

**Cover Note for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Request**

<b>OVERVIEW</b>	
Country:	Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Grant agent(s):	OECS
Coordinating agency(ies):	Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)
Program name:	OECS Education Sector COVID19 Response and Recovery Strategy
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding amount requested:	US\$3,000,000
Agency fees amount (additional to COVID-19 Accelerated Funding amount requested): <sup>1</sup>	US\$210,000
Agency fees as % of total COVID-19 Accelerated Funding requested:	7%
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding application date:	May 5, 2020
Estimated COVID-19 Accelerated Funding program start date:	July 6, 2020
Estimated COVID-19 Accelerated Funding program closing date (must be last day of the month, e.g. June <u>30</u> , 2021):	Sept 30, 2021
Expected submission date of completion report (At the latest 6 months after program closing date):	March 31, 2022
<b>Grant modality - (please enter 'X')</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Sector Pooled
	<input type="checkbox"/> Project Pooled/ Co-financed
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project/ Stand-alone

<sup>1</sup> General agency fees are additional to the Accelerated Funding amount requested, and determined by the grant agent's own internal regulations. They are paid to the agency's headquarters and relate to overhead costs and are typically used to assist in the defrayment of administrative and other costs incurred in connection with the management and administration of grant funds. These fees are pre-determined in the Financial Procedure Agreement (FPA) between the grant agent and the GPE Trustee.

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## Executive Summary

This application is submitted to the Global Partnership (GPE) by the OECS Commission on behalf of the four GPE Member States: *Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines*. The application is in response to the GPE Accelerated Funding Request that is intended to provide support to the Member States in addressing the myriad challenges created or exacerbated by COVID-19.

The application is based on a regional *OECS Education Sector Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19*, developed on behalf of all the nine English-speaking OECS Member States<sup>2</sup>. It describes a series of intended activities related to the strategy's four areas of focus: harmonization of policy response among Member States; transition to distributed learning; ensuring the well-being of students in and out of school and; promoting engagement. After several iterations through a consultative process with Member States and development partners, the strategy was endorsed by the OECS Ministries of Education. The four OECS Member States that belong to the GPE grouping decided upon a joint approach to the accelerated fund application, with the OECS Commission as Grant Agent. Therefore, the strategy served as the pivotal starting point for the development of this new initiative. While a joint approach is undertaken, specific attention to country realities and priorities guided the development of the application.

The approach taken in this application is to present the activities to be undertaken within each area of focus. The feedback received from Member States and development partners on the initial document led to the development of this second iteration of the application. The document provides details of the implementation arrangements, the nature of support to be provided to Member States and the supervision processes including fiduciary responsibilities, procurement protocols and project management strategies along with risk management. The results framework combines indicators specific to the activities and important to the Member States with those required by the GPE as part of this application.

Of critical note is the fact that this project is not treated as a standalone project. It is approached with the intention of connecting it to previous and on-going initiatives and gains in education in the region. It is viewed as an opportunity to address the needs of disadvantaged children in a bid to achieve higher levels of equity, whether the disadvantaged be deemed as such economically or academically. For that reason, and in keeping with the vision of the OECS, this COVID-19 accelerated funding request is couched within the OECS Education Initiatives Sustainability Framework. The funding from this initiative will play a major role in assisting the OECS Member States in maximizing the opportunities and demands created by the pandemic in making some transformational changes to education in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> OECS Member States: *Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Monserrat, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis,*

## 1.0 Introduction and context

The small, open economies of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have been trapped for years in low growth, high debt, and limited fiscal space, exacerbated by a number of external shocks. The impact of the 2008 global financial crisis was severe because tourism, remittances, foreign direct investment, and official development flows decreased sharply; growth rates plummeted; debt and fiscal imbalances increased to unsustainable levels; and labor market conditions deteriorated. In addition, natural disasters have periodically taken a heavy toll on the region, affecting lives, infrastructure, and economic activity. For example, the health systems of several Member States are still recovering from being impacted by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. For instance, the Post Disaster Needs Assessment done in Dominica estimated EC\$200 million in damage to the health sector alone.

Since the impact of the COVID pandemic as of April 30th 2020, a total of 1828 persons have been tested across the OECS of which 131 have tested positive and 5 have died. A total of 71 infected cases and zero deaths have been reported for the four project beneficiaries. The full potential health impact of the pandemic in the OECS region is not yet known. If infection rates in the OECS region are similar to, or higher than they have been, in China, Europe, or the US, then the pandemic has the potential to overwhelm the under-resourced and fragile health systems of Member States.

Due to the existing constraints on the region's health systems, the immediate measures taken by authorities have so far focused primarily on containment and aggressive preventive measures such as the implementation of strict protocols for hygiene, social distancing, contact tracing, quarantine, isolation, and border control. These measures have been complemented by parallel scale-up measures including the repurposing and retrofitting of existing facilities for quarantine and isolation, re-organisation of health system flow to minimise spread, continuous capacity-building in the health sector, and building necessary testing for, and hospital and critical care management of, COVID-19.

