adopting these strategies, MPAs can strengthen their resilience against financial challenges and contribute to the long-term health of marine ecosystems.

A Business Mindset in Conservation Planning

Adopting a business mindset in conservation planning does not mean turning MPAs into for-profit ventures; rather, it involves strategically managing the financial resources required to meet long-term conservation goals. By applying principles from the business world – such as sustainability, efficiency, and adaptability – MPAs can achieve financial resilience while continuing to protect vital marine ecosystems.

The key concept of a business mindset in conservation is to approach funding, resource management, and governance as integrated components of a comprehensive financial strategy. This involves understanding that MPAs must be self-sustaining and not reliant solely on short-term grants or **government budget allocations**. A strategic business approach to conservation enables MPAs to:

- **Diversify Funding Sources:** Just as businesses rely on multiple revenue streams to weather financial challenges, MPAs can secure funding from a variety of sources, such as government support, philanthropic contributions, market-based solutions, and private sector partnerships. This approach minimises dependency on any single source and maximises the potential for long-term sustainability.
- **Increase Efficiency:** Applying business principles means optimising the use of available resources. This includes improving operational efficiency, reducing waste, and ensuring that funds are allocated in ways that maximise impact. An MPA's management plan can incorporate these practices, ensuring that every dollar spent directly supports conservation efforts.
- **Align Conservation Goals with Financial Strategies:** MPAs need to identify how their conservation goals – whether protecting biodiversity, restoring ecosystems, or enhancing climate resilience – can be supported by financial strategies. By framing conservation efforts as investments in ecosystem services (e.g., carbon storage, coastal protection, and fish stock recovery), MPAs can attract a broader range of funding options that align with these goals.

A Business Mindset in Conservation Planning

- **Enhance Stakeholder Engagement:** Just as businesses engage with stakeholders to drive growth, MPAs must actively involve local communities, industries, and policymakers in their financial planning and management. This collaborative approach ensures that the needs of all stakeholders are considered, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and increasing the legitimacy of the MPA’s financial strategies.
- **Adapt to Changing Conditions:** The business world constantly evolves in response to market forces, technological advances, and regulatory changes. MPAs, too, must be adaptable to changing environmental conditions, socio-economic trends, and evolving policy frameworks. A business mindset encourages MPAs to anticipate future challenges and remain flexible in their funding approaches.

One key aspect of this approach is understanding the difference between financial mechanisms and financial tools, two critical components of a business strategy for MPAs.

- **Financial Mechanisms:** These are the overarching strategies or frameworks that provide funding to MPAs. Financial mechanisms are the “big-picture” solutions that support conservation financing. They define how funds are raised and sustained over time. Examples include government funding programs, international grants, market-based approaches and private sector partnerships. Financial mechanisms are typically broad in scope and align with the overall business model for conservation, aiming to provide a long-term, stable financial foundation for MPAs.
- **Financial Tools:** In contrast, financial tools are the specific instruments or methods used to implement these mechanisms. Tools are more concrete and often used to manage, distribute, or measure financial resources in the short- to medium-term. They are the practical, day-to-day resources that allow MPAs to execute their business plans. Examples of financial tools include budgeting software, financial forecasting models, Blue4All MPA Finance Planner, the MedPLAN Tool, etc. These tools enable MPA managers to track, evaluate, and manage the financial aspects of their conservation efforts, ensuring that funds are used efficiently and effectively.

A Business Mindset in Conservation Planning

Both mechanisms and tools play vital roles in the financial management of MPAs. The chosen mechanisms to be used in a specific MPA to secure long-term funding compose the financial strategy.

- Financial strategy:** the comprehensive plan that integrates the selected financial mechanisms to achieve long-term financial sustainability and support conservation objectives. The financial strategy focuses on securing the necessary resources, structuring them effectively, and ensuring that funding is aligned with the MPA’s goals.

The financial tools will thus, be the practical means by which we will be able to monitor our financial strategy, adapt according to how close or far away we are from our objectives and re-align our mechanisms to our conservation goals.

By adopting these principles, MPAs can transform their conservation efforts into financially sustainable, impactful, and adaptive programs. A business mindset helps ensure that MPAs are not just financially supported but also strategically positioned to thrive in the long term, contributing to global marine conservation goals and maintaining the health of marine ecosystems for generations to come.