The OECS's bleak economic performance has exacerbated social problems—unemployment has been growing at alarming rates, especially among the youth; and poverty, which was relatively high before 2008, has very likely worsened. Data for the Caribbean indicates a similar problem among youth, with youth unemployment standing at over 30 percent for women and 20 percent for men. The OECS recognizes the importance of improvement of the quality of education as part of the solution to improving social and economic development. Education has been a critical element of building social and economic resilience, and has therefore featured prominently in National Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies across the region.

## 2.0 Situational Analysis

Over the past months, various parts of the world, including all OECS Member States, have been gravely affected by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) with the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12, 2020 declaring the outbreak of the virus a pandemic. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the virus strain 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus'<sup>3</sup>. The global threat of the COVID-19 has seen the closure of borders across the region, businesses and schools; directly affecting the education sector in the OECS region. It cannot be stated strongly enough that the Coronavirus crisis in the OECS region will have a socioeconomic impact on families and will negatively affect instruction time, student assessment and students' psychosocial health. Teachers will also be affected with increased demands placed on them to meet students' needs in an environment for which many have not been prepared, while attempting to meet the needs of their own families.

As part of its response, the OECS Commission prepared an assessment focusing on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the OECS Member States. The resulting report outlines the implications of school closures on the economy. It also considers the impact of school closures on students and teachers, particularly teachers who are parents. These teachers are required to provide online instruction and support their own children's education at home. The EDMU and the Social Development Unit (SDU), two components of the OECS' Human Social Cluster (HSC) of the OECS Commission, have developed synergy between their respective COVID-19 Response Strategies. For instance, there is complementarity in the approach to social protection for vulnerable children, through which data on identified disadvantaged children are being used to determine how these children are supported with educational and social services.

OECS Ministries of Education have been exploring various strategies to both mitigate the impact of this crisis and plot a way to achieve stability in the education sector. All schools in the OECS have been closed. States have been in dialogue with their respective Cabinets of Ministers to review their response strategies. At the same time, the Education Development Management Unit (EDMU) of the OECS Commission conducted a rapid assessment in March 2020 which was used, in collaboration with its Member States, to develop an *OECS Education Sector Response Strategy to COVID-19*.

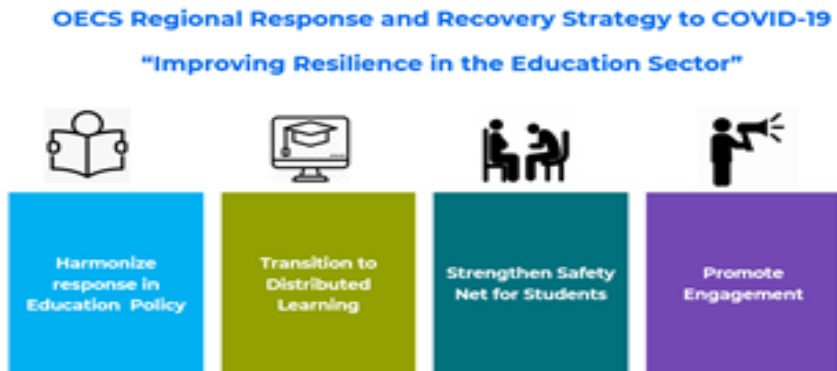
This response strategy, aligned to national strategies through a targeted, consultative process, and through partnership with civil society and the private and public sectors, places emphasis on 1) Harmonizing policy responses in education

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<sup>3</sup> Centre for Infectious Disease, Research and Policy. *Modelling study suggests 18 months of COVI-18 social distancing, much disruption. March 18, 2020.*

policy, 2) Transitioning to distributed learning, 3) Strengthening safety nets for students and 4) Promoting engagement. The strategy is anchored firmly in the OECS Education Sector Strategy (OESS), which seeks to address disaster risk reduction as a cross cutting theme to reduce inequalities and build resilience to crises and shocks in its Member States. The strategy was endorsed by all OECS Ministries of Education.

Below is a more detailed outline of the four focus areas of the OECS response strategy.



- (1) Harmonization of policy response amongst MS:** this will focus on streamlining education policy formulation and procedures across all Member States. It will promote collegiality and harmonization similar to that achieved during the development and implementation of OESS.
- (2) Transition to Distributed Learning:** while there have been advances in increased internet access in the region, some families and communities still have limited access to fast and reliable internet. For instance, in Dominica, areas on the east coast hard-hit by Hurricane Irma in 2018 continue to be affected with limited internet access. The situation leads to inequity. Increased attention to disadvantaged students through varied approaches is required. This instructional approach will also benefit average students.
- (3) Ensuring the wellbeing of students both in and out of school:** Schools have always had a responsibility for the physical, psychological and socioeconomic needs of students and educators, in and out of school. The extent of the issues being faced have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hygiene and sanitation in schools remains of critical importance for the health and well-being of whole school communities and attention should be taken of all WASH and kitchen facilities.
- (4) Promote Engagement:** To Facilitate the coordination of interventions to increase awareness and partnerships to mitigate the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Work under this component will be guided by the OECS COVID-19 Response Communications Strategy.

The response strategy is also aligned with the OECS Growth and Development Strategy, CARICOM Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy 2030 and ultimately the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Four (4) Quality Education <sup>4</sup>. A thrust of these strategies is increasing resilience in education through strengthened systems at the regional and national levels. The response strategy is available on the OECS website at [www.oecs.org](http://www.oecs.org)

Despite the progress that has already been made through our earlier referenced rapid assessment which collected data on school closures, e-platforms, training activities, among other areas, a more detailed assessment of needs, both immediate and of a longer-term nature, will be undertaken by July 2020 to further inform the regional and national COVID-19 recovery programme. For instance, during the rapid assessment it was discovered that there was a proliferation of e-platforms, that the majority of teachers had experienced little to no training in online instruction and that all Member States had cancelled most national assessments. Ministries of Education reported challenges with meeting the needs of teachers in such a short time, providing tools and facilities for online learning and continuing school feeding programmes while students were away from school. A major concern related to high stakes examinations. Whereas, the various Ministries of Education have control over local examinations, the regional examinations are controlled by the Caribbean Examinations Council. Sixth graders, fifth formers and tertiary level students were scheduled to write school leaving exams in May/June 2020 and there are concerns regarding adequately prepared students for those examinations.

A follow-up assessment that presumably will be in a more stable environment will collect much more data and allow for comparisons to determine how the situation may have changed and the implications of the new data. Therefore, the OECS Commission will continue to monitor and assess the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and will develop recovery measures in collaboration with OECS Member States.

The immediate response by Member States has been to provide instructional materials for school students. Some schools prepared home assignment packages for students. Throughout all of this, it has become clear to administrators around the region that there is an enormous divide between the privileged and

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<sup>4</sup> *Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*  
*4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill*  
*4.a.1 Proportion of schools with access to: the Internet for pedagogical purposes; computers for pedagogical purposes;*  
*basic drinking water; and basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)*

underprivileged. A number of states have been making an effort to purchase devices for those who are disadvantaged but the prevailing economic situation has made this very difficult. This is by far the most pressing concern facing the region. However, there have been concerns raised that education is much more than a device. Consequently, the response needs to address the pedagogical concerns and psychosocial needs of teachers and students while equity is addressed through additional devices.

The EDMU, in supporting efforts by Member States, established three teams to help coordinate the work being done in Member States, to increase collaboration to lighten the burden on each Member State and to harmonize standards for the response to the pandemic in education. Below is an outline of the teams and the work involved. The GPE Accelerated Fund initiative will build on these activities that have commenced.

Team	Scope	Outputs	Team Composition
Continuity of Learning Team	Providing guidance and support on high quality teaching and learning at home and using online modalities (to include: internet responsibility, learning principles, integrating psychosocial needs with instruction and assignments)	Guidebook to be shared with all stakeholders	10 different Curriculum Officers and Leaders from 7 different Member States
Content Development Team	Providing support for high quality teaching and learning by compiling and developing high quality resources (regional team guides national teams with an approach that avoids duplication and fills gaps in required resources)	A repository of resources available to all OECS citizens	10 Curriculum Officers and Leaders from 7 different Member States



Curriculum Collection Team	Data	Providing support to the two teams in working with OECS statisticians to acquire required data to inform team planning and task undertakings	Data-sets information and for undertaking tasks	4 Curriculum Officers and 2 OECS Statisticians working with all other OECS Statisticians
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## Grant Agent Selection

The OECS Commission responded to a call for Expressions of Interest (Eoi) to serve as Grant Agent on behalf of four countries (St. Lucia, Grenada, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) on April 22, 2020. The OECS Commission was endorsed by the regional education working group/LEG comprising regional and international development partners and Member States' representatives on April 29, 2020.

The process for selection of the Grant Agent was coordinated by the Coordination Agency, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), represented by Dr. Martin Baptiste, Senior Operations Officer, Education. The Request for Expressions of Interest was issued on April 17, 2020 to development partners who are eligible to apply to become a GA, as they have a signed Financial Procedure Agreement in place with GPE. The date for submission was April 22, 2020.

The evaluation of the EOIs was the responsibility of the Selection Committee comprising the GPE Country Focal Points as follows:

- (a) Dr. Jeffrey Blaize, Assistant Chief Education Officer, Commonwealth of Dominica
- (b) Mrs. Astra Frank-McKenzie, Deputy Chief Education Officer, Grenada
- © Mr. Dawson Ragunanan, Deputy Chief Education Officer, St. Lucia; and
- (d) Mr. Dixon Finlay, Deputy Chief Education Officer, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Selection Committee agreed on the rubric for evaluating the EOIs on April 16, 2020, with each criterion assigned the same maximum score (5).

Each Selection Committee member completed an individual evaluation during April 23-26, 2020. The Selection Committee submitted individual evaluations which included a recommendation for the GA to be made to the LEG.

## The OECS COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan

The OECS Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19 provides the basis for the development of the plan associated with this application. It presents the activities that are intended to enact the strategy. Consequently, the activities are presented according to the four focus areas of the regional strategy. Like the response strategy, the plan was developed using data collected from the rapid assessment, along with action points from multiple meetings and discussions with Ministry of Education representatives.