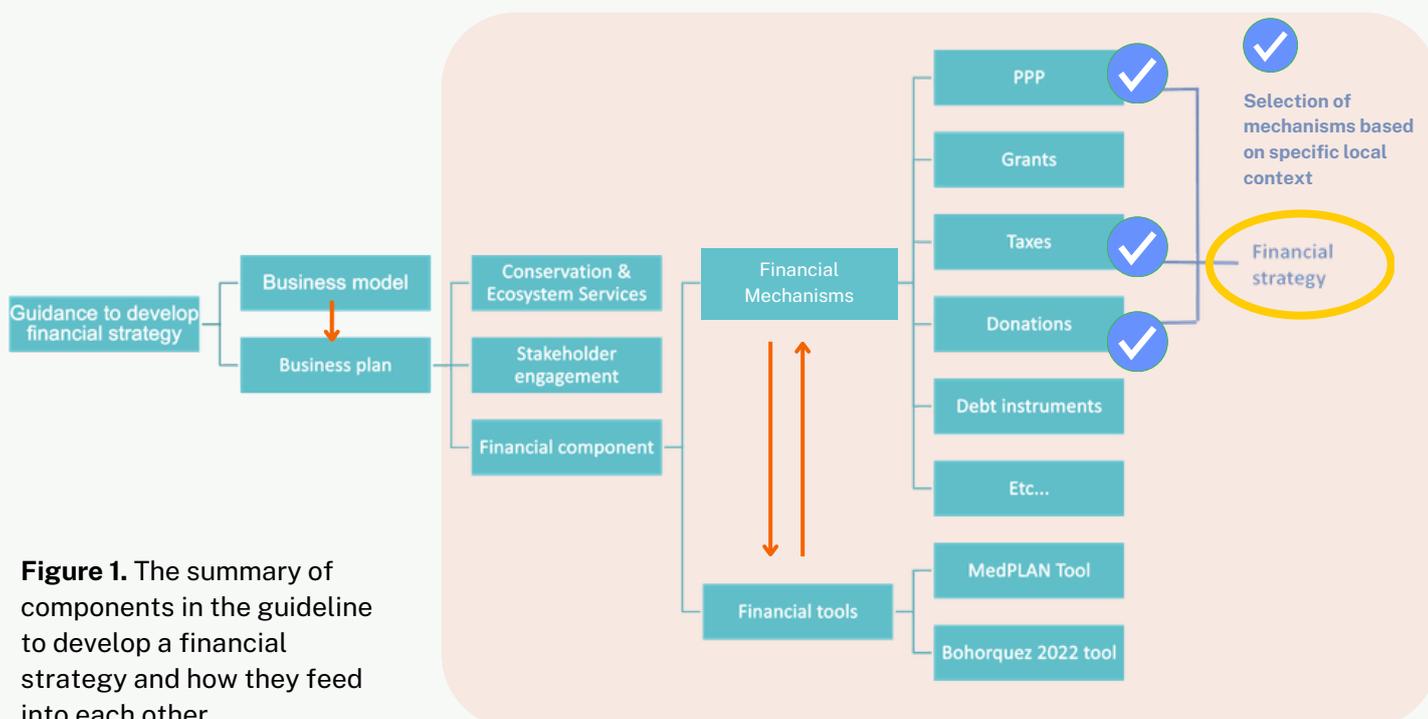


Figure 1. The summary of components in the guideline to develop a financial strategy and how they feed into each other.

Business model components & template

In the pursuit of financial sustainability, it is essential for MPAs to not only secure funding but also structure and manage their financial activities efficiently. A business model for an MPA outlines how it creates, delivers, and captures value through a structured approach to managing its activities, resources, and funding sources. The key components of an MPA's business model are:

Business Model Components

- 1. Basic Concept:** This describes the core purpose of the MPA and its key conservation objectives. It defines why the MPA exists and the value it provides to both ecosystems and society, including biodiversity protection, climate resilience, and sustainable fisheries.
- 2. Benefits:** The benefits the MPA provides, both directly and indirectly. These may include ecological benefits such as biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services (e.g., coastal protection, carbon sequestration), as well as social and economic benefits like improved fisheries, eco-tourism opportunities, and enhanced coastal resilience for local communities.
- 3. Value Chain Position (Process to Deliver Value):** The value chain refers to the set of activities and processes that the MPA undertakes to deliver its value proposition. This includes its core operational functions, such as habitat protection, enforcement, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and environmental restoration. It also covers how these activities contribute to the MPA's conservation goals and the broader environmental and social impact.
- 4. Cost Drivers and Revenue Sources (Financial and Resource Flows):** Cost drivers refer to the key expenses involved in running the MPA, such as staff salaries, monitoring equipment, habitat restoration activities, and operational costs.