The plan was shared with Member States and development partners for feedback, providing valuable feedback that led to the refinement of the document. For instance, the original name for the second area of focus was transition to online learning. However, critical feedback from the University of the West Indies suggested that much more than online learning is required and that additional accommodations for disadvantaged learners would be required, even beyond what the plan already identified. Therefore, the name was changed to 'Transition to Distributed Learning' with renewed attention to the various modalities that can be employed to meet the needs of special education students, and students who are disadvantaged by limited access to online learning facilities. The consultation process also achieved confirmed support from development partners such as UNICEF who committed to additional technical and financial support for the plan based on the recognition of alignment between the plan and the agencies' priorities.

The funding mechanism for the plan is varied. In addition to the much-needed funding support from the GPE that this plan is expected to provide, commitments have been secured from various other development partners such as the Caribbean Development Bank and USAID. Private sector agencies are also listed as having committed to supporting some of the activities in the plan as part of the implementation of the regional strategy.

The plan is guided by the OECS Education Initiatives Sustainability Framework, which comprises the following pillars:

1. **Human Resource Management:** emphasizes the need for viewing people as most important to any initiative and achieving the sort of changes that are necessary to transform the education sector. A high value is placed on people-engagement and ensuring that they own the initiative and they are given a voice.
2. **Change Management:** emphasizes specific, evidence-based approaches that create the environment for the people to work towards desired and needed changes.
3. **Financial Management:** emphasizes data-driven financial decision making to ensure that in the small economies of the OECS, finances are used most effectively and efficiently.

As indicated, the plan is predicated on the regional response strategy.

The goal and objectives of the regional response strategy are as follows:

**Goal:** Improving resilience in the education sector in the OECS by strengthening Ministries of Education and Schools response to disasters and emergencies.

**Objectives:** Consequently, the Education Development Management Unit (EDMU) of the OECS Commission has developed in collaboration with OECS Member States an Education Sector Response Strategy to COVID-19. This strategy seeks to:

- Harmonize education policies and procedures for greater agility and responsiveness to the impact of COVID-19
- Improve response and recovery to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in the OECS
- Develop a robust sustainability strategy for continuity within the education sector during emergencies

The following objectives guide the development of the plan:

1. Develop a harmonized approach to policy on educational matters in response to COVID-19
2. Increase access of the most disadvantaged students to materials, tools, facilities and experiences to close the achievement gap for future success
3. Provide opportunities for increased psychosocial support to teachers and students in the present pandemic
4. Train educators and students in improving pedagogy and resilience in education
5. Engage the public to achieve a unified approach in the response to COVID-19
6. Support the educational recovery from COVID-19 to facilitate students' return to school

## Beneficiaries

It is proposed that the intervention will be implemented among Kindergarten to Grade 6 students and their teachers in the four Windward Islands of the OECS Member States. The programme is expected to benefit directly approximately

about all students and their teachers in government and government assisted primary schools. It is estimated that during the programme period that approximately 24,255 students and their 1,600 teachers will be directly involved in the programme. Schools, teachers and students who have been determined to be especially at risk, marginalized and vulnerable will be specifically targeted.

## Cost

The overall estimated cost of the project is USD\$3 million over a 15-month period. Details of the budget are at Annex 1. Approximately 75% of project cost will be funded by the GPE grant. The remaining 21% of the costs will be borne by the participating Member States and other development partners. A large share of the budget, approximately 66%, will be devoted towards focus area two.

## Duration

The project is planned to be implemented over a period of 15 months, commencing July 2020 to September 2021.

## Focus Areas

### **Focus Area 1: Harmonization of policy response amongst Member States**

The MS of the OECS have made great progress in harmonizing their education systems in order to become more efficient. The OESS has been the principal driver of this harmonization. However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has served to illustrate just how much there is still to be done. The response has been similar in all states but by no means the same and there is a clear need to have a more coordinated response to future pandemics or disasters. This will allow for a much greater sharing of resources and expertise than has been the case with COVID-19.

**Activity 1.1** will adopt and adapt agreed criteria for the reopening of schools. This activity will not require any further funding beyond what is currently available. It is expected that the criteria will be informed by the UNICEF Framework for Reopening Schools, and also by the various health authorities in the region such as The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA). *The final criteria will be endorsed by the Council of Ministers.*

**Activity 1.2** will develop and deliver a program of training for Member States. The OECS Commission will collaborate with Caribbean Disaster Emergencies Management Agency (CDEMA) to develop a programme for Ministry officials in Education in Emergencies. This is to ensure that technical staff have the capacity to support school officials in responding to students' needs. Technical Assistance

will be required to provide the training, with technical guidance provided by CDEMA.

**Activity 1.3** will implement an *Academic Recovery Programme* targeting vulnerable students (special needs, learning disabled, low SES groups) who have been most affected due to the unavailability of devices, access to online resources, unavailability of teacher and counsellor support due to school closure, and support from home to assist in learning. A major impact of school closure on students who were already disadvantaged before COVID-19 is an anticipated increase in the achievement gap. Students who are from homes with less than ideal conditions and who do not have the kinds of support that students from more affluent homes have will fall behind their peers even further. A six to nine-month programme focused on these disadvantaged students will aim to address some of the inequality which exists. The programme will be conducted at Community Centres with easy access to students, where technological and instructional facilities will be provided to accommodate students' learning. Alternatively, the programme can be conducted at schools using multiple classrooms to allow for proper social distancing and other health protocols. The programme will also have to procure masks for students that adhere to health protocols. Consultations with health officials will help decide the youngest age allowable for this programme to manage the risks involved. The programme will continue into the summer and possibly into the reopening period as an after-school program. Final decisions will be made based on the programme design stemming from the data collection and the budget indicated.

A Technical specialist will be recruited to design the programme. To ensure ownership and the sustainability of this intervention, particularly if education systems in the region experience further shocks, this specialist will work closely with personnel from the Ministries of Education with support from the Eastern Caribbean Joint Board of Teacher Education and Community Colleges. This activity is aligned to the OECS Sustainability Framework which places a high value on people-engagement and ensures that they own the initiative and they are given a voice. The assignment will commence with data collection which will inform the design of the programme and identify the specific constituents to benefit from the programme. Ministries of Education will support the initiative in identifying personnel to provide tutoring support to students. The programme will comprise a summer component and will continue when schools are reopened, if the reopening occurs by September 2020. When schools reopen, the intervention may continue as an after-school programme. Given the varying circumstances, a grant will be presented to Member States who will be supported to implement the programme locally. Therefore, the projected figures may increase or decrease due to the local costs such as refreshments. Member States will provide student materials such as stationery through schools in the communities.

**Focus Area 2: Transition to Distributed Learning.** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for the move to a digital education and to close the digital divide. Individual MS have displayed their commitment to this through increasing

their own funding of related activities. Unfortunately, the funds that they have available are not sufficient to satisfy all demands.

**Activity 2.1** will conduct a rapid assessment of Learning Management Systems to present policy recommendations. Member States are at present using a variety of platforms, with no specific guidance or protocols for their selection and use. A rapid assessment of the e-platforms in use will provide a description of the situation, highlight the potential risks associated with limited to no controls, and provide policy recommendations to Ministries of Education. For instance, setting parameters on the number of platforms being used and establishing standards for the selection of these platforms will ensure that monitoring and teacher-training support are more feasible for the Small Island States that make up the OECS. This activity will be funded by UNICEF.

**Activity 2.2** will develop and disseminate digital public goods for use in education. There is a need to identify suitable public digital goods to improve the attainment of educational outcomes during this pandemic. For example, public goods to support continuity of learning and online psychosocial support for students will be explored and scaled. The activity will be supported by a Technical Assistant provided as a part of the GIGA, a UNICEF / ITU sponsored GIGA program. This activity will span a one-year period.

**Activity 2.3** will develop and implement a policy framework and strategy to promote digital equity across OECS Member States. This activity, part of the GIGA initiative, will involve consultations with all Member States to arrive at the policy framework. The activity will also seek to forge partnerships to provide quality internet access to vulnerable students. There are still areas of the region that do not have internet access and this will need to be resolved if the digital divide is to be narrowed.

**Activity 2.4** will procure devices for primary school students. Bulk procurement will be conducted by the OECS Commission utilizing a process similar to that used by the Pharmaceutical Procurement Services (PPS). This unit of the OECS Commission has implemented a time-tested model of procurement of pharmaceuticals since 1986 that saves Member States on average 20% annually which translates to XC\$6.04M. The devices purchased will be consistent with specifications as laid down in activity 2.4. The specifications would have been agreed by the various Member States to ensure that the needs of all are met. Funding from the GPE will cover devices for basic education, up to Grade 6 and the secondary school levels will be funded by UNICEF and other Public Private Partnerships. There will still need to be a significant contribution from the Member States to manage the distribution. As noted earlier, the Member States are already committed to supporting this initiative. A major aspect of this activity is the data collection to identify the most vulnerable as a means of determining precise figures for procurement.

At present, rough estimates are used. Where the figures do not match the data that will be collected to target the most vulnerable, Government financing will augment the numbers to be procured. The Member States themselves will

determine how these are distributed but it is expected that students will use them at home and will be expected to return them at the end of their schooling. The OECS Commission will work with Member States to devise a maintenance programme for the devices.

Further to this support, each of the Member States will be provided with virtual coaching equipment funded by USAID. The implementation of the bulk procurement model is deemed a sustainable approach to continued financing required for leveling inequities. Based on the level of success of the model, other educational materials can be considered for bulk procurement to realize additional savings and greater financial capital for financing other initiatives.

**Activity 2.5** will procure devices and provide training for teachers in primary schools. 1020 teachers will be provided with training, fully online, to a certificate level on a course approved by the Eastern Caribbean Joint Board of Teacher Education. This course will be offered through the University of the West Indies, Open Campus and Community Colleges. The course will focus on retooling teachers with high-quality pedagogical skills, evidence-based approaches to online learning and resilience in education. Therefore, the training will allow teachers to respond to the needs of students in view of the crisis and will set the stage for preparing teachers to respond to any emergency, particularly those that involve school closures. The training will also integrate the guidelines developed by the Continuity of Learning team and the content developed by the Content Development Team.