Template for creating a Business Model

To help MPA managers begin developing their own business model, the full Guideline provides a template that outlines each of these key components. The template is designed to be adaptable, allowing MPAs to tailor it to their specific needs, objectives, and funding contexts. This business model will serve as a strategic foundation for the MPA's financial planning and sustainability.

4 Business plan components & template

Once an MPA has developed its business model, the next step is to create a business plan. The business plan is a detailed roadmap for how the MPA will implement its business model and achieve its financial sustainability goals. It outlines the specific actions, strategies, financial projections, and risk management approaches necessary to operationalise the MPA's financial strategy.

The business plan should be a living document, regularly updated to reflect progress, changing conditions, and new opportunities. Below are the essential components of a business plan for an MPA, which will guide managers in executing their financial strategy.

Business Plan Components

- 1. Executive Summary:** A concise overview of the MPA's mission, objectives, and key strategies for achieving financial sustainability. The executive summary provides a high-level summary of the business plan, helping stakeholders quickly understand the MPA's goals and operational approach.
- 2. Mission and Vision Statement:** The mission statement outlines the MPA's core purpose and primary goals, while the vision statement describes the long-term aspirations and impact the MPA aims to achieve. These statements guide all strategic planning and operations.
- 3. MPA Basic Information:** This section includes essential details about the MPA, such as its geographical location, size, habitat types, species of conservation concern, and any relevant legal or regulatory context. It provides a foundation for understanding the MPA's operational scope.
- 4. Management Credentials and Governance:** A description of the MPA's management structure, key personnel, and governance framework. This includes the qualifications and experience of the team responsible for managing the MPA, as well as the decision-making processes and stakeholders involved in governance.
- 5. Conservation Priorities and Ecosystem Services:** This section outlines the MPA's conservation priorities, including specific ecosystems, species, or habitats that need protection. It also highlights the ecosystem services provided by the MPA, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and coastal protection, and explains their importance to the local and broader communities.

Business plan components & template

6. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Strategy (Marketing Plan): An overview of how the MPA will engage with its stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. This section should include a communication strategy to ensure effective outreach and collaboration. It may also involve a marketing plan to raise awareness, build support, and attract funding.

7. Financial Plan and Sustainability: The financial plan is the backbone of the MPA's business plan, ensuring that the MPA's conservation goals and operational activities are supported by sustainable and diversified funding. Unlike traditional profit-driven financial plans, this section emphasises financial sustainability, focusing on current funding sources, projected needs, and long-term strategies.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (optional but recommended): This section outlines how the MPA will track its progress towards achieving its goals. Through regular evaluations, the MPA can assess its impact on conservation, social, and financial objectives, identify areas for improvement, and adjust strategies to achieve long-term sustainability. This section outlines the tools, timelines, and metrics needed to monitor success effectively and communicate progress to stakeholders.

9. Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies (optional but recommended): In the risk assessment section, the focus is on identifying the potential environmental and operational risks that could impact the MPA's success. Effective risk management ensures resilience against challenges, from climate change and natural disasters to financial instability and stakeholder conflicts. By incorporating contingency plans, the MPA can prepare for emergencies and sustain its conservation and operational goals.

Template for Business Plan

To assist MPA managers in developing their business plan, a template is provided that covers all the key components listed above. The template serves as a practical tool, offering a structured format to guide the creation of a comprehensive, actionable plan. By filling out this template, MPA managers can organise their thoughts, set clear goals, and develop strategies for achieving long-term financial sustainability and conservation success.

Financial Mechanisms - A Compilation

In order to inform the development of a business model and business plan focused on long-term financial sustainability, a literature review was conducted to identify financial mechanisms that may support MPAs and OECMs in generating additional revenue streams.

The categorisation made aims to provide a structured overview of the various funding strategies available, highlighting their unique characteristics and applications, as well as examples of where they are already being used, facilitating the identification of suitable funding strategies for specific conservation needs but also underscoring the importance of diversifying funding sources to ensure the resilience and effectiveness of marine conservation efforts.