All the costs of training will be borne by GPE. 1020 devices will be purchased and allocated to schools for use by the teachers undertaking the training program. The process for procuring the devices which will be funded entirely by GPE will be the same as described for activities 2.4 and 2.5.

**Activity 2.6** will provide online learning support to students. Programmes for radio and television to complement instruction and content delivered online to ensure that the most vulnerable are reached and engaged positively while at home. This work will be supported by the regional content development team established.

This is primarily a sharing activity. Several Member States have already commenced production for radio and television broadcasting. The Member States will continue to fund this activity with technical guidance from the Content Development Team and the EDMU. A repository of the produced material will be created so that persons from across the OECS can access all materials and use them for instructional purposes. Public-private partnerships will be explored to fund television spots to allow students to access these programmes. All national government radio and television stations will be fully utilized for multiple repeat broadcasts of the programmes.

This activity will also provide technical and financial support to the Content Development Team referenced earlier. A firm will be procured to provide quality assurance and digitize high quality materials developed by the team and other

teachers who have demonstrated creativity in material development during the COVID-19 period. Funding for this support will be provided by CDB.

### **Focus Area 3: Ensuring the well-being of students both in and out of school**

The activities in this component are closely related to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an increasing understanding of the importance of hygiene for staff and students in schools and also for students' emotional well-being out of school. These activities generally attract small amounts but this does not indicate diminished importance. There is support from UNICEF and the Member States as well as GPE. To ensure continued sustainability of the outcomes of interventions under this initiative, the principles of existing psychosocial programmes such as the Return to Happiness, will be embedded in development of activities and capacity building.

**Activity 3.1** will provide hygiene kits to promote safety during school reopening.

The kits will be made available where parents are not able to provide for their children. When schools reopen, students will require masks and other hygiene products to maintain sanitary standards. Kits will be purchased to supply schools. Where economies of scale will be achieved, it is expected that procurement of the materials and apparatus will be conducted by the OECS utilising the bulk procurement model that will be implemented for procuring tablets and laptops. Where it is not feasible to undertake bulk procurement or where it is more practical to undertake in-country procurement, such as the production of cloth masks, the procurement will be undertaken at the Member State level, following the procurement rules of the OECS Commission.

**Activity 3.2** will strengthen prevention and reduction of diseases through improved water supply and sanitation facilities in schools. Steps will be taken to improve water storage capacity and increase the number of cleaning utensils for washing hands and cleaning surface areas of the school. Water supply improvement activities will be conducted in schools that demonstrate the need, as several schools already have increased storage capacity. The capacity increase occurred after severe hurricane seasons over the last two to three years. Therefore, 25% of schools are targeted for support in this activity.

### **Focus Area 4: Promote Engagement**

**Activity 4.1** will develop and implement a communications campaign. This activity will be implemented in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), UNICEF, USAID and other private sector partners. The campaign will support the dissemination of key messages to promote and amplify good hygiene practises and social distancing, providing guidance to parents to help better support children who may experience anxiety due to the pandemic, to share success stories in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to amplify key messages on the safe reopening of schools. A combination of digital and traditional



media will be used to optimize reach of beneficiaries, particularly those that are most vulnerable. The activity will target parents/caregivers, students, teachers and educators. The OECS Education Initiatives Sustainability Framework identifies full engagement of key stakeholders, rather than mere information dissemination as a critical step in achieving sustainability by establishing high level ownership of the initiative. Consequently, before, during and after implementation, a full engagement strategy will be developed comprising a series of key messages and stakeholder involvement and consultation will be designed and implemented alongside the activities of the other three focus areas.

## Implementation Arrangements

The program will be coordinated from the OECS Commission. The Portfolio Management Office (PMO) is charged with oversight of all projects undertaken by the OECS Commission. To support its mainly donor-funded projects, the Commission hires highly skilled professionals in the areas of Project Management, Procurement, Financial Management and Monitoring and Evaluation. All these services are amalgamated under the Corporate Services Division (CSD) of the Commission, each within a separate unit. The PMO assigns a Project Manager (PM) to each project and along with the Project Director (Functional Manager/Head of Unit) form the management team of the project. The fiduciary responsibilities will be managed by the respective units at the OECS Commission. The OECS Commission has a sound record of managing grants from bilateral and multilateral partners. The Project Director is responsible for the day-to-day oversight of the project while the Project Manager manages the project deliverables. The project team at the Commission will be supported by four National Coordinators, one in each of the four countries. These Coordinators will be employed for the entirety of the project. The Coordinators are guided and supported by a Technical Coordinator who works closely with the EDMU.

Given the role and mandate of the OECS Commission and its responsibilities to OECS Member States to coordinate regional efforts and achieve harmonization of the individual education sectors of the region, the OECS Commission will continue to provide technical and coordination support at the regional level. This support will ensure knowledge exchange across the Member States to the end of improving the overall approach to implementation. The EDMU will assist in monitoring implementation to help assure quality and contribute to efficiencies in implementation.