The categorisation is composed of ten main overarching categories having different and various instruments within each. The overarching categories are:

1. Donations and Philanthropy
2. Public and Government Support
3. Market-based mechanisms
4. Corporate Partnerships and Sponsorships
5. Tourism and Recreation-Linked Revenue
6. Conservation-specific funds
7. Risk Financing and Insurance
8. Licensing and Sustainable Use
9. Community and Social Mechanisms
10. Research, Education, and Innovation

Given that the compilation of financial mechanisms constitutes a significant portion of the full version of the guide due to the extensive examples provided, the comparison tables outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each mechanism, and the detailed references, we strongly encourage you to consult the full version for a comprehensive understanding. The full document offers in-depth insights and practical tools that will support MPAs in selecting and implementing the most suitable financial strategies to ensure their long-term sustainability and success.

[Access full version of the Guideline here](#)

Financial Mechanisms - A Compilation | Summary Table

DONATIONS AND PHILANTHROPY	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Philanthropic Grants	Financial contributions from foundations or individuals to support specific conservation projects.
Private Voluntary Donations	Financial contributions from individuals or organisations for conservation.
Crowdfunding	Raising small amounts from many people via online platforms for conservation projects.
PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Annual Government Budget Allocation /Tax Revenue	Funds collected by governments from taxes and used for marine conservation.
Environmental Levies	Taxes or fees from industries impacting marine ecosystems, with funds allocated to MPAs.
PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Subsidies and Tax Breaks	Incentives provided for blue carbon projects or eco-friendly activities.
Environmental Penalties	Revenue generated through enforcement actions against illegal activities in MPAs.
EU-Funded Projects	Participation in EU-funded consortia focused on MPA-related conservation and research activities.
MARKET-BASED MECHANISMS	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)	Payments made to those who maintain or restore ecosystem services (e.g., biodiversity, water quality).
Blue Carbon Credits	Monetises carbon sequestration in marine ecosystems like mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes.
Blue Bonds	Debt instruments to raise capital to finance marine and ocean-based projects
Habitat Banking	Credits are sold to offset environmental impacts elsewhere, linked to conservation actions or projects are compensated through conservation activities that yield a gain at least equivalent to the impact.
Loans	Financial instruments where funds are borrowed and repaid with interest to fund conservation projects.
Debt-for-nature swaps	Converting foreign debt into conservation funding for environmental projects.
CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS AND SPONSORSHIPS	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Corporate Sponsorships	Businesses fund conservation projects in exchange for branding and marketing opportunities.
Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)	Collaboration between government entities and private sector companies for public projects.
Eco-Certification Programs	Certification programs that charge fees for certifying businesses as sustainable.
TOURISM AND RECREATION-LINKED REVENUE	
Financial Mechanism	Description
User Fees	Fees charged for entry or specific recreational activities.
Concession Agreements and Revenue Sharing	Partnerships with private operators for tourism services within MPAs, with revenue-sharing arrangements
Eco-Tourism Packages	Premium, conservation-focused tourism experiences, often including education and unique activities.
Virtual Access Fees	Revenue generated from virtual tours, educational videos, or live-streaming experiences of the MPA.

Financial Mechanisms - A Compilation | Summary Table

CONSERVATION SPECIFIC FUNDS	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Conservation Trust Funds	Private, legally independent institutions – usually non-profits or foundations – designed to mobilize and sustain long-term financing for conservation efforts.
Endowment Fund	Funds designed to preserve the principal capital and generate income from investments to fund conservation activities. Can operate independently or within a CTF.
Sinking Fund	Time-bound funds designed to be fully spent over a set period, supporting specific conservation projects.
Revolving Fund	Self-sustaining funds that continuously replenish capital through income from conservation-related activities.
RISK FINANCING AND INSURANCE	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Catastrophe Bonds	Bonds that provide payouts for recovery efforts after specific catastrophic events, such as hurricanes or coral bleaching.
Risk Pools	Shared financial resources among a group of MPAs to cover unexpected expenses and disasters collectively.
Parametric Insurance	Insurance policies that pay out based on predefined triggers, such as storm severity or sea temperature rise, instead of assessed damages.
Climate Risk Insurance	Insurance policies designed to protect MPAs from the financial impacts of climate change-related events, such as rising sea levels or extreme weather.
LICENSING AND SUSTAINABLE USE	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Extractive Licenses and Permits	Legal permits that grant access to extract natural resources (e.g., fishing, bioprospecting) within MPAs, generating revenue through fees.
Non-Extractive Licenses and Permits	Permits for non-extractive activities in MPAs, like research, tourism, filming, and shipping.
Sustainable Seafood Branding	Uses eco-certification to promote sustainable seafood, generating revenue for MPA conservation.
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL MECHANISMS	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Volunteering	In-kind support from community members contributing time and skills.
Community Membership Fees	Small contributions paid by local individuals or groups in exchange for benefits.
Local Events and Festivals	Fundraising through community-led activities such as seafood festivals or clean-up events.
Cultural and Heritage-Based Contributions	Fees for cultural performances, storytelling, or guided heritage tours within the MPA.
RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND INNOVATION	
Financial Mechanism	Description
Training and Certification Programs	Revenue from marine conservation, MPA management, and ecotourism-related certification courses.
Blockchain-Based Conservation Tokens	Digital tokens representing funding contributions to specific conservation projects.
Educational Partnerships and Virtual Programs	MPAs partner with universities, research institutes, and environmental training programs to receive in-kind support (e.g., unpaid interns, student research, workforce assistance).
Innovation and Technology Funds	Grants and investment funding for developing new technologies and methods for MPA management.
Seed Funding	Early-stage funding for innovative projects or businesses linked to marine conservation.