The Ministries of Education will serve as the implementation agency for the grant. The MoE will manage local activities, with the support of the national coordinator. The various structures and groupings in existence will continue to function as in the past with support from the EDMU to ensure that Countries collaborate and learn from each other, while providing technical and implementation support to each other. During the implementation of the last GPE funded programme, the OESP, these structures worked particularly well, allowing Member States to

support each other, for instance, with the regional curriculum team that was able to undertake extensive work without the benefit of a consultant firm.

The Chief Education Officers' Forum will act as the Project Steering Committee with Chief Education Officers assuming chairmanship of the committee on a rotation basis as is the current practice. National implementation calls for a high level of coordination between various units of the MoE and education officers. This coordination will be managed by the Chief Education Officer or a delegated focal point, with support from the national coordinator. The focal point will coordinate closely with all relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries, and organize national consultation meetings of various aspects of the project.

## Financial Management

Financial performance is monitored and reported through smartsheet; hence the actual expenditure data is manually transferred from the accounting software to the reporting system to compare against budget.

The Commission currently uses Sage 50 accounting software. The accounting software Sage 50 is more than capable of handling the anticipated volume of transactions and reporting requirements of the grant.

Financial reporting is done partially in the accounting software e.g., activity reports and variance reports are done in the accounting software, however, where reporting on prescribed templates from donors is required, a data dump is done in Excel and formatted appropriately.

The organization's internal control system has in place arrangements for:

- proper authorization of disbursements,
- double signatures on cheques,
- account payee cheques and
- monthly reconciliation of bank accounts

## Procurement Arrangements

OECS Procurement Manual, dated 2013 revised June 2017 reflects the policy for the Procurement of the OECS Commission (OECSC) and is designed to guide all OECSC staff, directly or indirectly involved in Procurement, to: Promote transparency, probity and accountability in Procurement; Facilitate efficiency and effectiveness of Procurement; Provide standards for the monitoring and auditing of Procurement.

This Manual applies to all Procurement conducted by OECSC both at headquarters in Saint Lucia and its overseas offices and Missions. OECSC' Procurement is circumscribed by key legislation, treaties, agreements, and policies including:

- a) Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations - 1961.
- b) Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties – 1969.
- c) Revised Treaty of Basseterre – 2010.

Gantt Chart														
Activity QQ5		2020						2021						
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		Q5	
		JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL
<b>Focus 1: Harmonization of policy response amongst Member States</b>														
1.1	Adopt and adapt agreed criteria for the reopening of schools													
1.2	Develop and deliver a program of training for Member States.													
1.3	Implement an Academic Recovery Programme targetting vulnerable students													
<b>Focus Area 2: Transition to a Distributed Learning</b>														
2.1	Conduct a rapid assessment of Learning Management Systems													
2.2	Develop and disseminate digital public goods for use in education													
2.3	Develop and implement a policy framework and strategy to promote digital equity													
2.4	Procure devices for primary school students													
2.5	Procure devices and provide training for teachers in primary schools.													
2.6	Provide online learning support to students													
<b>Focus Area 3: Ensuring the wellbeing of students both in and out of school</b>														
3.1	Provide hygiene kits to promote safety during school reopening.													
3.2	Strengthen prevention and reduction of diseases through improved water supply and sanitation facilities in schools.													
<b>Focus Area 4: Promote Engagement</b>														
4.1	Develop and implement a communications campaign.													

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The Commission's centralized model for Monitoring and Evaluation which is situated in the Programme Management Unit (PMU) will play a key role in the monitoring and evaluation of this project. This process will be governed by the Commission's Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Manual adopted in 2018. Monitoring is done through reporting, periodic site visits (spot checks) to the sub-recipients to review the accounting and management of grant resources.

Monitoring and evaluation of this project will focus on the extent to which the proposed interventions are effectively and efficiently contributing to the desired outcomes. The process will adopt a results-based approach in which the improvement in the desired outcomes becomes paramount and the critical measure of success. Thus, monitoring and evaluation will be against output and outcome indicators. These indicators and targets will be found in a results framework that was developed as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation System for the project. This framework is consistent with the guidelines set out by the Global Partnership for Education and includes the core indicators highlighted in the guidelines. During the early preparation phase of implementation, baselines will be established for each indicator. Annual progress reports will be prepared to show the link between the desired results, the inputs and activities undertaken, the short-term objectives, and progress towards the results.

Data collection, management and administration for this project will be governed by the OECS Data Governance and Management Framework. This framework will provide guidance to Member States to strengthen capacities and processes to ensure that the project benefits from consistent, reliable and timely data which will be critical to monitoring and reporting on implementation progress.

The results framework below outlines the indicators that will be used to monitor and report on the implementation of this project.

## Risks

The major risk facing project management is the ability of the four MS to be able to keep to their obligation to fund about 12% of the project costs. The commitment of Governments to bridging the digital divide should not be questioned but the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to impact greatly on the economies of all the Member States. This is because of their reliance on tourism. It is unknown at present just what pressures will be brought to bear on budget appropriations for the period of the project. If individual states are unable to make their contributions, then a process of prioritization will have to take place. Wide consultation should mean that risks have been kept to a minimum.