Choosing what fits my MPA

This chapter provides guidance on how to assess the suitability of various financial mechanisms for a specific MPA. The goal is to help MPA managers choose mechanisms that are not only aligned with the MPA's conservation priorities but also practical and effective given its financial and operational context.

- Step 1: Assess Your MPA's Financial and Legal Context
- Step 2: Identify Financial Mechanism Categories That Fit Your MPA
- Step 3: Evaluate the Feasibility of Each Financial Mechanism (Implementation and Management Feasibility)
- Step 4: Select and Prioritise the Best Financial Mechanisms

This chapter also provides templates to help the MPA managers go over every step. We invite the reader to see the full version to take advantage of the full version of the guide.

Conclusion

Key Takeaways: Ensuring Long-Term Success

Diversification is key

MPAs cannot rely on a single **funding source**. Combining multiple financial mechanisms creates financial resilience.

Legal and Governance Contexts Matter

Each MPA must **align financial mechanisms with existing policies** and, where necessary, advocate for policy changes that enable financial innovation.

Stakeholder Engagement is Essential

Sustainable financing depends on **community involvement, private sector engagement, and political support**. Financial mechanisms should be designed in a way that benefits both conservation and local communities.

Adaptive Management is Necessary

Financial sustainability is not static. MPAs must test, **monitor and refine** their financial mechanisms over time, ensuring they remain effective and responsive to changing circumstances.

The Blue4All MPA Finance Planner

The Blue4All Finance Planner is an Excel-based tool that helps MPA managers assess financial needs, identify viable funding options, and develop a realistic strategy for long-term sustainability. By integrating the MedPLAN Tool for cost-revenue analysis and Bohorquez et al. (2022) for assessing financing mechanisms, it results in a comprehensive resource for evaluating financial feasibility and identifying suitable funding options.

Key Features:

- 1. Purpose:** It assists managers in identifying financial gaps by assessing current and projected revenues and expenses. The tool then helps model different funding scenarios, identifying cost-saving measures, enhancing existing revenue streams, and exploring new financing mechanisms.
- 2. Functionality:** The tool provides structured guidance through a step-by-step process that leads to the creation of a context-specific financial strategy, integrating data from diverse sources and aligning conservation goals with financial planning.
- 3. Process Overview:**
 - **Assess Costs:** Estimate both recurring and investment costs over a multi-year period.
 - **Identify Revenue Streams:** Map out existing and projected income sources.
 - **Calculate Financial Gaps:** Identify shortfalls by comparing revenue and expenditure.
 - **Evaluate Financial Mechanisms:** Use customised criteria to assess the suitability of various funding options, including philanthropic donations, public-private partnerships, or new financing models.
 - **Develop a Strategy:** Create an action-oriented financial plan that combines cost management, revenue maximisation, and innovative funding sources.
- 4. Stakeholder Engagement:** An optional step allows for stakeholder input into the funding process, enhancing local buy-in and ensuring that financial decisions align with community priorities.

Additional Tools for Success:

- **Integrative Framework:** Combining ecological data, socio-economic criteria, and stakeholder insights to guide decision-making.
- **Flexibility:** Suitable for various MPA types and governance settings across Europe, helping MPA managers strengthen their financial resilience.



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