Risk	Level of risk	Mitigation
<b>Limited availability of officials to participate in the process</b>	Low	It is unknown just how long travel is going to be restricted as a result of COVID-19. This will be mitigated by ensuring strong stakeholder participation in the preparation process. Consultations will take place both at regional and country levels. The use of applications such as Skype and Zoom has increased greatly in recent years and all MS are used to meet in a virtual environment.
<b>Insufficient funding on an annual basis due to the impact of COVID-19 on Government revenues</b>	High	The effect on the MS contribution could be disastrous. If there were to be severe shortfalls then the MS would be forced to reprioritize their activities and look to ways in which costs could either be recovered or reduced.
<b>The diverse priorities of participating Member States.</b>	Medium	Consensus has been reached prior to preparation of this application. It may become an issue if MS have to reprioritize as a result of insufficient funding.
<b>Limited access to and availability of data</b>	Medium	Measures to address this are being put in place through the OECS Data Governance and Management Framework.

Risk	Level of risk	Mitigation
<b>Delays in implementing activities in a timely manner</b>	Medium	<p>Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Commission has engaged key governance and technical structures resulting in the development of the <i>OECS Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19</i>. This evidenced-based strategy is currently being refined to ensure alignment with current national priorities of OECS Member States. The OECS Commission has fully engaged Ministers of Education, Permanent Secretaries and other MoE technical officers, contributing to a more efficient and coordinated response to this pandemic across the region. The Commission has also engaged the regional education support forum for dialogue and coordination among development partners who operate in the Eastern Caribbean. Furthermore, the OECS Commission has established strong ties to regional agencies like the Eastern Caribbean Joint Board of Teacher Education and the Caribbean Union of Teachers, which allow for easy linkages between the intended programme and the work of these agencies.</p>
<b>Institutional Capacity for Implementation and Sustainability</b>	Medium	<p>The institutional capacity and implementing agency risk is substantial both at the country and regional level. This would require closer collaboration between the countries and strong stakeholder participation at the country level. Consultations have been part of the preparation process to ensure readiness for implementation.</p> <p>There is a moderate risk that countries may not implement at the same pace. This will ensure that countries move at the same pace to be able to achieve the scale economies that the regional approach to responding seeks to achieve.</p>

Risk	Level of risk	Mitigation
<p><b>Fiduciary Risks- management of resources and accountability</b></p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The OECS Commission shall Financial Management oversight is done through regular reporting and site visits to the sub-recipients where spot checks are conducted in accordance with the Commission’s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Rules and Regulations</li> <li>• Documentation of Accounting System</li> <li>• Accounting Procedures Manual</li> </ul> <p>In addition to the above the Commission will undertake the necessary due diligence to ensure that adequate safeguards are put in place to provide reasonable assurance as to the protection of assets, from loss, fraud, waste and abuse at every step of the grant life cycle will be established in accordance with the Commission’s Anti-Fraud Policy.</p> <p>Key documents which will be captured during the project shall include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Proposal</li> <li>• Finance Agreement(s)</li> <li>• Quarterly Progress Reports</li> <li>• Mid Point Evaluation Report with Lessons Learnt and After-Action Reviews built into the process</li> <li>• Final/Close Out Project Report</li> <li>• Audit Report</li> </ul> <p>Audit services are procured through a tendering process according to the Commission’s procurement policy</p>



Risk	Level of risk	Mitigation
<b>Restricted consultation due to COVID 19 impact</b>	Medium	<p>The realities associated with the current pandemic has limited interactions among stakeholders due to the COVID 19 protocols implemented. Therefore, it is expected that interactions with stakeholders will be restricted. In light of this stakeholders will be engaged through the use of available ICT platforms such as zoom, google hangout, WhatsApp, texting, phone calls, SKYPE</p> <p>The OECS Commission provides a wide range of IT facilities and services with a state-of-the-art networking environment to support all. The backbone of the network is designed and operated by OECS IT Unit which provides and supports core services such as networking, high-speed internet services, unified communication services, endpoint security, email and data storage.</p>
<b>Under estimation of required supervision resources and implementation.</b>		<p>The costs for managing this operation would be higher than the normal operation. There is a substantial stakeholder risk mainly related to insufficient capacity at the national and regional level to implement the project. Additional head count will be hired at both the national and regional level to ensure the timely execution of activities and grant supervision.</p> <p>The Commission has secured resources from the Global Partnership for Education to strengthen the planning and data administration capacity of Member States. This training programme is currently being revised to ensure its relevance to the current realities of the Ministries of Education. These capacities will play a key role in the officers' contributions to the response and recovery efforts. The OECS Commission has compiled a list of lessons learned that will allow it to increase efficiencies in meeting the needs of Member States. One such lesson learned is the need for sub-grants for more immediate procurement and payment arrangements for goods and services. Appropriate support and monitoring mechanisms will be instituted to ensure that all fiduciary requirements are met by Member States.</p>

